Enhancing the MBA: Ethics Linked to an Organizational Communication Specialization

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Incorporating business ethics into an MBA program is critical. Recent corporate scandals have created an emotional and palpable mistrust expressed by the public about ethical business leadership. What are business schools doing to confront this situation? K. Mangan (2003) recently stated in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*:

> The board of AACBS International…this week endorsed proposed changes in its standards. In addition to highlighting the importance of ethics, the revised standards would encourage schools to develop codes of ethical conduct for M.B.A. students, faculty members, and administrators. But a number of business professors – many of whom teach ethics – say the proposed revisions…don't go far enough. Some 120 business professors have signed a letter calling on the association to require that all M.B.A. students take at least one stand-alone ethics course" (p.1, ¶ 2-3).

This impetus by the AACSB led us to review and to seek ways to enhance our MBA program.

In the beginning we were interested to see where Walsh College and other colleges' and universities' MBA programs fit into this discussion. Our MBA program already has a required, stand-alone ethics course. We decided to survey how many business schools require a stand-alone ethics course to determine how much time is being devoted to ethical issues by the students. From January to March 2003, we conducted a review of current MBA program offerings as posted on many colleges' and universities' websites and our convenience sample found that there was a broad mix of ethics courses and titles as part of the required curriculum; some programs offered topic-specific ethics electives in addition to the one required ethics course. (See Appendix A for convenience sample.)

Since we already met the required ethics course in our existing program, we decided to investigate ways to enhance our MBA. As part of our ongoing evaluation of the program, we held focus groups and surveyed employers who told us that they wanted employees who could design and communicate effectively a company's ethical standards/mission to internal and external constituents. Students told us they wanted courses that would make them more marketable in the area of corporate communications. We also wanted to provide a way for corporations to respond to the critics. As a way to address these needs, we developed an Organizational Communication Specialization as part of the existing MBA.

As a proactive measure to augment our current, required MBA ethics course, we developed a five-course Organization Communication Specialization pilot that will begin in winter 2004.

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(See Appendix B for course descriptions.) The MBA ethics course examines theoretical and pragmatic issues facing organizations and leaders in today's competitive marketplace.

The Walsh College MBA includes eleven specializations from various disciplines and subject areas. Each specialization consists of a cluster of four 3 credit hour graduate courses. The Organizational Communication Specialization consists of four required courses to be selected from a five-course curriculum. Offering an Organizational Communication Specialization in our existing MBA program provides an excellent opportunity for students to apply the MBA ethics course concepts to complex business situations that the Organizational Communication courses provide. Students will engage actively in assessing ethical issues and gain an in-depth understanding of corporate leadership and social responsibility. The Organizational Communication Specialization courses create a more focused environment that gives students the opportunity to explore corporate ethical behavior, corporate leadership and responsibility, and how organizations respond to their employees, constituents, and the general public. When students select the Organizational Communication Specialization, they will expand their awareness of internal and external organizational communication and the roles the communicator assumes.

Rationale for an integrated approach

Ethical business content has been an integrated topic in most MBA curricula, but recent corporate scandals such as Enron and WorldCom have emphasized the importance of ethical corporate behavior. Educators are examining various methodologies to enhance student awareness and ethical reasoning across different disciplines, industries, and cultural barriers. Case studies focus on executive misconduct, corporate ethical practices, and general greed that have created mistrust among stakeholders.

Over the past two decades, unethical corporate behavior has been pervasive and even depicted in films. As a forerunner to the exposure of Enron, WorldCom, and Arthur Andersen, Michael Douglas portrayed an unethical stockbroker whose mantra was "Greed is good" in the 1980's film *Wall Street*. Lying, stealing, and cheating are seen in many industries as acceptable business practices. Hard work and entitlement supplants ethics. "[A] big movie about greed was *Boiler Room*, about a fictitious brokerage firm when the aggressive young brokers cold-call investors and try to trick them into buying phony stocks" (Brennan, 2000, ¶13).

Effective communication of its ethical standards and/or mission is critical for an organization to maintain employee loyalty and public support. Friel (1998) reported that Frank Walker, chairman of Walker Information, believes a lack of effective communication by an organization to its employees and public sector creates misunderstanding about the firm's ethics and values. Our convenience sample of MBA programs indicated course topics in management/marketing, operations, strategy, statistics, and technology. Ethical issues may be offered as electives or covered in course discussions and projects, but not separate courses.

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The dilemma facing instructors today is getting students to question their aspirations. Does success = money, exciting lifestyles, and corporate power? Do they realize what ethical issues they will face in reaching these goals? It is not the instructor's role to enforce moral standards; it is his or her obligation to present issues and have the students make the decisions with emphasis placed on consequences that result from those decisions. Kimm (2003) emphasizes the B-schools' challenge is to deliver ethics courses that simulate situations for which there are no right or wrong solutions. Students must learn to navigate between consequences of their decisions that may or may not agree with corporate organizational and/or personal goals and values.

We are promoting a more active, integrated curriculum, one that will prepare students for multi-level managerial responsibilities, not necessarily CEO positions in billion-dollar, high profile firms. Dean (2003) reported that students are more interested in course content when they become engaged in activities that are relevant to their situations or to the ones to which they aspire:

> Today's student is unimpressed with the 'sage on the stage' approach to teaching. A more relevant pedagogy involves the 'guide on the side' where the faculty member expects the student to take responsibility for learning text material outside of class and then using that material in an applied manner in the classroom" (¶6).

Taking this pedagogy a step further, we believe that students must be prepared to communicate effectively the mission, objectives, standards, crisis plans, and corporate responsibility to internal and external audiences. Mintzberg (2000) stated, "the concept of teaching specific skills in finance or in marketing does not help with the real-life decisions that people make in the business world each and every day" (Reingold, 2000, p.6, ¶2). The need to prepare for multi-tasking and complex decision-making at managerial levels is what led us to develop a holistic approach as suggested by Mintzberg and tends to support the integration of ethics within an Organizational Communication Specialization.

Our research of college websites indicated that MBA programs recognize the importance of communication and ethics; however, communication topics are often embedded in the entire curriculum, rather than as a specific course. Stone (2002) wrote that "…administrators of MBA programs find themselves reconsidering the depth and breadth of their ethics curricula. At Metropolitan State University, enrollment has nearly doubled this year in the elective class 'Leadership and Ethics'" (p.1, ¶6). At Walsh College, our core course "Leadership and Ethics" has strong enrollment and an additional section had to be offered this term. As we evaluated our approach to delivering ethical subject matter, we recognized the strong relationship between ethics and communication skill. Ethical issues may be offered as electives or covered in course discussions and projects.

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Selling the program

Convincing our Board of Trustees and administration of the value of the Organizational Communication Specialization required the concerted effort of the director of the MBA, chair of the Communications Department, and the faculty who would be involved in making this program design work. All of the faculty, other than the MBA director and Communications Department chair, are employed full-time in business enterprises and are adjunct instructors. They bring real world experience to the classroom. Their expertise in addressing a variety of ethical situations is extremely valuable, as our research shows that businesses actively support integrating current issues into coursework.

We formulated the following question to gain support for developing and implementing an Organizational Communication Specialization: Are we failing to prepare students for the complex and influential issues impacting the students' desire to "make money"? To answer this question and to assist us in the design of the five Organizational Communication Specialization classes, we conducted a series of focus groups composed of local business people who employ our graduates, who serve on our advisory councils, and who work in communication-related fields. To solicit responses from prospective MBA students, an online survey was conducted to ascertain the interest level in an Organizational Communication Specialization. Classroom surveys of current MBA students established interest level in adding these courses to their program. The majority of the responses from all respondents were positive, and the results were presented to the administration. The Board of Trustees approved the specialization and the first course will be offered in winter 2004.

Putting the program into play

We have an opportunity to engage our graduate students in ethical issues and organizational communication practices. These students are not the typical 23-24 year olds, but are a non-traditional student body whose mean age is 33 and who have more than two years of professional work experience. This program is not designed as an executive MBA, but is for a FEMBA (fully employed MBA) student who is a middle manager.

We reviewed several MBA and Organizational Communication programs to determine which courses would best fit our student profile. Since our MBA has been growing and meeting our students' needs, finding appropriate specialization courses to complement the existing coursework was critical. Generally, our students are not interested in electives, but are focused on immediate, practical application of their coursework to their jobs. The ethics course is a part of the MBA core, and all students are exposed to ethical concepts through a variety of teaching methodologies (e.g., case studies, surveys, interviews, role play, and team projects). Our job was to develop courses that would expand those concepts into specialized areas. The Organizational

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Communication courses reflect that planning. Offering Cross-Cultural Communication and Diversity, the first course in the series, has been delayed until winter term and the final syllabus is still under development. This course is intended to expand the ethical issues/topics introduced in the MBA ethics course that are related specifically to cross-cultural communication and diversity. Similar teaching methodologies will be utilized. The remaining courses in the specialization, Research Methods for the Business Professional, Strategic Communication, Effective Presentations, and Global Competition and the Role of Communication, are being developed. Incorporating ethics topics into these courses is part of the ongoing curriculum design process.

MBA students who want to become involved in corporate communication strategies, human resource management, or in writing or presenting corporate materials will now have the opportunity to take courses that will make them more marketable in those arenas. They will have the ethics' foundation to enhance their organizational communication skills.

Assessing the program

We plan to assess this program's success using student and faculty evaluations of assignments, workloads, and project grades. An evaluation survey instrument will be designed and distributed mid-term to the faculty and to the faculty and students at the end of the semester. The data will be included as part of our overall college assessment process and reported to the North Central Association (NCA) for accreditation purposes. Future course content and assignments will be based on faculty and student evaluation feedback.

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Appendix A
Convenience Sample of MBA Programs

College/University	MBA Programs	Required or Elective
Bentley College - McCallum Graduate School of Business	Ethical Issues in Corporate Life (elective or required in the Business Ethic's Concentration)	None required - elective Ethics concentration available
Carnegie Mellon – Graduate School of Industrial Administration	Ethics and Leadership (New)	None required - elective available
Chicago University Graduate School of Business	A Guide to Business Ethics	None required - elective available
Duquesne University -John F. Donahue Graduate School of Business	Applied Ethics (foundation core) Managing a Diverse Work Force (content core)	Required
Georgia State University – J. Mack Robinson College of Business – Flexible MBA	Managerial Environment and Business Ethics (Required) Law and Ethics Bus/Employee Environment (Elective)	Required
Michigan State University – Broad Graduate School of Management	Business Ethics & Legal Environment	Required
Northwestern University – Kellogg School of Management	Making Ethical Decisions (1 credit – not repeatable)	Elective
Notre Dame University – Mendoza School of Business	Marketing Ethics Spirituality of Work Global & Multinational Corp. Responsibility Business Ethics (EMBA)	Required
Oakland University School of Business Administration	None	N/A – none found in web search
University of California Los Angeles – Anderson School of Business	Special topics – Politics, Ethics, and Business	Elective in management
University of Dayton – School of Business Administration	Business Environment & Ethics	Elective
University of Michigan School of Business Administration	Business Law or Ethics Course (student selects)	Required (could not find program course offerings)
University of Pennsylvania – Wharton	Ethics, Leadership, and Communication – 4 course module	Required
University of Southern California – Marshall School of Business	None	N/A – none found in web search
Vanderbilt University – Owen Graduate School	Ethics in Business	Elective
Wayne State University School of Business Administration	Social Perspective on Business Enterprise (ethics embedded)	Not a stand-alone course

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Appendix B
Organizational Communication Specialization Courses

MBA 530 – Leadership and Ethics (core)
Prerequisite: MBA 501
This course examines theoretical and pragmatic issues facing organizations and leaders today. Students study modern concepts, strategies, and techniques in solving organizational issues. Students are introduced to principles of ethical thinking and their application to business situations and decision-making. Critical thinking, decision-making, ethics, and communications are among the recurring themes.

Organizational Communication Specialization (choose any four of the following)

COM 520 – Research Method for the Business Professional
Prerequisite: QM 503
This course examines business research methodologies from the perspective of the business consultant. Topics include the role of the business consultant, research applications in business, research design (including quasi design and experimental design), data collection methods (i.e., surveys), instrument development and validation, interpret and validate research outcomes. Students will study different publication styles and will design and conduct business research using available Internet and database tool.

COM 535 – Cross-Cultural Communication and Diversity
Prerequisite: MBA 501
This course examines the role of organizational culture in encouraging diversity and cross-cultural integration with the business environment. Students will study how global cultures and diversity influence how business is conducted. In addition, students will consider their own culture and how it influences their awareness and understanding of different viewpoints that impact corporate negotiations, team projects, and management decision-making. Case studies are included.

COM 540 – Strategic Communications
Prerequisite: MBA 501
This course involves students in the elements of message design, creation, and transmission of various modes of business communications. Students will examine and differentiate forms of authoring while building communication skills for internal and external audiences. Varying formats will include document types such as marketing, crisis communication, image and mission, and social responsibility as well as customer documents, compliance auditing, digital documentation, newspaper releases, training materials, and other media and business documentation. Composition guidelines will be provided and used in developing various messages. The design of persuasive, informational, narrative, and other categories of organizational message are studied and practiced.

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COM 560 – Effective Presentations

Prerequisite: None. Open to MBA students only.

This course prepares students to plan and present a variety of oral and written presentations using research, audio/visual, and computer technologies as they work individually and in team situations.

COM 570 – Global Competition and the Role of Communication

Prerequisite: MBA 501

This course presents current global issues as they impact the role of the business communicator. Students will utilize case studies and team projects to understand and develop their roles as communicators within organizations that are moving into or that are already part of the global marketplace.

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Diversity and Corporate Ethical Behavior

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Background

Addressing the needs of a diverse student population and incorporating ethics' discussions in undergraduate communication courses have become routine as corporate scandals have caused us to evaluate how we view corporate responsibility, and as the influx of different cultures within the workplace has forced employers to become proactive in recognizing and validating the differences among employees. Having a diverse student population within a business communications class offers a wealth of possible ethical and interrelated cultural issues, often allowing a far more in-depth examination than is possible in a homogenous class. Have we sufficiently taken the awareness of cultural diversity and ethical behavior into our assignments? I agree with Madison (2002) that not enough time is devoted to these important topics. He conducted research that "…indicates that undergraduate students in Ohio's colleges and universities receive approximately 10 hours of classroom-based ethics education while they earn their bachelor's degree" (¶ 4). Stearns (2003) stated, "The subject [culture], however, has remained dangerously soft within business schools – taught but not emphasized" (p. B7). George (2003), Guffey (2003), O'Rourke, (2001) and Zaremba (2003) are just a few of the business communication instructors who strongly point out the need to understand and adapt to different cultures if a business wishes to remain competitive and, in many instances, become global. They also stress the importance of corporate ethical behavior. These topics are incorporated into chapter discussions and assignments. Realistically, however, curricula design and term lengths limit instructors' flexibility. Yet as business communicators we know how important diversity and corporate ethical behavior topics are and want to incorporate as much exposure to them as we can within a course.

My student demographics may be more unusual than those of other undergraduate institutions; Walsh College is an upper division business college. Almost all of my students are, on average, over 25 years old and are working at least part-time if not full-time. Some are international students who may be here on student visas (and are not permitted to work); others have resident status and can work. In my current Intermediate Business Communications class of 28 students, there is one student from Russia, one from Indonesia, one from Mexico, one from Poland, and two from Israel. The classroom setting provides an environment for all students, even those with little experience in dealing with other cultures, to discuss, evaluate, and assess diversity and ethical situations.

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Walsh also measures student learning outcomes for North Central Association (NCA) accreditation through ten core competencies. Two core competencies, business ethics and global perspectives are embedded in my diversity and ethics assignments. At the end of the term, the students do a self-assessment and I do an overall assessment of how those core competencies were delivered into the coursework.

Designing and delivering the assignments

Two questions I face when formulating diversity and ethics assignments are:

- What is a stimulating assignment that will get students to interact with different cultures/diversity in the workplace?
- How do students critically view and report various ethical issues in the workplace?

These questions are answered by having students participate in two assignments, a cultural interview and a group presentation (see Appendix A) that result in an awareness that both topics often are interrelated. The students are given the assignments fairly early in the term with the due dates toward the middle to last quarter of the term. The cultural interview assignment requires students to select someone they can interview about how cultural differences affect that person's perception and/or successful completion of his or her job. The interview is intended to broaden the students' view of cultural diversity. The pro/con issues that the interviewee faces are recorded and reported by the students; the student interviewer must then analyze and interpret the responses from his or her perspective.

The group presentation requires that students self-select a topic that focuses on ethics in the workplace. The students formulate a question dealing with corporate ethical behavior or responsibility. The group members do not have to agree on how the ethical issue is resolved. Their challenge is to present research that supports their viewpoint about the ethical implications resulting from the ethical question. "[T]he educator must challenge students to forgo the easy way out and call upon them to expand their knowledge beyond the familiar bounds. The students' thought process must be developed to enable them, as future managers, to identify the internal and external factors which influence the decision-making process" (Strong & Hoffman, 1990, p. 605).

Actively involving students in business ethics and diversity through situational interviews and research allows the students to gain in two skill areas: the students focus on composing appropriate questions that elicit responses dealing with ethical and cultural/diversity issues in the workplace, and the students increase their understanding of how to manage situations that result from those issues. Victor (1999) prefers scenarios to case studies, "because the scenario focuses on a very specific behavioral conflict or difference" (p. 100). I believe the cultural interview and group presentations serve the same purpose. They engage the student in discourse; they prevent the student from passively observing cultural interactions and corporate behavior by instead making him or her investigate issues and evaluate the results. Once the students have completed the cultural interview and have begun their research for the group presentations, they often find

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some diversity issues are related to corporate ethical behavior issues. For example, sometimes a position is given to someone based solely on the corporation's desire to have a culturally diverse workplace without regard to needed technical expertise or language proficiency. Students then face the question: Does the corporation's hiring policy create an ethical question?

Several class discussions are devoted to topics that get the students to look at not only basic issues such as language barriers and time zone differences, but at sub-cultures and skill levels. "One needs to recognize that shared expectations as to what is and is not acceptable in business transactions grows in importance as business transactions increasingly span national and cultural boundaries" (Ahmed, Chung, & Eichenseher, 2003, ¶10).

Student feedback and assignment evaluation

The students like to spend 20 –30 minutes out of their four-hour class that meets once a week discussing their progress on the assignments. Sometimes they talk informally in small groups and report their progress to the class; other times, they ask for suggestions about topics that may have stopped them from getting in-depth answers from their interviewees. They help each other with database research concerns for the group presentations. The students report these discussions keep them focused and prevent them from veering off onto unnecessary tangents.

As the term comes to an end, we evaluate these projects; the overall consensus is that the students have immersed themselves in the assignments far more than they thought they would have. Most report a deeper understanding of and willingness to listen to people from other cultures and diverse backgrounds. They have learned to research and evaluate the results of corporate ethical behavior and how these concerns affect personal interaction and productivity in the workplace. A wider band of gray appears to replace black and white in issue resolution.

Conclusion

Students should be challenged to evaluate their personal biases and to hone their communication skills within the global business environment. The instructor's role is that of a facilitator. There is no quick fix in these assignments; they are designed to make the students think about issues.

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Appendix A

My course text is Guffey's (2003) *Business Communication: Process and Product,* (4th ed.). These assignments are based on class discussions of the text topics and from outside readings, usually *Wall Street Journal* articles, which reflect current diversity and corporate ethics' issues. These readings are updated each semester.

The following are two class assignments that the students receive.

1. Cultural interview

Guffey (2003) and others make a strong point about the need to understand and adapt to different cultures if a business wishes to remain competitive and, in many instances, become global.

You are to interview a person doing business in another culture, or a person from another culture doing business here. Draw on your knowledge and experiences to write a report about that person's attitudes, experiences, and recommendations. The final paragraph(s) should be your interpretation of the interview and the responses.

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Develop a list of at least eight (8) questions to ask the person about his or her job responsibilities, work environment, personal attitude toward the job and coworkers, and recommendations for ways to improve any negative situation.

Examples: What do you find more difficult in dealing with people from another culture? How does this difficulty affect your work or the work of others? What suggestions would you have for improving the work environment? What works well when dealing with people from another culture?

Write a report about your conversation with the person. Include the person's job title/responsibilities and how you know the person. Present your questions and the responses as a formal question and answer interview. Remember: the final paragraph(s) should be your interpretation of the interview and the responses.

2. Ethics in the workplace – group presentations

Consider current topics of interest that focus on business ethics: for example, corporate ethics (golden parachutes, insider trading), whistle blowing, smoking in the workplace, sexual harassment, use of profane language, discrimination (age, cultural, gender), email privacy, workplace security.

You will form teams of 4-6 members and select a topic of interest that focuses on business ethics. The team may sub-divide the topic. Determine the ethical issue you want to present.

Your group will research the topic and prepare a presentation for the class. You do not have to have unanimous agreement within the group about the ethical consequences of the topic. For instance, if you are discussing smoking in the workplace, some members could be for the ban, and some could be against the ban. The format for the presentation is open ended. Some groups have role played within a presentation, some have debated, and some have presented a panel discussion. Be creative and make this a team effort!

You will be graded on two elements: the research presented in the discussion and your creativity in the presentation.

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I Did, But I Still Don't Get It

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Many students enrolled in college business communication classes lack the grammar and punctuation skills they need to write effective messages. Employers and college professors are especially aware of the lack of skills of entry-level employees and of college students.

During the years 1998-2003, Public Agenda's *Reality Check* surveys have asked the nation's public school teachers, parents, students, employers, and college professors if they are seeing higher standards and improved student achievement in their own communities. For five consecutive years (1998-2002), employers and college professors remained broadly dissatisfied with the English language skills of young people entering jobs and higher education (the 2003 survey results are not yet available). Some three out of four said that today's high school graduates have just fair or poor skills in grammar, spelling, and the ability to write clearly (Reality Check 2000, 2001, 2002).

Consequently, college business communication instructors are having to teach basic rules for grammar and punctuation in their courses; this is seen in the contents of the business communication textbooks. However, anecdotal evidence indicates that many of these instructors are not having success teaching the mechanics effectively; their students are not able to apply the rules to their own writing any better at the end of the semester than they did at the beginning of the semester.

As Asselin (2002) stressed, students need to regard grammar as a useful tool to produce or understand texts that are relevant to them. Noguchi (1991) thought teachers should focus only on the few errors that account for most of the mistakes students make in their writing. The mistakes most often identified by college teachers were run-on sentences, comma splices, fragments, and the boundaries between and among clauses (Patterson, 2001). Teaching those limited grammatical concepts in the context of their use is far better than isolated grammar study, according to several authors (Noguchi, 1991; Weaver, McNally, & Moerman, 2001). The question, according to Weaver et al, is "What aspects of grammar can we teach to enhance and improve students' writing, and when and how can we best teach them?" (p. 19). Weaver et al suggested teaching writing conventions during the editing phase.

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Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine whether frequent application of grammar rules through exercises helps students in business communication courses. This was operationalized by testing the ability of the students to identify errors in grammar, punctuation, and spelling in sentences they are given on a test at the end of the semester. All the available business communication textbooks have sections with grammar, punctuation, and spelling rules, and most have exercises on the mechanics. The study attempted to determine whether having students do these exercises is worth the teachers' and the students' time.

In the context of English language studies, research has shown that teaching grammar in isolation does not work; most students do not remember it, and they seldom transfer it to their own writing (Weaver, 1996; Patterson, 2001). The question of whether similar outcomes can be expected in the business communication course was the focus of this study.

Methodology

A total of 89 students who signed up for business communication classes in Fall 2000 and Spring 2002 were employed to study the beneficial effects of their completing exercises in the appendix of the textbook after studying the rules the exercises were geared toward (Guffey, 2000). Table 1 summarizes the demographics of the participants.

Table 1
Gender & Class Status of the Participants

	MALES	FEMALES	**TOTAL**
SOPHOMORES	4	10	14
JUNIORS	18	22	40
SENIORS	17	17	34
GRADUATE	1	0	1
TOTAL	40	49	**89**

The students were randomly assigned to one of two treatments. The control group was not asked to complete the exercises while the test group was.

Both groups were first given the same pre-test (Appendix A) and asked to identify the errors in grammar, punctuation, capitalization, number style, usage, and spelling. The number of actual mistakes in the pre-test instrument that students failed to identify was noted as his or her type A pre-score. The researchers also noted, as type B pre-scores, the number of errors a student made by identifying as errors correct grammar, punctuation,

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capitalization, number style, usage, and spelling. The sum of these two scores provided the total pre-test score of the student.

At the end of the semester, both groups were given a post-test that was similar to but different from the pre-test (Appendix B). Similar to the scoring of pre-tests, the researchers noted the type A post-scores and type B post-scores for each student. The sum of these scores constituted the student's total post-test score.

Each student's improvement was then computed by subtracting the post-score from his or her pre-score. Positive results of this computation indicate improvement in the student's performance since scores reflect the number of errors made by the student. Three improvement scores were computed for each student: overall improvement, type A improvement, and type B improvement.

Each semester one of two sections was randomly assigned to the test group and asked to complete the exercises. Thus two sections from the two semesters fell into this group. There were 43 students in these two sections combined. The students handed in their exercises to prove that they completed them. The exercises were not graded since the text provided the answers.

The remaining two sections (one from each semester), comprising 46 students, were assigned to the control group and did not complete any of the exercises.

Data Analyses and Results

The data were collected in the fall and spring semesters in a college of business in a mid-sized university in the Midwest. All business students in the college are required to take the business communication class. One-way ANOVA, with "overall improvement" as the dependent variable and the "treatment" as the independent variable was conducted to deduce the effects of students' doing the exercises. Table 2 summarizes the results.

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Table 2
Overall Improvement

Descriptives

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for the Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Did not do exercises	46	-1.7609	6.87082	1.01305	-3.8013	.2795	-25.00	14.00
Did do exercises	43	-1.5814	5.86041	0.89370	-3.3850	.2222	-14.00	13.00
Total	89	-1.6742	6.36713	0.67491	-3.0154	.3329	-25.00	14.00

ANOVA

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	.716	1	.716	.017	.895
Within Groups	3566.835	87	40.998		
Total	3567.551	88			

Two conclusions can be drawn from the above table: (1) There are no treatment effects as the significance level of .895 indicates (i.e. there was no difference in the improvement levels of both groups), and (2) both groups did worse in the post-test than in the pre-test (mean improvements for both groups were in the negative figures).

Some clarity was gained on separate analyses of the two types of errors that students made (Tables 3 and 4).

The results of the analyses of Type A errors (Table 3), i.e. identifying errors in the test sentences, summarized above, indicate that there are no significant differences between the two respondent groups (p-value >.10). It may even lead to a conclusion that doing the exercises may be detrimental (mean improvement of -0.14) to the students' performance.

Table 4 similarly indicates that the mean improvement in Type B errors for students who completed the exercises was NOT statistically different from those who did not (p-value: 0.167). Given the high significance level of 0.167 (Table 4) due to the low power of the test, one may even argue that, contrary to expectations, students who completed the exercises are more prone to identify correct mechanics as language errors (commit Type B errors) than those who do not do the exercises.

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Table 3

Type A Improvement Scores: Identifying Existing Errors

Descriptives

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for the Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Did not do exercises	46	0.6957	6.23207	0.91887	-1.1550	2.5463	-12.00	22.00
Did do exercises	43	-0.1395	5.60009	0.85401	-1.8630	1.5839	-15.00	15.00
Total	89	0.2921	5.91647	0.62714	-0.9542	1.5385	-15.00	22.00

ANOVA

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	15.503	1	15.503	.440	.509
Within Groups	3064.902	87	35.229		
Total	3080.404	88			

Table 4

Type B Improvement Scores: Spotting Non-existing Errors

Descriptives

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for the Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Did not do exercises	46	-1.0652	2.18482	0.32213	-1.7140	0.4164	-7.00	6.00
Did do exercises	43	-1.7209	2.25014	0.34314	-2.4134	1.0284	-8.00	7.00
Total	89	-1.3820	2.22846	0.23622	-1.8515	0.9126	-8.00	7.00

ANOVA

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	9.556	1	9.556	1.945	.167
Within Groups	427.456	87	4.913		
Total	437.011	88			

In general, the overall conclusion of these analyses is that doing exercises does not improve the English mechanics skills of business communication students.

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This study indicates that students do not make significant improvements in learning grammar by doing isolated exercises. Therefore, business communication instructors need to go beyond mere identification of errors to actively compel students to apply grammar and punctuation rules to their own writing.

Alternative Approaches to Teaching English Mechanics

The disheartening results of this research lead us to consider other treatments that might be more effective in teaching mechanics to students. Sitler (2001) suggested two approaches: the Usage-Scan and the Fix-it Page. The Usage Scan is a student-led mini-lesson with classmates on some point of grammar or style. The Fix-it Page is a process where the instructor records the patterns of errors and the students are then responsible for finding and fixing these errors, as well as monitoring their progress throughout the semester.

One innovative approach could be to apply cognitive theories on the relationship between punishment and performance. Previous works in the management literature suggest that punishment can result in performance improvements when perceived as connected to performance (Korukonda & Hunt, 1989).

Future Research Plan

We plan to use the last approach in one of the authors' business communication classes to see if this will improve students' skills in English mechanics by the end of the semester.

A student's paper with more than three spelling, grammar, and punctuation errors will be returned without a grade. The returned paper, if correctly revised, will be graded one letter grade lower than if it had originally been submitted with perfect grammar. If the revised paper still does not meet the three-strikes rule, the student will receive an F for the paper.

Students will continue to have the opportunity to visit with the instructor for individual or small group conferences if they plan to revise an assignment as advocated by Weaver et al (2001). This is to help the students better understand the mechanics of the English language and not for the instructor to help rewrite the paper.

The current practice of students' doing exercises in grammar and punctuation will be continued, but in class rather than as homework assignments where they have access to the answers.

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Conclusion

For five consecutive years, three out of four employers and college professors have been dissatisfied with the English language skills of young people entering jobs and higher education. Because business messages need to be correct, college business communication instructors need to know effective ways of teaching English mechanics.

This study found that students who did exercises in the textbook appendix as outside class assignments unrelated to their writing were not able to identify grammar, punctuation, and spelling errors in sentences given at the end of the semester any better than students who did not do the exercises. Students who completed the exercises were actually more prone to misidentify correct spelling, grammar and punctuation as errors.

Business communication instructors should focus only on the errors that many students make in their writing and teach those rules in the context of their use. By doing that and using other approaches given in the paper, instructors will more effectively teach students to write business messages correctly.

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Appendix A

Pre-Test

Guffey's C.L.U.E. (Competent Language Usage Essentials) Grammar, Punctuation, and Spelling Review

The following sentences contain errors in grammar, punctuation, capitalization, number style, usage, and spelling. Use proofreading marks to indicate your corrections.

Example: Before eating sixteen members of the Committee met in the sabin center.
Revision: Before eating, 16 members of the committee met in the Sabin Center.

1. At last Sundays graduation ceremonys Melissa Yost who uses a wheel chair, was honored because she was the only graduate who had never missed a day of classes.

1. The rolls royce carrying prince charles and queen elizabeth pulled into a filling station to have it's deflated tire examined.

1. If it's not to late to register my brother and myself plan to take courses in History, Management, and English.

1. In just two hours time I was able to locate 9 excellent Web sites, containing relevant information for my report.

1. Mistakes are a fact of life, however it is the response to the error that really counts.

1. Complicating the problem is inefficent legislation, and lack of enforcement personel.

1. We cannot procede with the mailing, until the list of names and addresses are verified.

1. My new Sport Utility Vehicle came equipped with: antilock brakes, alloy wheels and a trip computer.

1. My bosses biggest computer worry is the possibility of us being hacked, and not knowing it.

1. Besides your resume and cover letter you must submit a seperate employment application form.

1. Elizabeth was suprised to find the one of a kind vase in a store called Second Thoughts.

1. Although the manufacture promised excelent milage I get only fifteen miles to the gallon.

1. Your account is now ninety days overdue, therefore we are submitting it to a agency for collection.

1. If you have all ready sent your payment please disregard this notice.

1. Of the 350 letters mailed Ms. Radfords assistant reported that only five were returne

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Appendix B

Post-Test

Guffey's C.L.U.E. (Competent Language Usage Essentials) Grammar, Punctuation, and Spelling Review

The following sentences contain errors in grammar, punctuation, capitalization, number style, usage, and spelling. Use proofreading marks to indicate your corrections.

1. In the evening each of the female nurses are escorted to their car.

2. It must have been him who received the highest score although its hard to understand how he did it.

3. The Manager asked Hilary and I to fill in for him for 4 hours on Saturday morning.

4. Working out at the Gym and jogging twenty miles a week is how she stays fit.

5. 3 types of costs must be considered for proper inventory control, holding costs, ordering costs, and stockout costs.

6. If I was him I would fill out the questionaire immediately so that I would quality for the drawing.

7. Higher engine revolutions per mile mean better acceleration, however lower revolutions mean better fuel economy.

8. Our teams day to day operations include: setting goals, improving customer service, manufacturing quality products and hitting sales targets.

9. If I had saw the shippers bill I would have payed it immediately.

10. Salary, hours, and benefits, these are 3 items about which most all job candidates ask.

11. Do you think it was him who left the package on the boss desk.

12. About _ of Pizza Huts six thousand outlets makes deliverys, the others concentrates on walk in customers.

13. Every thing accept labor is covered in this 5 year warranty.

14. Our Director of Human Resources felt nevertheless that the applicant should be given a interview.

15. When Keisha completes her degree she plans to apply for employment in: Seattle, Dallas, and Atlanta.

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INDICES OF READABILITY AND USABILITY OF ONLINE JUROR EDUCATION MATERIALS

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Introduction

Trial by a jury of peers is a cornerstone of American democracy, and more than 150,000 jury trials occur each year. (Landsman, 1999; Saks & Marti, 1997; Abramson, 1994). On an annual basis, approximately 15 million Americans are summoned to jury duty; yet only about one-third report to serve as jurors (Schneider 1997). Maltby notes that in some rural areas only one in ten of those called actually reports to serve as a juror (2003). Low juror response has resulted in under-representation of certain elements of the population on juries (Fukari 1996). For example, in 2000 in Dallas County, Texas, nearly one of every four county residents was Hispanic; however, only one of 14 reporting for jury duty was Hispanic (Dallas Morning News 2000).

In reply to low juror response rates in the state and nation, judges, attorneys, court administrators, scholars, and former jurors have proposed various recommendations to make jury service a more positive experience. These include one-trial-one-day service requirements, simplified draft jury instructions, increased juror pay, provision of transportation and child care, tax incentives, and increased use of technology to summon and manage jurors (Jury Summit [JS], 2001).

One of the recommendations for the increased use of technology is to provide online education prior to reporting. This has been recommended as one tool by which prospective jurors could be educated about their responsibilities (JS, 2001), and the 78th Texas Legislature has authorized Texas counties to implement methods whereby prospective jurors may appear in response to a jury summons by computer or automated telephone system (HB No. 2188, 2003).

In response to this initiative of providing juror education materials online, this study proposes that unless the online materials are written at an appropriate reading level and the Web sites are designed in a usable fashion, the initiative will further reduce jury response and will further aggravate the problem of under-representation by minorities. This study suggests that all online juror education materials should be analyzed for

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"readability" and "usability" if they are to be an effective educational tool. In the next section, the literature on text readability and hypermedia usability will be presented. In the following sections, measures will be applied to assess juror education materials published on the Web by Texas counties with the highest number of Hispanic residents.

Review of the Literature

Since juror education materials are now being published online in the state of Texas where there is a large Hispanic minority population, this literature review describes the demographics of the Hispanic consumers of these materials in Texas and reviews the literature on readability and usability. The online delivery of these materials requires potential jurors to retrieve and review the materials independently. Therefore, it is necessary to review the literature on how to assess the text readability levels and the hypermedia usability levels of these educational materials.

Hispanic Juror Demographics

There is no Constitutional requirement that a jury of twelve men and women must represent all of America's diverse ethnic, racial, and economic groups (*Donaldson v. California*, 1971). However, there has been concern as to whether potential jury pools accurately reflect shifting racial and ethnic populations (Fukari 1996). For example, the Hispanic population in the United States increased by 58 percent, from 22.4 million in 1990 to 35.3 million in 2000. By the year 2050, it is projected that the Latino population (including Hispanics) will triple in size to reach 100 million (U.S. Census Bureau 2001, slide 4).

Half of all U.S. Hispanics live in two states: California and Texas. The 2000 Census reflects that Texas had 6.7 million Hispanic residents and 19 percent of the Hispanic population in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau 2001, slide 6). However, Texas juror demographics fail to reflect these population percentages. In 2000, a joint study conducted by the Dallas Morning News and Southern Methodist University reported that nearly one of every four Dallas County residents was Hispanic; however, only one of 14 reporting for jury duty was Hispanic. The study concluded that inherent barriers systematically prevented large segments of the population from participating in jury duty.

One of the barriers noted was language. Contributing to that barrier is the statistic that nearly 95% of Hispanics/Latinos consider it very important to maintain their language and culture and nearly 70 percent of those over the age of 5 still speak Spanish at home (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [USDHSS], 1997). To further focus on the Hispanic population, 43% of Latinos have less than a high school education compared to 15% of the general population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). Because Hispanics/Latinos constitute an essentially bilingual, poorly-educated community, issues of linguistic competence and language use are important when designing communication materials (USDHHS, 1997).

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The April 2003 Task Force on Jury System Improvements Final Report, in treatment of the topic of readability of juror materials, stated:

> recognizing the importance of making the handbook as readable as possible for the widest audience, the final revisions to the juror handbook consisted of a plain-language rewriting of the content in 2002. Although the initial work resulted in a high-school reading level, the revised version was adapted to a mid-seventh grade reading level. The resulting handbook is accessible to more readers, but the essential meaning has not changed. (Judicial Council of California, 2003).

Along with this written handbook, an electronic version was approved to be used for local court adaptations and for use in school classrooms. Online dissemination of juror education materials will require potential jurors to have computer/Internet access and to be computer literate. In 2000, computers were found in a majority of American homes (51 percent). In 2001, computers were found in 48.8% of Latinos' homes (Latino Issues Forum, 2002).

Text Readability

The Texas Commission on Judicial Efficiency is developing a state judicial information technology infrastructure to improve access to records, permit more effective scheduling and tracking of cases, and establish an open architecture for electronic information gathering and reporting (Texas Commission on Judicial Efficiency, 1996). Using information technology to communicate more effectively to the jury pool in Texas would further these goals. Unfortunately, especially with mass communication, it is difficult to identify the composition of the audience. This is especially the case with documents published on the World Wide Web. Because potentially anyone in the world has access to the Web, Web-based communications must be designed for a large and diverse audience, ranging from those with very little experience in reading complex documents to highly trained and experienced professionals. Writers who wish to reach the Hispanic population should be aware that 43% of Latinos have less than a high school education compared to 15% of the general population (Latino Issues Forum, 2002).

According to Klare (1974), an author has several ways in which to approach the communication problem. The first is to guess at the reading level of the audience. The second is to develop and administer a comprehension test covering the material to a group of readers. The third is to use "readability" formulas.

Klare (1974) notes that "[a] readability formula uses counts of language variables in a piece of writing in order to provide an index of probable difficulty for readers" (p.64). Unlike a comprehension test, a readability formula does not require reader involvement; it is strictly a predictive measure. This characteristic contributes both to its efficiency and

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to its widespread use. Three readability formulas are discussed here: Flesch Reading Ease, Flesch/Kincaid Grade Level, and Gunning Fog Index.

The Flesch Reading Ease formula has become one of the most widely used formulas in the history of readability measurement (Klare 1974). The result of applying the Reading Ease formula to a sample of text is a rating ranging from 0 to 100, with higher ratings indicating material that is easier to read. An interpretation of the ratings is shown in Table 1.

Table 1
Interpretation of Flesch Reading Ease Ratings

Reading Ease Rating	Difficulty Level	Educational Attainment Level	Typical Style of Magazine
0-30	Very difficult	Postgraduate Degree	Scientific
30-50	Difficult	Undergraduate Degree	Academic
50-60	Fairly difficult	Grades 10-12	Quality
60-70	Standard	Grades 8-9	Digests
70-80	Fairly Easy	Grade 7	Slick Fiction
80-90	Easy	Grade 6	Pulp Fiction
90-100	Very easy	Grade 5	Comics

Source: Courtis (1986).

Kincaid, et al. (1975) followed the Flesch Reading Ease formula with the Flesch/Kincaid Grade Level formula. Like the Flesch Reading Ease formula, the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level formula computes readability based on the average number of syllables per word and the average number of words per sentence. The computation results in a score that can be interpreted as a grade level (e.g., a score of 8.0 means that an eighth grader would understand the document).

Gunning developed the Fog Index in 1952. Unlike the two Flesch measures that count the number of syllables in all words, the Gunning Fog Index counts only words of three or more syllables. The result of the process is a numerical index, which corresponds to the levels of writing shown in Table 2.

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Table 2
Interpretation of Gunning Fog Index

Fog Index	Category
19.5	Technical Books
17.0	Scientific Literature
13.7	Newspapers
12.6	Instruction Manuals
9.7	General Circulation Magazines
8.6	Youth Magazines

Source: Courtis (1986)

Hypermedia Usability

A newer topic affecting readability of Web-based documents is hypermedia usability. Unlike the abundance of measures for text readability, there is a shortage of established guidelines for measuring the usability of hypermedia and Web user interfaces. Usability engineering methods are used to improve the usability of the resulting interface. According to Nielsen (1994), experience has shown that many developers find many usability methods to be intimidating, too expensive, and too difficult and time-consuming to use. This is why Nielsen developed "so-called discount usability engineering with methods that are cheap, fast, and easy to use" (Nielsen, 1994). His method, "heuristic evaluation," is useful in identifying usability problems during the design phase of user interfaces, thereby allowing for the correction of potential problems prior to implementation of a system.

Nielsen's heuristic evaluation requires a team of three to five evaluators to examine the interface and then to judge its compliance with recognized usability principles or the "heuristics." Nielsen (1994) found that a team of evaluators is preferred since different people find different usability problems making it possible to improve the effectiveness of the method significantly. Nielsen recommends a team of three to five since significant gain has not been reported with larger groups.

The heuristic evaluation method was applied to a Web site in 1994 by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). The experimenters at the BLS created a modified list of usability principles that were based on Nielsen's general-purpose list and supplemented by hypertext-specific principles drawn from Schneiderman and Kearsley (Levi & Conrad,

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1996). The modified list of usability principles adapted by the BLS is defined in the Methodology section.

The BLS study concluded that the heuristic evaluation method had the following strengths and weaknesses. The strengths included its economy, ease of learning, and rapid implementation (just over two days). The weaknesses included its lack of baseline against which to evaluate results and the need of evaluators to use the same hardware with the same processing speed, memory capacity, and network connectivity, as well as the same browser so that evaluations can be compared. All of these conditions are difficult to predict.

According to Nielsen (1994), heuristic evaluations can detect between 40 and 60 percent of the usability problems that an empirical user test would find, with the types of problems being roughly comparable. Without an empirical user test, these claims must be trusted.

According to Levi and Conrad (1996), overall, the BLS considered the heuristic evaluation process to have been a success. They were able to detect a large number of usability problems with a reasonable expenditure of effort.

Methodology

This study analyzed materials using the established readability and usability measures described in the previous section to determine if online juror education materials are written at an appropriate level for the targeted audience thereby serving as an effective educational tool. Specifically, this study focused on online materials designed to reach primarily Hispanic jurors. Therefore, from a list of all Texas counties, 33 counties were identified as having the highest number of Hispanics registered (Texas State Data Center and Office of the State Demographer, 2003). From the 33 counties, 15 had online jury education materials and so were selected for this study.

The authors applied the readability measures to the online education materials found on the 15 Web sites. The juror information was examined using the Flesch Reading Ease formula, Flesch-Kincaid Reading Level formula, and Gunning Fog Index.

The result of the Flesch Reading Ease is an index number that rates the text on a 100-point scale. The higher the score, the easier it is to understand the document. Authors are encouraged to aim for a score of approximately 60 to 70 (Table 1).

The result of the Flesch-Kincaid grade level is an estimated grade level. Like the Gunning-Fog index, it is a rough measure of how many years of schooling it would take someone to understand the content. Numbers over twelve are reported as twelve. Authors are encouraged to aim for a grade level of 8.

The result of the Gunning Fog index, like the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level, is a rough measure of how many years of schooling it would take someone to understand the content. A lower number means that the content is more understandable (Table 2).

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The Flesch Reading Ease score and the Flesch-Kincaid Reading Level were calculated using Microsoft Word (i.e., Tools/Spelling and Grammar). The Gunning Fox Index was calculated using a tool on the Web published by Juicy Studio, a Web site whose mission is to promote best practice for Web developers and programmers.

To obtain a more objective usability measure and to follow the procedures set forth by Nielsen (1994), a group of students was asked to apply the usability principles to these same materials. According to Nielsen (1994), a team of evaluators should individually inspect a Web site. Once all the evaluations have been completed, the results should be aggregated. Therefore, sixteen students attending the Summer I 2003 session at the University of Texas at Brownsville volunteered to participate. The demographic information for these students can be found in Table 3.

Table 3
Participant Demographic Information

Description	Percentage
Number of Students	16
Ethnicity	
Hispanic	100
Gender	94
Age	
Under 20 Years Old	19
20-29 Years Old	31
30-39 Years Old	25
40-49 Years Old	19
50-59 Years Old	0
60-69 Years Old	6
Registered Voters	56
Texas Drivers License Holders	100
Jury Duty Service, Initial Call	19
Jury Duty Service, Actually Served	0

Students were instructed to apply the following modified list of usability principles and the associated severity ratings.

- *Speak the users' language*: The Web designer uses words, phrases, and concepts familiar to the user, and presents information in a natural and logical order.

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- *Be consistent*: The Web designer indicates similar concepts through identical terminology and graphics and adheres to uniform conventions for layout, formatting, typefaces, labeling, and so on.
- *Minimize the users' memory load*: The Web designer takes advantage of recognition rather than recall and does not force users to remember key information across documents.
- *Build flexible and efficient systems*: The Web designer accommodates a range of user sophistication and diverse user goals and provides instructions where useful. All screens are laid out so that frequently accessed information is easily found.
- *Design aesthetic and minimalist systems*: The Web designer creates visually pleasing displays and eliminates information that is irrelevant and distracting.
- *Use chunking*: The Web designer writes material so pages are short and contain exactly one topic without forcing the user to access multiple documents to complete a single thought.
- *Provide progressive levels of detail*: The Web designer organizes information hierarchically, with more general information appearing before more specific detail. The designer encourages the user to delve as deeply as needed, but to stop whenever sufficient information has been received.
- *Give navigational feedback*: The Web designer facilitates jumping between related topics, and allows the user to determine his or her current position in the document structure making it easy to return to an initial state.
- *Don't lie to the user*: The Web designer eliminates erroneous or misleading links and does not refer to missing information.

The severity ratings scale is as follows:

0. I don't agree that this is a usability problem.
1. Cosmetic problem only—need not be fixed unless extra time is available on project.
2. Minor usability problem—fixing this should be given low priority.
3. Major usability problem—important to fix, so should be given high priority.
4. Usability catastrophe—imperative to fix before product can be released.

Because students self-nominated to participate in this study, there was no formal review of their computer Web skills although all held current email addresses at the university. The author distributed copies of the Web sites to be evaluated and the severity rating forms. Each student was verbally given the purpose of the study and what was being evaluated. The terms *jury duty*, *jury service*, *district clerk*, *jury summons*, and *jury information* were explained in detail. The first Web site was located together by the author and the participants and an explanation as to what to look for and how to navigate the Web site was completed. Students were then given time to complete all the forms and return them to the authors.

The authors understand that this is not a comprehensive sample and should in no way be interpreted as being a representative sample of large jury pools in Texas counties.

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Sixteen people volunteered to apply the measures in this study in order to have more objective usability results instead of the authors themselves applying the measures.

Findings

Readability
Table 4 shows the following results of the readability measures.

Table 4
Results of Readability Measures

Texas Counties	Flesch Reading Ease	Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level	Gunning Fog Index
Bexar	62.3	8.2	9.58
Collin	38.3	12.0	13.96
Comal	56.4	9.0	11.17
Dallas	52.1	9.7	11.5
Denton	62.5	8.5	10.36
El Paso	55.2	9.0	7.42
Fort Bend	67.2	6.8	8.24
Harris	55.5	9.4	9.15
Hays	56.6	9.2	10.92
Hidalgo	52.4	9.8	9.55
Liberty	23.4	12.0	12.4
Nueces	60.9	9.1	11.47
Tarrant	59.3	9.2	11.32
Travis	51.6	10.3	10.44
Williamson	58.6	8.8	9.85
Texas Uniform Jury Handbook	59.8	8.7	10.14

The results of the Flesch Reading Ease measure indicated that of the 15 counties, four counties (27%) scored within the recommended 60 to 70 range. This range is defined as standard requiring a grade level of 8 to 9. Nine counties (60%) scored within the 50 to 60 range, which is defined as fairly difficult, requiring a grade level of 10 to 12. One county scored in the 30 to 50 range, which is defined as difficult, requiring an undergraduate

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college education. One county scored in the 0-30 range, which is defined as very difficult, requiring a postgraduate college degree.

The results of the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level calculation indicated that of the 15 counties, four counties (27%) scored at or below the recommended grade level of 8; eight counties (53%) scored with a grade level of 9; three counties (20%) scored at a grade level of 10 or higher.

The results of the Gunning Fox Index calculation indicated that of the 15 counties, two (13%) scored at or below the recommended eighth grade level; four counties (27%) scored at the ninth grade level; three counties (20%) at the tenth grade level; four counties (27%) scored at the eleventh grade level; one county (7%) scored at the twelfth grade level; and one county (7%) scored above the high school level.

Usability

The results of the usability testing are reported in Appendix A and summarized below.

Language. Twelve counties were rated by at least 60% of the participants as not having a usability problem with language. On the other hand, three counties were scored by at least 50% of the participants as having language concerns.

Consistency. At least 79% of the participants stated there was no usability problem with consistency in at least four of the 15 counties whereas two counties had almost 80% of the participants with some type of concern with consistency. Of the two counties with some type of concern with consistency, one of the Web sites had a 36% participant concern at the usability catastrophe rating.

Minimizes Memory Load. Seven counties were rated by 60% or more of the participants as not having a usability problem with memory load. However, there was one county that had 42% of participants rating its Web site with major or catastrophic usability problems.

Builds Flexible Efficient Systems. Five counties had 73% or more of the participants who indicated no usability problem with efficiency whereas in four counties, at least 20% of the participants indicated there were major or catastrophic usability ratings. One county out of these four counties had 50% of the participants indicating major and catastrophic usability ratings of its Web site.

Designs Aesthetic Minimalist Systems. Of the 15 Web sites evaluated, 64% or more of the participants indicated no usability problem with aesthetics. Three counties were rated by 30% of the participants as having major or catastrophic usability rating. One of these three counties had 44% of the participants indicating major or catastrophic usability of its Web site.

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Uses Chunking. Approximately 80% of participants rated two counties as having no usability concerns with chunking and at least 60% or more rated three additional counties at that level. Almost 30% of the participants indicated that there were three counties with major and catastrophic problems on their Web sites. One of those three counties had at least 44% of the participants finding major and catastrophic concerns.

Provides Progressive Levels of Detail. At least half of the participants indicated there were ten counties with no usability problem with progressive levels of detail. One of these ten counties had 88% of the participants agreeing to no usability problem, which was one of the highest ratings received. On the other hand, for three counties, 38% or more of the participants indicated major or catastrophic problems with their Web sites. One of those Websites had 53% of the participants indicating major or catastrophic problems.

Gives Navigational Feedback. More than 60% of the participants indicated that six counties had no usability with navigational feedback problems on their Web sites. One of those six counties had an 88% participant rate with no usability problem on navigational feedback. Two counties, on the other hand, had 35% participant ratings of catastrophic usability levels where it is imperative that the Web site be fixed before it is posted.

Don't Lie to the User. Seven counties' Web sites were rated by 70% or more of the participants as having sites that had no usability problems. Of these seven sites, three had 87% or more of the participants indicating no usability problem with the designer lying to the users. On the other hand, there was one county site that had 40% of the participants indicating it was a usability catastrophe.

Conclusions

One of the objectives of the Information Technology Task Force of the Texas Commission on Judicial Efficiency is to make the Texas Judicial System more accessible to the public, lawyers and judges. Using information technology to communicate more effectively to the jury pool in Texas would contribute to judicial economy and efficiency. Using information technology to make the judicial system more accessible to the Hispanic/Latino population might also increase understanding of the importance of jury service. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services recommends that materials developed for Hispanic/Latino audiences be adapted to better fit the needs and specificities of this population group and that messages should be written clearly and simply for readers who are just learning the English language. Other strategies for enhancing readability include the use of readability formulas, larger type size, brief and clear written materials with a minimum of technical jargon, and the addition of good visual materials and use of culturally appropriate images and symbols (USDHHS 1997).

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Web site designers will need to pay more attention to issues of linguistic competence and language when designing online juror educational materials.

The objective of this study was to respond to the initiative of providing juror education materials online. This study proposes that unless the online materials are written at an appropriate reading level and the Web sites are designed in a usable fashion, the initiative will further reduce jury response and will further aggravate the problem of under-representation by minorities. This study suggests that all online juror education materials be analyzed for "readability" and "usability" if they are to be an effective educational tool. The literature on text readability and hypermedia usability is presented and then these same measures are applied to assess juror education materials published on the Web by Texas counties with the highest number of Hispanic residents.

The application of the measures to the 15 Texas counties with online juror education materials and with the highest Hispanic populations showed that the readability and usability measures presented can be successfully applied to the online materials. The authors believe that the tools are an appropriate means of determining the educational materials' level of complexity and appropriateness for the targeted audience.

The results of applying the readability measures were varied. The results of applying the Gunning Fog Index indicated that 13 of the 15 counties had a readability level higher than the recommended eighth grade level. The results of applying the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level formula and the Flesch Reading Ease formula indicated that 11 of the 15 counties had a readability level above the recommended level. Based on all three measures, it is recommended that the Web designers rework the Web sites to be written at a reading level appropriate for a diverse audience such as jury pools.

The Gunning Fox Index had the greatest variability in results when compared to the other two measures. Also, the results of using the online calculator and then comparing the results to manual calculations produced very different results. Therefore, the authors recommend using the Flesch Reading Ease and Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level formulas to evaluate the readability of the Web sites. Both of these formulas are readily available and easily applied when using popular word processing software.

By combining the data listed under the 0 (not a usability problem) and 1 (cosmetic problem only) severity ratings for each county, the authors concluded that Bexar, Dallas, Denton, Fort Bend, Harris, Hays and Travis Counties had a combined rating of 80% or higher on all nine usability heuristics. This indicates their web sites were considered excellent by the study participants. These counties had information that was not only easy to find and easy to read, but also had the necessary links and maneuverability for users.

At the same time, the authors found that Collin, Hidalgo and Liberty Counties had a combined usability average that exceeded 27% in the 3 (major usability problem) and 4

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(usability catastrophe) ratings. Having such high percentages on the overall combined heuristic ratings indicates that these counties should redesign their web sites taking into consideration ease of use and level of reading comprehension. It may be concluded then, that when revamping these web sites, consideration should be given to readability levels of text, links moving between areas, navigational ease of locating topics and the different levels of information.

The other five counties, Comal, El Paso, Nueces, Tarrant and Williamson had a combined average usability in the acceptable range of the nine different heuristic areas. This indicates that highs and lows were found in each category but when combined and averaged, the ratings fell in the acceptable range. It is therefore recommended that these counties continue to refine their web sites taking usability heuristics into consideration.

Since the measures were successfully applied to the online materials, future research should be aimed at determining if there is a correlation between the readability and usability of the selected Web sites and the actual juror representation rate. In other words, will publishing juror education materials at an appropriate reading and usability level encourage jurors to read the materials and thus respond to jury duty? If applying the measures successfully encourages usage of the education materials, future research must also address how to make the application of these measures a requirement for Web designers of judicial sites.

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Appendix A

Usability Heuristics

TEXAS COUNTIES WEB SITES	LANGUAGE					CONSISTENCY					MINIMIZES MEMORY LOAD					BUILDS FLEXIBLE EFFICIENT SYSTEMS				
*Severity Rating Scale In Percentage	0	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4
Bexar	78.5	14	7			78.5	7	14			71	14	14			64	29	7		
Collin	53	13	7	7	20	20	67	7	7	13	40	20	13	13	13	27	20	33	7	13
Comal	58	25	8	8		58	33		8		33	33	25	8		42	17	42		
Dallas	73	27				80	20				67	27	6.6			86.6	6.6	6.6		
Denton	73	20		6.6		80	13				63	25	6			81	6	6		
El Paso	67	27			6.6	46	33	6.6		13	46	27	6.6	6.6	13	73	6.6	6.6	6.6	6.6
Fort Bend	78.5	21				64	21		7	7	64	36				64	29		7	
Harris	94	6				81	12.5	6			75	25				63	31			6
Hays	75	12.5	12.5			8.5	12.5				56	31	12.5			75	6		12.5	6
Hidalgo	50	18.8	6	6	18.8	50	12.5		6	31	31	25	6	18.8	18.8	25	12.5	12.5	25	25
Liberty	64	21		7	7	21	14	21	7	35.5	29	29		21	21	35.5	29	7	14	14
Nueces	60	7	27		7	67	27	20		7	60	7	20		13	67	20	13	20	
Tarrant	60	7	7	13	13	60	13		20	7	71	14	7	7		69	12.5	12.5	6	
Travis	69	12.5	12.5		6	56	13	19	6	6	53	27	13		7	75	13	6		6
Williamson	75	18.8		6		50	31	12.5	6		50	18.8	18.8	12.5		56	18.8	6	12.5	6

SEVERITY RATING SCALE:

0 Not a usability problem
1 Cosmetic problem only—need not be fixed unless extra time is available on project.
2 Minor usability problem—fixing this should be given low priority.
3 Major usability problem—important to fix, so should be given high priority.
4 Usability catastrophe-imperative to fix before product can be released.

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Usability Heuristics (Continued)

TEXAS COUNTIES WEB SITE	DESIGNS AESTHETIC MINIMALIST SYSTEMS					USES CHUNKING					PROVIDES PROGRESSIVE LEVELS OF DETAIL					GIVES NAVIGATIONAL FEEDBACK					LINKS ARE ACCURATE				
*Severity Rating Scale In Percentage	0	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4
Bexar	71	21	7			86			14		50	29	14	7		50	29	14		7	71	21	7		
Collin	27	33	7	20	13	33	13	40		13	13	40	7	20	20	27	27	20	7	20	60	7		13	20
Comal	42	33	25			33	17	33	17		17	42	33		8	23	23	31		23	38	31		15	15
Dallas	44	31	12.5	6	12.5	44	25	12.5	6	6	56	12.5	6	12.5	12.5	50	31	6		12.5	69	6	6	6	12.5
Denton	73	20		6.6		80	13			6.6	60	33		6.6		73	20	6.6		6.6	86.6	13			
El Paso	5	20	6.6	13	6.6	60	20	6.6		13	53	6.6	20		20	67	13	6.6	6.6	6.6	73		6.6	6.6	13
Fort Bend	64	29	7			57	36	7			57	36	7			64	21	14			78.5	14	7		
Harris	69	25		6		63	25	6		6	75	12.5	6		6	69	6	6	6	12.5	75	12.5	6		6
Hays	56	37.5	6			56	31	6		6	87.5	6	6			87.5	6			6	87.5	6	6		
Hidalgo	25	31		25	18.8	6	31	18.8	12.5	31	31	25	6		37.5	50		12.5		37.5	44		18.8		37.5
Liberty	21	29	21	7	21	43	14	14	7	21	13	20	13	20	33	21	35.5	7		35.5	27	20	13		40
Nueces	53	13	27	7		53	7	7	13	20	67	13	13	13	13	60		27	13		60			20	13
Tarrant	69	12.5	6	6	6	40	20	13	20	7	53	13	7	20	7	53	27		7	13	87				13
Travis	69	19	6		6	69	19	6		6	56	32	6		6	59	13	6	6	6	69	12.5		6	12.5
Williamson	44	25	12.5	18.8		50	6	18.8	18.8	6	50	25	6	18.8		56	25	6	12.5		6.	18.8	6	12.5	

SEVERITY RATING SCALE:

0 Not a usability problem
1 Cosmetic problem only—need not be fixed unless extra time is available on project.
2 Minor usability problem—fixing this should be given low priority.
3 Major usability problem—important to fix, so should be given high priority.
4 Usability catastrophe-imperative to fix before product can be released.

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Student Assessment of the Business Communication Course

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Abstract

This research study surveyed 315 business communication students in Spring 2003 at an AACSB-accredited College of Business to determine the student assessment of the various components of the course. The top five components listed in order were resumes and interviewing, teamwork, oral presentation, and the memo. Least valuable components and demographic information are also presented.

Introduction

How do students assess the business communication course? Nearly ten years ago Swanson and Meinert (1994) surveyed over 500 students to determine how they compared the importance of the business communication course to other business core courses, to determine the difficulty of the course as compared to the other business courses, and to judge the effectiveness of the instruction in the course. They found the business communication was considered the most important of the business core courses; it was perceived to be the easiest of the core courses; and the instruction was thought to be more effective than that in five other core business courses.

The issue of assessment continues to be important in Colleges of Business as reflected by the emphasis given to accountability in the accrediting standards of the AACSB-International (2003). One institution, for example, restructured its management communication course to be competency-based as a means of quantifying student outcomes (Murranka & Lynch, 1999). Issues of assessment including accountability of instruction, accreditation standards, course and grading standards for core courses, and student outcomes are all examined by Varner and Pomerenke (1998). One factor that Varner and Pomerenke discussed was *value added*—what value can be added to the student's education by a particular course?

When designing the curriculum, faculty frequently assess the various components of the business communication course, addressing such questions as which components to include and how much time to spend on each. Student evaluations provide another source of assessment. When students evaluate a course, however, they are usually evaluating the presentation and teaching style of a specific instructor rather than the value of the course components.

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Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to find out how business communication students assess the importance of the components of the business communication course. The content of the business communication course was divided into twelve subsets. Students were asked to assess the degree of value they attributed to each of these components.

Procedures

This study was conducted during the Spring 2003 semester at Stephen F. Austin State University in Nacogdoches, Texas, an AACSB International-accredited university where business communication is taught as part of the business foundations in the College of Business. In addition to being a required course for all business majors, the sophomore-level course is also one of the communication options of the university's core curriculum and, as such, attracts business minors and non-business majors.

A survey instrument was developed identifying twelve basic components of the course. Based on the validation from seven faculty members teaching the business communication class, the instrument was modified prior to distribution.

Students were asked to determine the value of the following course components: written report; oral presentation; memo; positive/neutral news letter or message; negative news letter or message; persuasive news letter or message; communication theory and concepts; any of these--electronic mail, WebCT, chat, or online discussions; assignments composed/completed in the computer lab; resumes and interviewing; teamwork; and out-of-class homework and writing assignments. All of these components are currently included in the business communication survey course. For each component, respondents were asked to indicate the value as follows: 5—very valuable; 4—of some value; 3—no opinion; 2—of little value; or 1—not valuable. In addition, students were asked to judge if the amount of class time spent in these components was about right, excessive, or insufficient.

Following the completion of instruction in all of the component areas, students in thirteen sections—taught by six different instructors--of the basic business communication course were asked to participate in the study. Usable surveys were completed by 311 students.

Findings

Demographic information indicated that over 53% of the students were business majors and minors; the remainder were not business majors or minors. See Table 1 for additional details. Information about the student interpretation of the value of course components was also collected.

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Table 1
Demographics of Students

Major			**Number of Students**	**Percent of Students**
Business Majors and Minors			166	53.38%
Majors	127	40.84%		
Minors	39	12.54%		
Non-Business Majors and Minors			145	46.62%
			311	100.00%
Status				
Sophomore			140	45.02%
Junior			101	32.48%
Senior			40	12.86%
Freshman			30	9.65%
			311	100.00%
Took Course Because:				
Required for Major			209	67.20%
Optional for Major or Minor			41	13.18%
Required for Minor			32	10.29%
Elective			28	9.00%
No Response			1	.32%
			311	100.00%

Over sixty percent of the students (188) indicated that the resumes and interviewing component was one of the most valuable components of the course, closely followed by approximately 58% who judged that teamwork was one of the most valuable components. Students rated the writing assignments as less valuable than some of the other components (See Table 2).

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Table 2
Most Valuable Course Components
(items rated 5 in student survey)

Component		Number of Students	Percent of Students
1	Resumes and Interviewing	188	60.45%
2	Teamwork	179	57.56%
3	Oral Presentation	155	49.84%
4	Memo	147	47.27%
5	Negative Newsletter or Message	144	46.30%
6	Persuasive Newsletter or Message	141	45.34%
7	Written Report	139	44.69%
8	Positive/ Neutral Newsletter or Message	136	43.73%
9	Communication Theory and Concepts	118	37.94%
10	Assignments Composed/Completed in the Computer Lab	115	36.98%

Note: Valid responses were received from 311 students

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Students were more likely to indicate that more time was needed in a component area than that less time was needed. A number of students reported that additional time in class working on reports and with teams would be helpful.

The majority of students indicated that all of the course components were of some value. However, some students judged some components of little value or no value to the course. Some students didn't like out-of-class homework and writing assignments (9.52%) while others did not care for electronic mail, WebCT, chat or online discussions (8.8%). See Table 3 for more information.

Table 3
Course Components Perceived to be Least Valuable
(items rated 1 and 2 in study survey)

	Component	Number of Students	Percent of Students
1	Out of class Homework and Writing Assignments	30	9.52%
2	Electronic mail, WebCT, Chat or Online Discussions	28	8.88%
3	Oral Presentation	19	6.11%
4	Teamwork	18	5.79%
5	Written Report	17	5.47%

Note: Valid responses were received from 311 students

Conclusions

Based on the findings of this study, the business communication course is perceived to be a valuable one by the students completing it. The majority of students currently seem pleased with both the course components and the time spent on them.

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The resume and interviewing component was perceived to be the most important by the majority of the students. Surprisingly, most faculty spend only about a week on this topic. Perhaps this means that students feel a stronger need for job preparation skills in the current economy. It may also mean that they have not received this exposure in other courses they have taken.

Teamwork was another component that was highly rated. Although many College of Business classes require team assignments, this course is the first business course teaching teambuilding. Not only does the course stress concepts of team communication, it also integrates team skills in class projects.

The oral presentation was also rated as very valuable. Considering that many students have already completed a speech course in the Communication Department, they may feel that more oral presentation opportunities are a plus.

Electronic applications may not be adequately used by students. While the majority of students have appreciated the inclusion of electronic mail, WebCT, and other electronic enhancements, some students have not found the features as attractive. Some of those students appear to be less proactive and less willing to assume responsibility for learning. They may rarely or never check their email and do not access the web-based platforms.

The results of this study have given the faculty an opportunity to reassess and revaluate the components of the course. Based on these findings, faculty may modify their individual class assignments and activities.

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"If we build it will they come?" Creating Online Opportunities for Interaction and Community

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Introduction

With a sense of optimism about what we might accomplish for our undergraduate and graduate students in Corporate Communication, we accepted an invitation from our IT department to create a departmental "Community Organization," to be built and maintained within the Blackboard[i] system our College has adopted and promoted for faculty and student use. Because we were early and experienced adopters of online sites for our courses, we welcomed this opportunity to provide our undergraduate majors and master's students with a site that could be uniquely useful to them, and to us. While we realized the potential burdens of such an undertaking, particularly in the design and maintenance of the informational aspects of the site, we concentrated on the possibilities of positive outcomes such as ease of access to facts about department procedures and coursework and a reduction in the need to respond to routine questions that could easily be referred to the website. We imagined that eventually the website would 'sail' almost by itself as the more tedious aspects of the site start-up would begin to be replaced by the kinds of interactions we hoped would take place there. Unfortunately, thus far, we have not created the kind of community space we had hoped.

In this paper, we will share our adventure in building and managing this community organization in order to contribute to the continuing dialogue on computer mediated (or facilitated) communication and its uses (and abuses) in learning environments. We use our experience to discuss several elements related to the construction of such a site, including the skills needed, considerations regarding the host culture, the roles of faculty facilitators or 'managers' and students. Finally, we reflect upon the nascent, rarely-visited community site to discuss the real and potential obstacles in developing and maintaining such a site, the opportunities, and our newly cautious optimism, akin to Shepherd 's (2001) "pragmatic idealism-- --the promise that is communication and the possibility of community" (p. 34).

Preparation

Fortunately, today's online learning software platforms, such as Blackboard, are accessible (given institutional support) and little technical expertise is needed. Every campus has its experts; some are self-taught (faculty and staff) while others are the "go-tos" in the computer services departments. Our own experience with the Blackboard platform includes some classes that use the websites for posting informational items such as announcements and course materials, and online discussion opportunities as a supplement to in-class meetings. Other classes use the online Blackboard site as the principle 'location' with one or two face-to-face meetings

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supplementing the online interaction. In the case of collaborative projects with other institutions, we've used a common Blackboard site for all participants and relied more extensively on complimentary forms of electronic communication such as email, synchronous and archived chat and instant messaging.

Blackboard is a widely adopted instructional tool, in corporate as well as academic settings, and it is not surprising that the platform is relatively straightforward, includes easily accessible sections, and can accommodate communication in both synchronous and asynchronous modes (see Bober & Paz Dennon, 2001). But as with any technology, the platform is limited not only by the specific design and templates offered but by the instructor's goals, capabilities, and willingness to explore available features, and of course, the willingness of the 'target' community to engage with it. As Bober and Paz Dennon (2001) note, students interacting online find themselves in a variety of different settings which are not neutral or "accidental" and which "cannot help but affect the nature, frequency, duration and quality of their conversations and exchanges--and by default, the community they build" (p. 243).

Institutional culture

As important as any individual skill set or choice of supporting online platform, is the institutional setting in which the online "community" will reside. The culture of an organization will determine, to a large extent, the reception of any new tool to help construct and maintain community. Many current definitions acknowledge that communities are not homogenous entities. Communities may be defined by geographical location, member label or some other marker (Milburn, forthcoming). For example, according to Burke (1999), members of institutions or organizations interact with a variety of communities. Among these, our particular concern is to understand local internal and online communities and how an institution such as ours interacts with and designs interactions for these groups. Regardless of the kind of community, the relationships formed depend upon the parties' ability to build trust. How organizations go about building this trust varies, and Burke (1999) recommends a number of programs and events that can work toward this purpose.

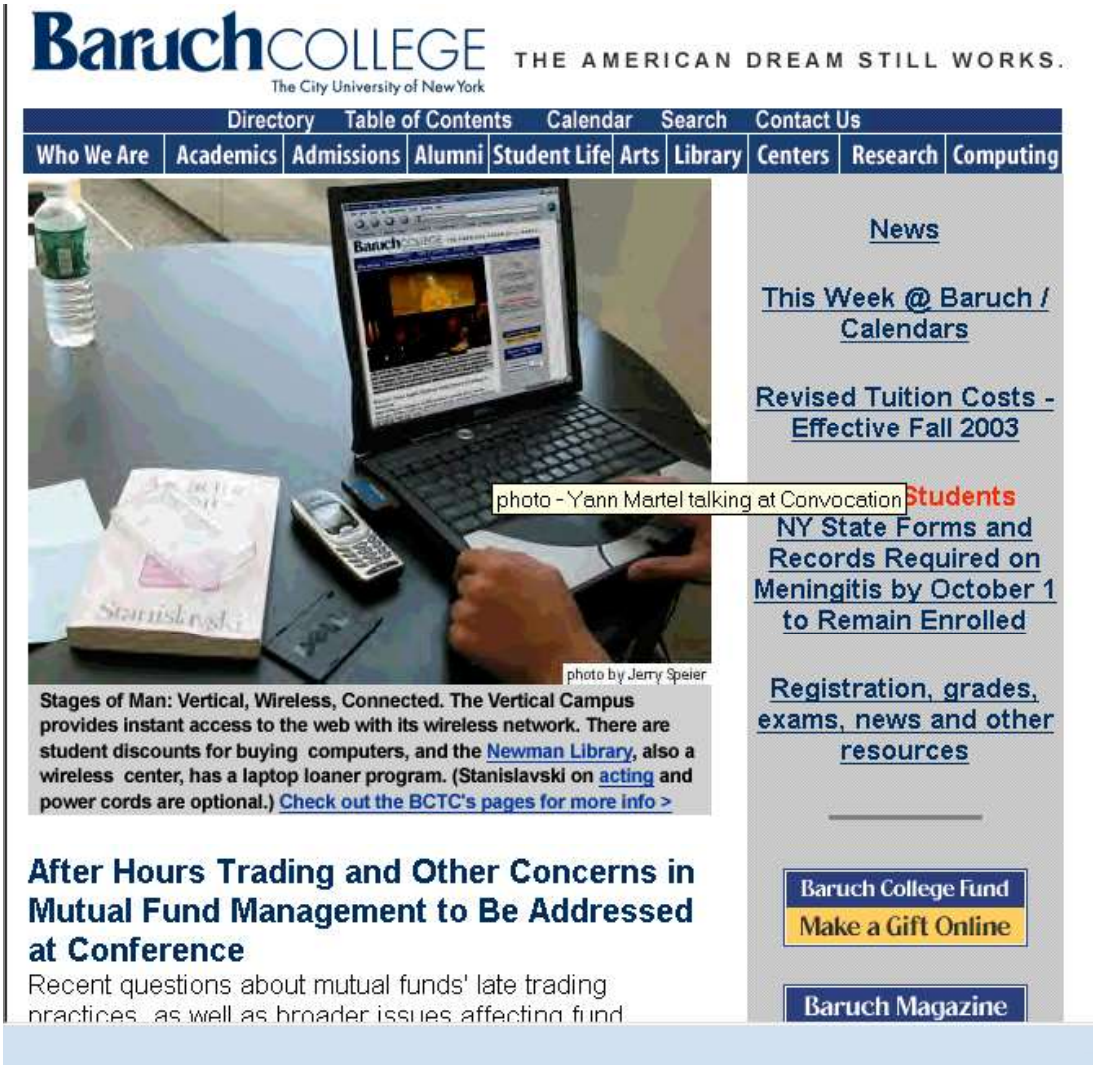
While Burke (1999) describes the notion of trust and communities' relationships at an organizational level, Wilson and Peterson (2002) describe the issues of multiple community memberships at the individual level. The state they describe whereby "individuals belong to many communities, bounded to different extents and in varying ways" (p.455) is similar to that at Baruch College. Regardless of the different memberships any individual may have, a community can only be built if persons have a reason for coming together around a "shared interest or condition" (Wilson & Peterson, 2002, p.455).

Baruch College is unique among the CUNY schools and indeed among undergraduate institutions in general for its principle focus as the largest collegiate business school and its distinction as the most ethnically diverse school in the nation[ii]. It has students from across the wide spectrum of New York City's cosmopolitan population, as well as from 148 other nations around the world, who speak over 90 languages. The total enrollment is over 15,000, including

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nearly 2,500 graduate students. As demonstrated in Figure 1 below, Baruch College positions itself through the slogan at the top of the page, "The American Dream Still Works." This version of the home page (which changes weekly) further illustrates the prominent use of technology, where the new wireless campus environment and the ubiquitous laptop--displaying last week's home page and the broadcast appearance of the freshman convocation speaker--shares a spot in the atrium with an acting text (a cue to the heightened focus on the liberal arts and the performing arts in particular). The article link positioned immediately beneath the photo usually promotes the school's links to the business community, this week highlighting a conference on "after hours" trading and mutual fund management and last's week detailing a partnership with Merrill Lynch.

Figure 1. *Baruch College sample homepage*



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We constitute a community of choice among many competing communities to which the students and faculty belong. As is the case with many urban campuses, students work. Many work full time, and most have other responsibilities to family and community groups in addition to their coursework. Their considerable off-campus commitments are partly responsible for Baruch students' pragmatic attitudes toward learning ("will this be graded?" or "is it on the test?"); they typically have limited time to socialize on campus and comparatively few take part in student government or even clubs. They are often reluctant to spend any more time than necessary engaged in extra-curricular campus events. And yet the college leadership has adopted a mission that is committed to excellence and believes that excellence in the students will come through a deeper engagement with one another and with the work of a learning community, with the faculty, with campus speakers and events. Institutional goals are focused on a campus-wide change of culture in order to achieve the envisioned academic outcomes.

Many college programs attempt to provide campus activities that mirror those found on traditional campuses, but until recently our midtown campus, located in several rental buildings distanced from one another by several city blocks, has worked against such efforts at building a sense of community. It is hoped that two newly constructed, award-winning buildings, facing one another and each filling nearly an entire city block, will help students feel pride in the institution and realize an increased sense of their shared membership and responsibility in evolving a collegial campus atmosphere where little or none has existed. The Information and Technology Building houses a state-of-the-art library, a computing services facility, a conference center, as well as many administrative functions. A second, 17-story building, known as the Vertical Campus, opened Fall 2001 and houses classrooms, student services functions, athletic facilities, theatres and faculty offices.

Information on the college website explains aspects of the college's physical re-configuration based on the occupation of these new sites; we quote a lengthy section to offer evidence of college pride in stewardship of the new spaces, as well as to demonstrate the significance the college attaches to the newly integrated campus and its hopes for new opportunities which the sites are to encourage:

> … a section of 25th Street now named "Bernard Baruch Way"—the Vertical Campus anchors Baruch's visual identity as an institution in the neighborhood. For the first time, it integrates at one location all faculty and staff offices and most of the classroom space for Baruch's two largest academic units: the Zicklin School of Business and the Mildred and George Weissman School of Arts and Sciences. This physical union of the business and liberal arts programs supports the undergraduate business curriculum, which requires an arts and sciences foundation for the degree; the first-time proximity of the two schools also creates a host of new opportunities for multidisciplinary classes, programs, and initiatives.

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Figure 2. *Image of the Vertical Campus building*



Designed by the New York architecture firm of Kohn Pedersen Fox and Associates and constructed by the Dormitory Authority of the State of New York, the Vertical Campus also marks a new approach to an urban educational facility. With nearly 800,000 square feet of space to work with, planners at Baruch have attempted in an urban setting to create the sense of open space and quadrangle design that characterizes the typical ex-urban college campus. Thus, a great deal of space has been given over to three stacked atria, one rising from the ground floor to the fifth floor, with a glass curtain wall facing Baruch's Information and Technology Building to the north, across Bernard Baruch Way; another, wider atrium rising above that, from the fifth to the eighth floors; and a third, against the southern wall of the building, that rises from the eighth to the 13th floors with a dramatic glass curtain facing south and giving views of all of lower Manhattan (see Figure 2).

This design allows sunlight from the southern exposure to filter diagonally from the top of the building and along the southern side down to the ground floor entrance lobby and exterior plazas on the north side, along Bernard Baruch Way.

> At the same time, each floor is designed as a quadrangle, with a mix of classrooms, research space, and offices around the open atrium and with many open spaces and cul-de-sacs that are furnished with chairs and tables for conversation, reading, and hanging out between classes. This design unifies the teaching and research facilities as they would likely be encountered in a more traditional campus design (Baruch College Website, http://www.baruch.cuny.edu/about/glance.html).

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Paralleling the development of the new physical campus, the College has invested in the development of instructional uses of technology and has encouraged faculty in their use. College resources have extended the reach of the campus and its potential to offer learning opportunities outside of the constraints of the usual 50 or 75 minute class period two or three times a week, incorporating technology into classes and enabling students to access information and faculty-designed course materials and to get faculty and student feedback from home and work spaces through email, listservs, and course websites.

Among CUNY colleges, Baruch has been the leader in adopting such technologies, initially with an in-house platform called "Electronic Campus" (see O'Keefe Bazzoni, 2000) and currently with web-based email for students, faculty and staff and Blackboard as the online instructional platform. In addition to areas for announcements, course documents, course information and external links, the features we believed would be most useful for creating community included the "Communication" area where a Discussion Board, Email exchange, and dedicated Group sites reside. Faculty and students can also access course-relevant materials by taking advantage of the Blackboard feature called, "Academic Web Resources." This area contains a list of subject links to web resources provided by Blackboard where users can do research from within the site. And in institutions such as ours where the library provides online access to reserve materials, it is possible to link to these through the Blackboard site, encouraging greater use of these faculty-recommended materials and discouraging the usual google.com site search, or at least providing an easily accessible alternative.

Goals

Our initial motives for creating communities where little or none existed included using technology to provide information and creating a dialogue between students and between students and faculty in a communal space separate from course sites. We wanted to use the space to provide accurate and timely information to our students, posting everything from FAQs about the Communication Studies department to announcements about events of interest. We wanted to bring the students to a safe place where they could exchange information with relative ease but where they would also be able to interact with one another or with faculty in more substantive ways, either in synchronous or asynchronous fashion. We agree with D'Cruz (2003), that

> people learn best when they collaborate with others. We call it a 'social context' for learning. A social context increases people's ability to learn. Research shows that collaborating with others as part of the learning experience improves everything from critical thinking and communication skills to recall, course completion and a positive attitude toward learning (p.47).

We also anticipated that interactions on the site would help us to gain a better understanding of our students' needs not only in terms of support for their coursework, but in their readiness for the contemporary workplace and its online environments. We hoped that the organization's membership and shared interest in communication issues would provide a non-graded learning

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environment that might eventually come to share some of the characteristics of 'real-time' student and faculty community of gathering places, such as those being made available in the new campus facilities. As with physical campus locales, the academic setting would be apparent and its politeness rules maintained, and the comings and goings of website visitors would be both entertaining and informative, and often even persuasive. Useful information would be easily disseminated, and students would come to rely on this organizational site to check for new postings much as they might check a campus bulletin board, while stopping in for a chat. Social aspects of online exchanges would prevail and the pitfalls of the somewhat artificial characteristics of the usual course-related online exchanges would be avoided. We would learn something from one another and about one another, and ourselves, that wouldn't otherwise happen in the course of most class-related exchanges. There would be something for lurkers as well as more active contributors that would link them to the Department and to one another even during those semesters when they were not actually enrolled in classes, and even--we hoped--after graduation. And so we began.

Launch

Our pilot launch of the websites, during academic year 2002-2003, has taught us a few things about Blackboard, our students and ourselves. For the undergraduate website, we posted relevant announcements of events such as a major fair and an interns forum. We also posted documents such as an explanation of how the internship course works. Using Blackboard's Discussion Board feature, which allows student members to post, we built several 'forum' areas designed to attract student input and begin discussion. Because we wanted to have our students be a part of the site design from the outset, one of the forum areas was set aside for student suggestions for items to post as part of a FAQ sheet regarding department procedures, special topic courses, etc. Other forums were "Introductions" where students were to provide a brief introduction of themselves, "Q & A", a forum for questions anyone could pose or answer that lay outside usual coursework. As the graphic chosen for the site was an abstract (see Figure 3), we posted a forum asking students to offer their interpretations of its potential meanings; finally, we provided a space where students could post announcements on public or campus-sponsored events of interest to the community.

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Figure 3. *Abstract graphic on undergraduate website*



Students were invited to the site via an email message sent via Blackboard, and several students did visit the site eventually. The first student post was encouraging:

> I am very glad that emails were sent out informing us of this link. Otherwise, I would have been so involved with my classes to discover this on my own. My only hope is that all other students take advantage of this resource to make it as successful as I imagine it has potential to be. I am excited to be the first one to utilize this tool so far? (FAQ post Mar 26 2003 2:44 pm)

In retrospect, this post seems to have quite accurately outlined key elements of our project: that we would need to promote the site and that email was one way; that at least this student recognized the potential of such a site, and that the site would be of value only if others joined this student in the space.

Unfortunately, few students posted, although many more did visit. Two students offered suggestions for the FAQ sheet, and one or two students contributed to the other forums, but no dialogue developed, and the site has remained 'under construction.' In addition, two students sent out email to the entire group of users, with questions that we thought best solved by other means. The first was a request to other students for a prime spot in a full class, asking if any of the students would be dropping their spot. The second was a request for company internship information. This fall, the site has already attracted a couple of new questions to the Q & A

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discussion thread, input that confirms that some students can navigate to the site on their own and attests to their treatment of the site thus far as principally a virtual bulletin board, where they can post a note requesting information and hope someone will post one back.

The graduate student site began a bit differently. During the Spring 2003 semester, a graduate Employee Communication[iii] course was to have provided content for the site. The students had a newsletter assignment, and it was not specified that the newsletter be paper or online. Students were notified that an online area was available for use. To facilitate the effort, we added a banner heading that simulated the print newsletter that was initially developed by students, "The Communicator" (see Figure 4). Using their chosen content areas, we added staff names and a discussion thread for profiles, as well as a comment area to serve as a feedback area of "The Communicator" for the students to refine their content. The sections of the newsletter itself included: Department News, Calendar of Events, Profile of Corporate Communication, and Career Notes.

Figure 4. *The Online Communicator, homepage of the graduate student website*



To our dismay, rather than using the provided onsite area, the students printed and distributed four out of the five newsletters assigned. The final edition was submitted as a CD with each page of the newsletter saved in PDF format. Although the idea of linking the organization site to a course seemed initially a sound one, the preference for print and the lack of initiative on the students' part for creating an online presence created a slow start for the site itself. However, the

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email function has been employed to alert students to upcoming internship opportunities and course registration requirements. Currently, we are reconsidering the areas of importance, and will try to build in more interactivity to the site with some questions of the week, announcements and photographs of new students.

Participation

What we have discovered thus far is that while our motives may be sound, our hopes are unrealistic at best and unlikely to be met--or approached--in the current environment of our urban, public campus. For, despite the new physical plant, College initiatives in communication technology and encouraged communication intensive pedagogy in traditional and online platforms, our campus community traditionally has had no physical center, no administrative communication strategy, and has been a culture typified by condensed routines of teaching and learning. Few students have scholarships that allow full time study and on-campus presence, and fewer faculty can afford to treat advising as a serious responsibility in a culture that rewards research achievements and substantial committee and other co-administrative service responsibilities and undervalues out-of-class interaction with students beyond the requisite office hours.

Our initial goal of merely transmitting information to students was apparent in our choice of which information to include on the site, using Blackboard as merely an electronic bulletin board to post information for students to read. Information, or knowledge sharing as it's come to be known, is labor intensive for the administrator and while we were aware of this from our experience in the course-related websites we had previously managed, we underestimated the amount of time we would have to devote to this non-course site in order to post materials, respond to inquiries and market the site to students who had no motivation to use it, as this was extra-curricular and offered no additional incentives. In addition, several other factors may detract from the use of such a site, including the requirement that students send email only to college email addresses from within Blackboard. As most students now have email accounts with ISPs or free providers such as hotmail and yahoo, they have not integrated the Baruch webmail account into their routines. Future administrative plans for a portal environment and the use of such accounts for all significant student interactions, such as registration and advisement, may serve to alter current practice and promise to dramatically improve opportunities for use of Blackboard and other College sites.

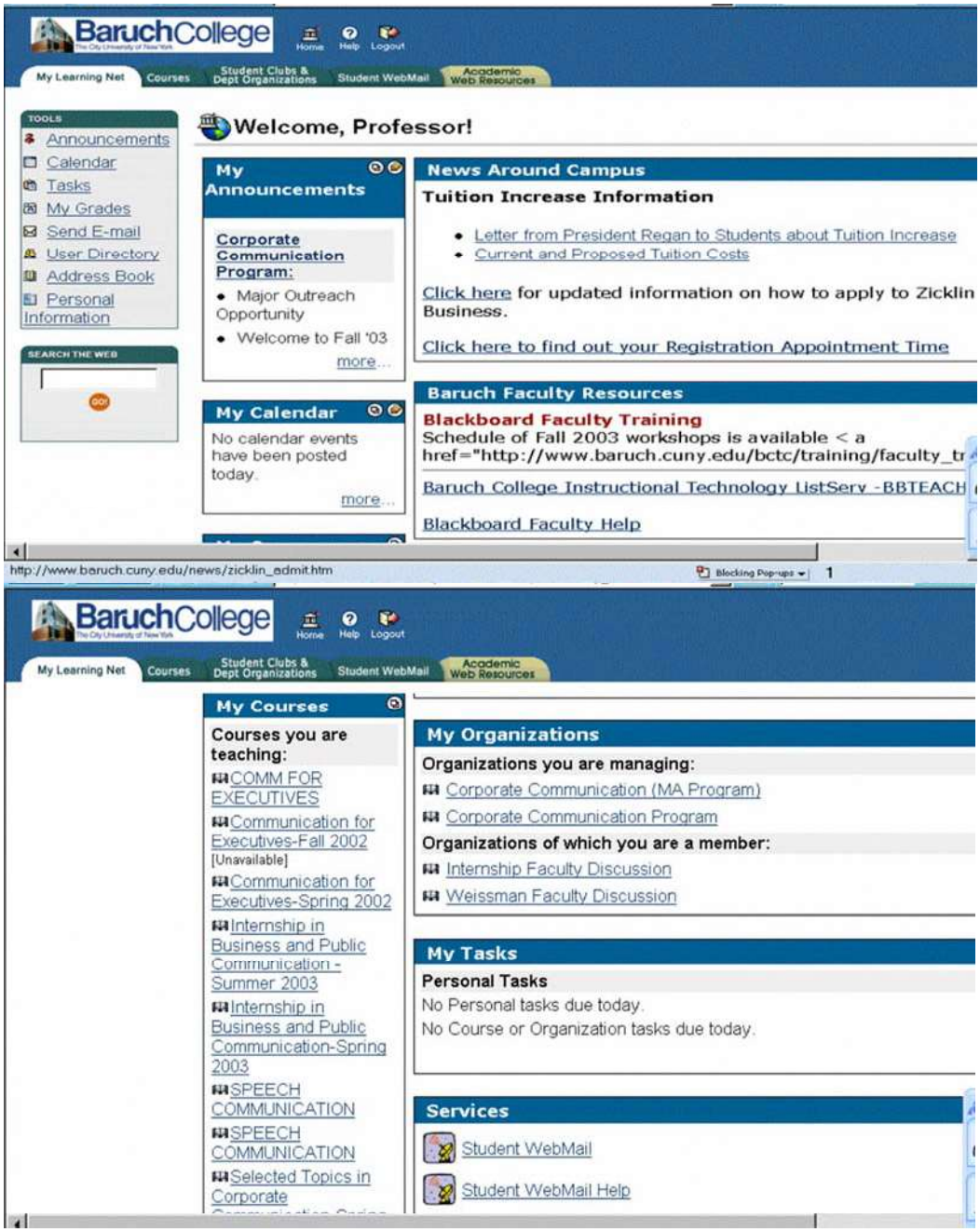
Another hindrance to its use is the current place of the community site on the Blackboard homepage. When users log on, they can only find the organization site on the bottom right of the screen by scrolling down a couple of times, an especially problematic feat for those using small monitors. Figure 5 (below) demonstrates the two full screens it takes to find the organization areas. There is a green tab on the top of the screen (that simulates a card file in appearance); if a member knows the navigation process, clicking on the green tab creates another page featuring the member's organizations. However, the moniker "Student Clubs & Dept Organizations" may not ring a bell to students who do not know that their department has an organization, or that it

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may be for their use. Finally, Figure 5 demonstrates the way that an announcement in an organization site appears in a label that may confuse students further. Under “My Announcements,” students would see the “Corporate Communication Program” title with two bullets, “Major Outreach Opportunity” and a “Welcome” message. Unless students know that the department organization exists and what it was called, they may unwittingly ignore this announcement, even though it’s placement is at the top of the screen. While the Blackboard template may limit what the local IT managers can do in terms of providing a more simply and easily viewable entry page, it is clear that designing for ease of communication has not been a priority for an already overburdened technical staff. We believe that the entry page is unnecessarily cluttered and hope that such a re-design will eventually be undertaken as such narrowcast campus organizations move up on the list of priorities, as one of our IT administrators has indicated it will. Participation by one of us in another institution's Blackboard environment encourages us that such simplicity of navigation can indeed be achieved, even when members belong to several such organizations, by using a 'less is more' design theory that clears the page of extraneous details and provides clear organization descriptors and links.

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Figure 5. *Sample entry page to Blackboard*



Another concern is that users must choose to list themselves in the directory, otherwise their names will not appear. Users can choose to use the "personal information" area, where they

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"choose the information from [their] user profile that should be publicly available." Students are listed on the roster by name only; they voluntarily take the additional step of submitting and choosing to make public any further information that others may be interested knowing. In our experience thus far, students do not submit any additional information unless required to do so for a course. They have not done so on our organization sites.

The participation limitations we encountered align with the experiences and research of many authors. For, as Barth (2000) has attested, "without proper incentives, most people won't actually use the technology." Cothrel and Williams (2000), likewise, reported that three-quarters of their survey respondents said that only 5-15 percent of members contributed frequently. They also stated, "personal attributes like passion, a desire for recognition, and a sense of obligation that comes from past experiences as a 'taker' make some people want to give back to the community" (p.18). Additionally, Bober and Paz Dennen (2001) noted that "learners are affected by utterances of their peers" (p.242). Further, "community building may in fact be constrained, even compromised, by the frustration students feel" (p.244) and they concluded their research this way: "asynchronous interactions, thus, can be seen to hold greater potential for building community knowledge" (p.248). Clearly then, our community of learners bring unique understanding and experience to their new internal and online campus communities; as we shape and our re-shaped by the changing institutional culture, we expect that our community building will reflect the environment.

Reflections

In our discussions, observations, and informal interviews with students, we have been trying to get at similar questions as Wilson & Peterson (2002), "Where do community members situate computers and other communication and information technologies in their daily lives?" (p.459). We are curious about students' views about the site and its usability. We are also concerned with what Wilson and Peterson (2002) describe as the "emerging communicative practices" and "social processes" (p.453), rather than with the "specific user technology" (p.453). However, from observation and informal conversations, we see that technology itself can pose a hindrance to individual students, and assumptions cannot be made about their levels of interest, competence, or experience. We wish to explore these perceptions further. In sum, we are attempting to document the way our students, as "new participants" are "socialized into online practices" (Wilson & Peterson, p.453) that are constructed and controlled by faculty members. We are concerned with student expectations and experiences regarding the demands of the changing college environment and its increased emphasis on communication technology while simultaneous and competing demands heighten in the other communities to which they belong.

Given our recent reflections about the importance of the organizational culture's influence on our ability to create community through an online tool, we are also curious about culture and communication as experienced in our organization (Baruch College) and our department. Further, we will seek to understand what sense of community students currently feel at Baruch.

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Understanding these issues from a student perspective may help us to co-create new ways of facilitating and fostering an online community.

Implications

There are many reasons that an organization would want to foster good community relations (see Burke, 1999), from building trust to achieving a competitive advantage. Following Shepherd and Rothenbuhler (2001), we believe that creating a community is a good thing to do. While there are several means to create a community, or to extend a sense of "we" to include "people whom we had previously thought of as they," (Shepherd & Rothenbuhler, 2001, p.xii) each is achieved through some form of communication. One way that communication creates communities occurs, at least partially, through what Depew and Peters (2001) describe as "rituals, symbolic public displays, collective myths, and performances" (p.9). However, Depew and Peters (2001) assert that these ways lead to (or have led to) a suppression or marginalization of individuality and encourage those who would create communities to consider how to use communicative interaction to create a "democratically integrated, but socially heterogeneous and fully differentiated" community (p.16) that recognizes and values members' differences.

If, as Shepherd and Rothenbuhler (2001) point out, "communication is most often taken as the road to the good community" it follows that if we wish to continue to build an online community at Baruch we must be willing to attend very carefully to communication, in the sense of its mundane, minute details as well as its organizational, strategic sense. While we have embraced and begun to utilize the technological tools of community building, we did not begin by articulating or framing our community building goals as communication goals. It is only upon reflection that we now recognize the communication and community-specific reasons and the challenges they entail in undertaking such activity

In our case, the tool itself was primary. While we had known that the way we communicate with students could be improved, the idea that we could form or foster a sense of community among disparate, mostly working-students, would be an added bonus. This bonus, however, may have been our sticking point. For, as Gosset and Tompkins (2001) have alerted, a civic community of common pursuits of a way of life is vastly different from a "workplace community" where people have designated roles resulting from a task-oriented existence that focuses people and other resources towards particular, preconceived organizational ends (p.115). This sense of Baruch's online community as a workplace community may provide the largest obstacle to creating the former sense. When students do not have clear roles to play in this online community, when the structure itself inhibits participation, then in spite of communication as facilitated by the technology, community itself will not have been created. While students at work may understand their role and responsibilities (and understand they're being paid to fulfill same), the student-faculty-administration relationship is perhaps a more complex and ambiguous one.

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Rather than being concerned with focusing on providing or communicating information, we might have made better use of the community building aspects of the tool had we made sure there were more face-to-face mechanisms or opportunities for many of our majors to interact outside of their individual classroom settings. For as has been noted,

> the notion of Internet-based virtual communities has turned the attention of many community seekers away from the neighborhood and in the direction of cyberspace. But what has not been generally recognized is that Rheingold's original virtual community, The Well, in San Francisco, had a strong foundation in geography. New friends that were discovered in cyberspace ended up meeting one another in physical space, as new face-to-face relationships were born in the local community (Harrison, Zappen, Stephen, Garfield, & Prell, 2001).

Coda

In the spirit of offering our experiences to others to learn we suggest the following suggestions. First, begin. Often people are told to have a goal in mind first, and then decide on the communication tools later. We believe that through trial and error, and reflecting back upon one's decisions in a group or collegial way, we can constantly be in the process of creating tools and places for communication. Some work for a while and others go in and out of fashion, but it is important to have a variety of ways for people to interact, especially when face-to-face is seldom used.

Second, consider whether the communication is being used merely as information transfer or if it is really community building. One way to determine this is to ask: Are the students, or members, learning as much from one another (or more) as they are from the administrator? A way to encourage this is to recruit student co-managers as discussion initiators and facilitators for specific online events.

Third, establish community norms regarding appropriate topics, language, and mutual respect to evolve an environment online of trust (consider students' reluctance to post if they have the feeling they might be evaluated, either by faculty or peers whom they have not yet met in person). Explore the potential for community networking (as Stewart, 1997 has suggested for organizations), a form of 'yellow pages' to connect people who can benefit from sharing knowledge; in other words, to connect those who know with those who need to know. Help students to feel they have something valuable to contribute by describing themselves on their pages by interests, skills and experiences in order to get to know one another.

Other ideas include:

- Provide orientation sessions to students on the use of the tools
- Devise site attractors
    - Post FAQs
    - Post related news clips and opinion seeking questions

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    - Invite expert lectures and/or Q&As
    - Use the "Announcement" function
    - Create groups and pairs – peer-to-peer mentoring
    - Schedule face-to-face (F2F) appointments
    - Schedule real-time chats
    - Allow anonymous posts
- Advertise the community
    - use physical bulletin boards
    - organize F2F meetings
    - create links from other sites
- Encourage faculty member input and online presence
- Schedule time for updates

Finally, consider how to encourage a sense of commitment to the endeavor. Our goals for the online organizations we are managing appear to be in synergy with current institutional goals aimed at heightening student involvement and identification with the College. Key to achieving these goals is student readiness and willingness to accept full partnership in the collective building of our communal environment. When students realize they can gain some benefits from participation, rather than seeing it merely as another obligation of a course, or technological tool, they can join in co-creating the community that only happens when everyone is a member.

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[i] There many such online learning platforms. For some descriptions see Bober & Paz Dennon (2001) and Knowlton (2003). According to a recent article in the New York Times, Blackboard currently reports 3000 clients, 600 of whom are abroad. English and five other languages are supported. For further information, see Blackboard's corporate website, http://www.blackboard.com/.

[ii] This information was retrieved from the Baruch Website, http://www.baruch.cuny.edu/about/glance.html, which cites data from U.S. News and World Report to confirm the assertion. See "Campus Diversity," 2004 America's Best Colleges U.S. News and World Report (55); some ranking information is available online http://www.usnews.com/usnews/edu/college/rankings/rankindex_brief.php

[iii] Milburn taught this Employee Communication course.

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Facework in 19th Century Chinese-authored Business Letters

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Abstract

Face is an important construct in understanding Chinese communication, and was assumed to play an important part in 115 Chinese-authored letters in English written to the Jardine, Matheson Company, Ltd in the 19th century. Facework—the attention to self-presentation strategies—was analyzed in the letters and proved surprisingly sparse. The explanation for this leads to a hypothesis that proximity (p) in a relationship characterized by frequent interactions over time can counterbalance the asymmetrical power distribution (P) of unequal parties in a relationship, and that strong p relationships do not demand facework.

Introduction

Feelings of pride in achievement, embarrassment, and shame are familiar human emotions and they are related to one's image of one's self in relation to others. Chinese culture identifies this as face, and the term has passed into English-speaking cultures to represent the same idea: one's face is one's self-image in the context of a society. Popular wisdom suggests that face concerns figure highly in Chinese business communication, and therefore facework—attending to face needs in one's interactions—should be evident in letters from Chinese businesspeople. I wanted to analyze Chinese-authored letters in English to see how face and facework appear. But I felt some concern that modern global business practices, often conducted in English even when it is not the speakers' first language, have influenced the way letters are written. In China today textbooks and guides abound in Chinese for writing business letters in American or British style, complete with English language model letters. Furthermore, face concerns in modern United States culture, for example, are not as important as face concerns in Chinese culture. I thought recently written letters would reflect the influence of the United States and that influence would be hard to separate from Chinese culture.

I wondered how much face and facework would be exhibited in Chinese-authored business letters of an earlier era, before e-mail or fax or overnight delivery had internationalized communication style and content. I was able to analyze 115 letters written by Chinese authors in English that were part of the Jardine, Matheson Co. Ltd. archive dating from 1832 to 1901. My hypothesis was that Chinese authors writing in

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English in the 19th century would show great concern for facework. I further hypothesized that business letters with a lot of facework would also show indirectness.

The construct of face

The theoretical basis for this analysis of Chinese-authored business letters in English is the construct of face. Face is the public presentation of positive claims for self to others within relationships. P. Christopher Earley (1997), basing his work on the classic scholarship of Erving Goffman (1959), explains that face references one's social status and also one's moral character. Facework "involves the enactment of face strategies, verbal and nonverbal moves, self-presentation acts, and impression management interaction" (Ting-Toomey,1998, p.1). Facework refers to the behaviors that people engage in to position themselves positively, as evidenced in such phrases as maintain face, gain face, borrow face, stretch face, lose face, as well as save face. To "lose face" came into the English language as a translation from the Chinese concept.

Scholars have been inquiring into the verbal and nonverbal moves of self-presentation that constitute impression management of the self ever since the early studies undertaken in the late 1950s. Face and facework have been specifically associated with the Chinese in subsequent studies (Brown and Levinson, 1987; Morisaki and Gudykunst, 1994; Chang and Holt, 1994; Scollon and Scollon, 1994; Gao & Ting-Toomey, 1998).

It was reasonable to predict a fairly high level of facework in the Jardine, Matheson data set of letters, and further, to expect that face concerns would generate indirect correspondence. Researchers identify situations of relational intimacy, where conflict and other uncertainties threaten face, as likely to generate indirect communication (Ting-Toomey & Chung, 1996; Brown & Levinson, 1987; Ting-Toomey, 1994; Chang & Holt, 1994). Facework in relation to individualism-collectivism (Triandis, 1995) as well as the independent-interdependent self-construal in Asian cultures show that indirectness is preferred in the facework of collectivist cultures (Ng, et al.; Morisaki & Gudykunst, 1994; Scollon and Scollon, 1994; Zhang, 1995).

Power and Proximity: Two Dimensions of Chinese Relationships

All notions of "face," mianzi in Chinese[1], are complex, concerned as they are with social acknowledgment, approval, and personal autonomy, and Chinese notions of face are central to Chinese social life (Chang & Holt, 1994; Gao & Ting-Toomey, 1998). Human interaction is often discussed in Chinese society in terms of Confucian ethical principles for a life well lived, and the five relationships commonly attributed to the Confucian school of ethical thought are particularly of interest. These five relationships include emperor and subject, husband and wife, parent and child, older sibling to younger, and friend to friend. The first four are unequal in power distribution; only friend to friend is without a power difference. The principles in Chinese culture that describe ethical, right relationships outline a pattern for power difference.

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The principles also assume proximity in relationships. All of the celebrated five relationships except emperor-subject involve repeated close interactions. In traditional Chinese culture, individuals are at the center of ever-widening circles of proximity relationships. According to Fei Xiao Tong (1985), a 20th century Chinese social anthropologist, the individual occupies the central core and then his or her immediate family are in the next ring. After that are classmates, cousins, classmates of siblings, and so forth in increasingly less intimate relationships, occupying rings more distant from the core. In still more distant rings are teachers, work colleagues and parents of classmates. Eventually, one reaches the end of these circles of connectedness. Anyone who can claim a connection with someone in one of the circles can also claim the rights of relationship with the person at the center. For example, if I was the teacher of your brother's wife, then you have a responsibility to meet my needs. But if I have no connection whatsoever with anyone to do with you, you owe me nothing. After the last ring of relationship is the large world of people for whom one has no responsibility.

I have elsewhere (Beamer, 2003) referred to these two dimensions of relationships as P (power) and *p* (proximity). Unequal distribution of power is a constant in Chinese culture and it leads to asymmetrical relationships.

Guanxi and relationship networks

As explained above, the relationships are ranked in degrees of closeness to the self. "Within this complex of interrelationships, one mien-tzu [sic] can be related to another, linking the private to the public" (Chang and Holt, 1994, p. 24). Relationship networks are known in Chinese as guanxi, sometimes translated as "connections." Guanxi relationships are particularistic and personal, and operate on a basis of reciprocal obligation, gift exchanges, and honor exchanges that show respect for face (Beamer, 1994). I had predicted that negotiations over business issues might appear to be weak in letters written by Chinese authors, because what is really being attended to is the facework (see Scollon & Scollon, 1994, for a discussion of negotiation versus relationship in the West and East). Guanxi operates in unequal power relationships, and it requires attention to face by both parties.

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Methodology

Matheson & Co. Ltd granted permission for me to access the Jardine, Matheson archive in the Cambridge University Library, England. A catalog compiled by a librarian in 1953 covers the huge archive of Jardine, Matheson letters on microfilm and other documents, while a slim hardcover index identifies the 115 letters written *to* the firm that have been put on microfilm. These letters are identified by the code B7 (for incoming correspondence), followed by numbers designating the four locations from which the letters were written (1 for Amoy, 2 for Canton, 15 for Hong Kong and 37 for Shanghai), and then the indexed number of the letter itself. Following the index, I found the microfilm letters to Jardine, Matheson, read them on microfilm and transcribed them as fully as possible. I also handled

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a few of the original letters that are kept in boxes and not usually available for view. The letters are of varying legibility, both in hand and on microfilm.

Never are the correspondents in these letters of equal power to one another in the Chinese social and economic contexts; in other words, the P (power) dimension is always present. The writer (often a requester) is nearly always at a lower power level than the reader. Among the Chinese-authored English letters to Jardine, Matheson under consideration, two series of letters reveal relationships. One is the supplier-buyer relationship of Thomas Hunt & Co., a British firm allied to Jardine, Matheson, and Amoy & Co., the Chinese firm supplied by Thomas Hunt & Co. The other is the superior-subordinate relationship between the British Jardine, Matheson director in Shanghai and the Chinese comprador in Shanghai. A comprador was the interface between the foreign-owned company and the Chinese workers, customers, suppliers, and financiers.

Furthermore, request situations are likely to trigger face concerns. "As a dynamic social resource available to Chinese relational partners, mien-tzu [sic] is often activated by a request." (Chang & Holt, 1994, p.116). Brown and Levinson (1987) call requesting a Face Threatening Act (FTA), and indirectness has been proposed by Lim (1994) as the most important principle for moderating face-threat. Forty-seven of the 115 letters were making requests, and another 11 letters made requests and also informed the reader. That means a total of 58 of the 115 were request letters.

To analyze the degree to which facework is present in the letters I used the framework developed by Lim (1994) with some adaptations. Lim proposed four basic strategies in facework: face-giving, withdrawal, moderation, and disregard. Three mitigating tactics —tact, solidarity, and approbation—further these strategies.

Analysis of Face-giving, Withdrawal, Moderation, and Disregard

The first strategy, face-giving, is fairly well understood by people in most cultures. It actively promotes the face-wants of the other, and therefore is the strongest of the four strategies for acknowledging the positive attributes of the other party. Letter B7/15/11309 from a Chinese resident in Hong Kong called Fong Mow Feng asks for information about the Freemasons and remarks, "After my knowing from your well-known kindness the said particulars I would ask you another favor, that is, to propose my admittance [sic]." In this case, the face-giving strategy in "your well-known kindness" prefaces a request.

Withdrawal, the second strategy, is an avoidance strategy used when someone else is threatening one's face. Here is an example (spelling and syntax are unchanged: "Though we do not explain you about the draft of Mess. S+B. we have already mentioned you when in Canton." (B7/2/5251) Another example involves this example of facework from a letter (B7/2/5711) from Acow & Co., written in 1856. Again spelling and syntax are unchanged;

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in addition, the positioning on the page attempts to replicate the original handwritten correspondence. It appears to be a response to a request for an adjustment to the account:

> We have credited you in act/C — *informing*
> for the value of 2 Kegs of Butter $24^{30} [over 00] omitted in our
> last, but we beg to observe that we were led to
> believe that you would charge us only $20 for the — *complaining*
> flour each barrel and at which rate we have no
> doubt you will make out your bills against us. but
> in the event you insist upon us to pay you $22 for — *yielding,*
> the same, we will have no other alternative just — *signaling*
> now, but to comply with your demand, and in — *willingness*
> hearing from you on the subject, we shall credit — *to comply*
> you with the difference you allude to. — *in advance*

Here the issue of price per barrel of the flour is not as important, apparently, as not putting up a fight. The author writes, "we will have no other alternative just now but to comply," in a withdrawal strategy.

Moderation, the third facework strategy, enacts the potentially face-threatening act, but tries to lessen the threat to face. Moderation of the request in the letter above appears in the minimization strategy involving a further offer to give Thomas Hunt a credit, showing considerable readiness to abandon the claim for the lower price. Later in the same letter the writer extends a face-enlarging offer to the addressee, again in apparent response to request for adjustment:

> [With] regard to your claim against Acreith ^ of Macao we beg to
> say that we are not aware of the nature
> of your claim against the said Firm. we would
> suggest you to make out your account. and have
> the same countersigned bythem as correct . when
> we shall have no objection whatever to admit
> [second page]
> your claim.

Here the writer extends a handsome offer to the reader to press for payment on the reader's behalf, from a firm against which the reader's company has a claim. This face-giving strategy actively promotes the face-wants of the Thomas Hunt company. These examples of willingness to accommodate the other party's face are indicative of the extent to which facework matters in Chinese business relationships. However, the aggrieved tone of the wording is at odds with face concerns: "we were led to believe," "we have no doubt you will make out your bills against us," "if you insist upon…" "we will have no other alternative just now." A sense of grievance is perhaps the true feeling behind the conventions of face in this letter. The facework is performed, but the frankness of sentiment is directly expressed.

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The fourth strategy in facework is disregard, when the face-threatening act is carried out anyway, without consideration for the face of the party; Brown and Levinson (1987) called it "bald on record." An example comes from the beleaguered Achoon in Hong Kong who repeatedly petitions Jardine, Matheson & Co. to take responsibility for clearing a landslip from a hill they owned in the Wanchai district that damaged his property: "I shall thank you to make immediate arrangements for the clearing away of the earth from my property as the Surveyor General refuses to do anything in the matter and refers me to you" (B7/15/8956).

Mitigating Tactics

Lim (1994) notes: "Indirectness has been proposed as the most important principle for moderating face-threat" (p. 213), and offers the three mitigating strategies to lessen face-threat: tact, solidarity and approbation.

Tact. Tact along with a moderation strategy results in mitigations in the request. Mitigations are communicated through conventional indirectness phrases such as "We beg to enclose," "Will you be kind enough," and "Please." Such conventionally indirect phrases are understood to be direct, since the requesting intent is clear, but they are also understood to be mitigated by respect for the other's autonomy face-want ("negative face" concept in Brown and Levinson, 1987).

Solidarity. The second mitigating tactic, solidarity, minimizes differences and emphasizes connections and commonalties. In the 115 letters, solidarity produces the following kinds of expression: "I will do all I can," "In compliance with your request," "We trust so clear That we explain on the subject…" [i.e., We trust that we explain ourselves clearly], "Kindly let us know the price…as We are glad to order some more." Expressions of self-deprecation (humbleness) and agreement also result from the application of solidarity to face-giving strategies.

Approbation. The third mitigating strategy enhances face-giving strategies by giving praise and withholding blame. The results are expressions of appreciation and affirmation of the other's face. For example, "I thank you for your good intention," "your well-known kindness," "your goodselves," "you have taken care me much [sic]."

Findings

Using a modified version of Lim's (1994) matrix for the four strategies and the three mitigators, I can present the distribution of types of facework that occur in the letters (Table 1). The number following each type represents the number of occurrences. Explanations of the types follow the table.

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Table 1
Number of Facework Incidents in 115 incoming letters to Jardine, Matheson

Incidents by type	Face-giving	Withdrawal	Moderation	Disregard
Tact	Nomination 2		Pleading 90 Debt Incurring 20 Advice 1 Experimenting 1 Conventional Indirectness 1	Instruction 1
Solidarity	Cooperation 18 Humbleness 3 Agreement 1	Empathy 2	Self-liability 4 Disagreement 2 Formality 5	
Approbation	Appreciation 16 Affirmation 6			Disapproval 2
TOTALS:	**46**	**2**	**124**	**3**
NO FACEWORK IN 14 LETTERS				

As Table 1 shows, by far the most frequent facework involves moderation of a face threat by employing tact, and the most common of moderation is what Lim calls "pleading," basically, saying "please" plus the request. This occurred 90 times in the data set, where the most frequent wording for this conventional mitigation is "we beg you to…". The next most frequent facework (20 occurrences) also comes from moderating a request by tact, and results in wording of debt-incursion: "we shall feel obliged." *These two only minimally mitigate the face-threatening request act.* They are standard nineteenth century expressions of politeness, the equivalent of modern-day "Do it, please," and "I'd like you to…" They are mild forms of facework.

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The third most frequent category of facework results from solidarity moves applied to a face-giving strategy, in 18 expressions of cooperation: "we gladly shall beredy [sic] o [sic] your orders." The fourth most frequent facework resulted in (16) expressions of appreciation. This is the confluence of a face-giving strategy and approbation. All the other types of facework occurred much less frequently, as Table 2 shows. Affirmation affirms the relationship; formality refers to the use of formal language; self-liability is taking responsibility for harm to the relationship and often involves apologies. Together there were 15 instances of these three. Humbleness, nomination (putting the other person in charge), disapproval, disagreement, instruction, advice, and experimenting occurred rarely. Surprisingly, only one example was found for the conventionally indirect moderation: "will you kindly…?" This was the most frequently used requesting strategy by modern Chinese in a study of conversation (Zhang, 1995). It could be expected to occur frequently in the 19th century letters as well, but in fact was almost totally absent.

Table 2
Facework Occurrences Ranked by Type in the Jardine, Matheson Letters

Type	Number of instances
Pleading	90
Debt Incursion	20
Cooperation	18
Appreciation	16
Affirmation	6
Formality	5
Self-liability (apology)	4
Humbleness	3
Nomination (referral)	2
Disapproval	2
Disagreement	2
Instruction	1
Advice	1
Experimenting	1
Conventional Indirectness	1

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Perhaps the most unexpected finding of all is that 14 letters in the Jardine, Matheson data set have *no facework whatever*. Furthermore, of these 14 letters, five were written by Tong King Sing, the Shanghai comprador for 10 years for Jardine, Matheson, whose relationship with his recipients, the British managers of the company, was closer in proximity (frequency of interaction) than any other writers in the data set.

One of these letters is Tong King Sing's request for financial backing to buy and manage a pawnshop. It offers an interesting example of the unexpected lack of facework. Instead of the facework strategies in the model, this letter relies on explicit delivery of factual information, to persuade William Keswick, the *taipan* in Hong Kong, of the reasonableness of the proposal.

In contrast to his effort (apparently successful) to win Keswick's backing is his letter asking forgiveness of part of a debt. The debt was in two parts, one for 7000 taels (Tls) of silver and the other for 6008 taels. A tael was a small boat-shaped metal piece of a specific weight, used as currency. Tong King Sing's salary as comprador was only Tls. 1500 (plus Tls 5744 to underwrite the expenses he incurred for the company) (Liu, 1982, p.106). He had strong motivation to have his debt partially dismissed (he asks for Tls 5427.90 to be knocked off). Nevertheless, the 6-page letter has perhaps only five facework tactics—two expressions of appreciation, two of cooperation, and one standard "I beg you will." Of course, the letter also has lengthy explanations, which constitute a facework strategy that relies on solidarity. To explain one's position is to show openness and some vulnerability to the other. It also implies a request that the other become a collaborator in the issues. But the facework moves in Lim's model are scarcely there. Scollon and Scollon (1994) write: "…in the West we only have to imagine a situation in which a person's topic is that he or she wants to borrow a large amount of money from someone else. He or she is then likely to be as deferential as a mandarin, putting off bringing up the topic of the financial touch until the groundwork has been very carefully laid" (138). In the actual example of the comprador's letter, the "financial touch" is indeed delayed until explanations are thoroughly laid out. But Tong King Sing is unequivocally *not* "deferential as a mandarin" and that is a striking characteristic of the letter.

Scollon and Scollon posit that Asian conversation today—a large category—follows a curved pattern of facework-topic-facework. They conclude facework is important in conversation. In contrast, the Jardine, Matheson & Co. data set can hardly be said to conform to this pattern, unless we count formalistic conventions of business correspondence such as a salutation with "Dear" and a complimentary close with "We are yours faithfully." The findings indicate facework is not important in the 115 letters.

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Discussion

Why do these letters, even the 58 that make requests, have so little concern for face? The analysis of facework leads me to conclude that where face is not a very great concern it is because the relationship between writer and reader has been previously established outside of the correspondence and is ongoing. In other words, the relationship has a strong *p* (proximity) dimension. A solid, ongoing relationship that has a history and that will continue to exist, gives its participants a certain freedom from the need to engage in facework while conducting commercial transactions. The Shanghai comprador, Tong King Sing, had many other channels of communication with Jardine, Matheson & Co. besides letters. His actions over time were the arena for facework, for he says, "I can say that ever since I entered the service I might have a little error in my judgment – but I never have robbed or squeezed you in the slightest degree as most of Chinese servants do…I consider squeezing an Employer is a sinful + mean act" (B7/37/4690). Perhaps the very soundness, ethically speaking, of the relationship—a basis for the *p* dimension—means he does not have to attend to face in his correspondence about business.

In these letters, which for the most part come from ongoing relationships, face is not greatly threatened, even though the interlocutors are not strangers. Scollon and Scollon (1994) argue that in Chinese culture only communication with strangers is direct, because the status of the interlocutors is unequal and the speech act of requesting may be termed a potentially face-threatening act. However, in this data set the letters with the most facework tactics are from writers who have least proximity in their relationship, and who can claim only the weakest *p* dimension, such as job applicants (e.g.B7/15/10606) and dependents like the Tailor Ahoy who writes:

> I have forgoten to
> send cloth to you that is my
> fault; Because on that day
> I have gone to Aberdeen coming
> back on the next. I know that
> you have taken care me much
> and much I will put in my
> heart I thank you do not dislike
> in a few thing and I hope that
> you will take care me again. (B7/15/7786).

The perfunctory facework that dominates the data set is perhaps not surprising given the unexpected lack of indirectness.

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Politeness and Indirectness: An Area for Further Study

A related issue that this paper cannot deal with in depth is politeness. Indirectness and politeness are linked in the literature (Blum-Kalka, House & Kasper, 1987; Brown and Levinson, 1987; Zhang, 1995), and face concerns and politeness issues are frequently discussed together. The letters show a preference only for the merest politeness, the barest nod, as in "we beg to request." The inattention to indirectness and politeness was not because the Chinese authors had had no experience with them, since as has been shown the Chinese had and still have a great respect for face issues. Furthermore, the Chinese authors were not lacking in English language models of conventional politeness. Letters of the Jardine, Matheson archive written by native speakers of English to Chinese readers as well as British readers abound in conventional politeness usages. Another politeness factor is the relative threat to self identity posed by the request, (compare Brown and Levinson's P, D and R politeness factors for "power," "distance," and "ranking of imposition" in doing the face-threatening act.)

When I first analyzed the letters, my assumptions about a Chinese preference for indirectness were disconfirmed. When I further analyzed the facework, I was startled to find how perfunctory and weak it was. In my earlier study of these letters (2003) I suggested that the Chinese authors chose to employ directness *in order to* emphasize relational proximity. The facework analysis further supports that hypothesis by demonstrating that facework was not considered important in situations in this data set where the relationship between writer and reader was characterized by frequent, close interaction, regardless of the power distance separating the writer and reader.

I wish to express my gratitude to Matheson & Co, Ltd. for granting me permission to access the Jardine, Matheson archive in Cambridge University Library.

[1] Throughout this paper, when I transliterate Chinese I use pinyin, a system introduced in China in the latter part of the 20th century. Some scholars use the Wade-Giles system of transliteration, which results in different spellings in English. An example is the word for "face"; in pinyin it is mianzi while in Wade-Giles it is mien-tzu.

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Dealing with the Predisposition of College Students to Ethical Behavior

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Introduction

Numerous surveys from various parts of the United States and Great Britain continue to show a rise in the percentage of college students who admit to cheating on exams and to a general disregard for adhering to strict standards of choosing right over wrong. Even as long ago as 1992, Davis et al. (1992) found the growth in reported cheating in the previous 20 years to be an alarming trend. Articles written in 2003 indicate that the problem is still with us (Penn, Fall 2003; Grebe, 2003).

Such information caused us to seek answers to two questions: 1) Is cheating as much a problem at a university situated in the Bible Belt as it is in other parts of the country? 2) What can educators do to combat this trend? Our study involves obtaining questionnaire results from 200 senior students majoring in the Texas Tech University, Jerry S. Rawls College of Business Administration. We also offer suggestions to help educators combat cheating.

Procedures and Methods

In this section, we discuss questionnaire design, consider previous findings, and analyze our results. A table showing answers to specific questions is also included.

Questionnaire design
Many of the studies of cheating in Higher Education were done at universities on either coast or in the Northern part of the United States. We were interested to know if students from the "Bible Belt" would be less inclined to be dishonest. We included questions designed to give us information regarding this question.

We constructed a 34-item instrument that used a forced choice, Likert-type format (Appendix A). This questionnaire was modeled after one used by Newstead et al. (1996) with changes and additions related to our specific needs. Of the 200 students who completed the questionnaire, 191 were from Texas, four from New Mexico, and five from areas outside these two states.

Previous Studies
Some evidence supports the theory that those who cheat are highly motivated to get good grades (Perry, Kane, Bernesser, & Spicker, 1990). However, there is also evidence that the better students with higher GPAs do not cheat as much as the students with lower GPAs (Weiss, Gilbert, Giordano,

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& Davis, 1993). We used items in our questionnaire related to this issue to see if our sample would show similar results.

Another issue that has been studied is the effect of membership in fraternities and sororities on cheating. Evidence suggests that members of sororities and fraternities cheat more than those students who are not so affiliated (Stannard & Bowers, 1982). We added a question about this merely to see if our sample would show the same results.

Results

With our location in the Bible Belt, we expected our sampling to be a fairly religious group. Of the 200 students surveyed, 29 students (14.5%) reported going to church weekly, 57 (28.5%) said that they go monthly, 79 (39.5%) students reported going only once a year, and 35 (17.5%) said that they never go to church.

The results of question 9 ("What is the number of college courses you have cheated in during the last year?") show that 45 percent of the students reported that they had cheated in the last year. We performed a one way Anova on questions 6 (honesty discussed at home) and 7 (church attendance). These analyses revealed no significant correlation between honesty discussed at home or church attendance and cheating. However, a means plot graph showing the relationship between cheating and church attendance showed a higher report of cheating among those who attended church only once a year or never compared to those who attended weekly or monthly. A univariate analysis of questions 1 (gender), 4 (fraternity/sorority), and 9 showed no significant difference for gender or sorority cheating, but it did reveal a significant relationship ($p = .019$) between belonging to a fraternity and cheating.

Our results also showed a significant relationship between students' GPAs and their likelihood of cheating. The analysis of variants showed that students with a GPA of A were less likely to cheat than those with a B or C average. Table 1 summarizes our questionnaire results.

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Table 1

Summary of Questionnaire Results

1. Gender	127 male	73 female			
2. Year in school	Senior				
3. GPA	19.5% = A	67% = B	13.5% = C		
4. Fraternity or sorority	30.5% yes	69.5% no			
5. Home state	191 Texas	4 NM	5 other		
6. Honesty discussed at home	frequently 65.5%	occasionally 32.5%	never 2%		
7. Church attendance	weekly 14.5%	monthly 28.5%	yearly 39.5%	never 17.5%	
8. "Is it honest?"	Frequently 55.5%	Occasionally 40.5%	never 4%		
9. Number of courses cheated in	6-10 6%	3-5 6.5%	1-2 32.5%	never 55%	
10. What percent do you think cheat?	26 respondents say 75% cheat	77 respondents say 50-74% cheat	71 respondents say 25-49% cheat	25 respondents say 0-24% cheat	1 gave no answer
11. Parental Pressure	13% yes	87% no			
12. Instructor pressure	21% yes	79% no			
13. Influence of friends caused cheating	29% yes	71% no			
14. Needing a job or admittance to Grad. Sch.	12.6% yes	87.4% no			
15. Competition with other students	24.5% yes	75.5% no			
16. Heavy work load	46% yes	54% no			
17. Insufficient study time	44.5% yes	55% no	.5% no answer		
18. Do you feel guilty?	54% yes	22% no	24% no answer		
19. Do you disapprove of cheating?	78% yes	22% no			
20. A normal part of life?	29.5% yes	70.5% no			
21. What would you do if you observed cheating	89.5% nothing	Talk to person 5%	5.5% report to authority		
22. Daily quiz	42% yes	58% no			
23. Unit test	42% yes	58% no			
24. Mid-term	28% yes	72% no			
25. Final exam	30.5% yes	69.5% no			
26. Copied another's assignments	63.5% yes	36.5% no			
27. Concealed professor's error	39.5% yes	60.5% no			
28. Test information from other students	67% yes	32.5% no	.5% no answer		
29. Allowed someone to copy your work	75.5% yes	24% no	.5% no answer		
30. Have you copied another's assignments	64% yes	35.5% no	.5% no answer		
31. Plagiarized	27% yes	72.5% no	.5% no answer		
32. Copied test work	27% yes	72.5% no	.5% no answer		
33. Taken a test for someone	3.5% yes	96% no	.5% no answer		
34. Had someone else take a test for you	1% yes	97% no	2% no answer		

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Because our questionnaire results mirrored those reported from other geographical areas, cheating appears to be as much a problem in our area in the Bible Belt as it is in other locations.

In addition to recognizing the cheating problem, we are also aware that those who have studied cheating in the Higher Education community identify business-major students as the group most likely to cheat and report that instructors of business subjects have been found to condone cheating (Baird, 1980; Newstead, Franklyn-Stokes, & Armstead, 1996; McCabe & Trevine, 1995). These findings indicate that instructors in business subjects should be looking for ways to reduce instances of cheating. What can we do?

Suggestions for Educators

Many question our ability, at this stage in our students' lives, to make changes in something so ingrained in our students as a personal moral code. However, research has shown that the study and emphasis of moral issues in a classroom situation will have an impact (Knapp and Huber, 2002). We are up against notable odds. Nevertheless, we can make progress through at least four offensives.

Honor Codes

A first, and perhaps easiest, course is to use established honor codes to emphasize the importance of ethics and honesty in our classrooms. Most colleges and universities have an honor code or honor pledge that students receive at the time of their registration. Instructors can remind their students of the promise they made when they enrolled. At Texas Tech University (where we teach), the Office of the Ombudsman suggests quoting the university's statement on academic integrity and including the descriptions of Cheating and Plagiarism found in the Texas Tech University Catalog (Quilliam, 2002). A search of your institution's website or catalog may produce similar statements that can be used in class. Including these quotations in the class syllabus and going over them at the start of the semester will clarify for the students what is and what is not acceptable. If you are unable to find a specific honor code at your institution, a list of sample honor codes can be found at http://www.academicintegrity.org/samp_honor_codes.asp.

Often, the students' definitions of cheating will vary from the instructor's. Including a statement such as the following will help students to understand what is meant in each course.

> Cheating: Dishonesty on examinations and quizzes or on written assignments, illegal possession of examinations; the use of unauthorized notes during an examination or quiz; obtaining information during an examination from the examination paper, the Internet, or another student; assisting others to cheat; alteration of grade records; and illegal entry to or unauthorized presence in an office are instances of cheating (Jones, ed., 2003-2004, p. 49).

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We have found it helpful to reproduce a copy of applicable definitions with each assignment so that the students are very clear on what they can and cannot do. A verbal warning at the beginning of each test or quiz can also remind students of the honor system that they have agreed to follow. There may also be places on campus that offer students tips for avoiding cheating and plagiarism, such as those found at our Office of the Ombudsman (Texas Tech University, 2003).

Class Procedures and Requirements

A second suggestion deals with managing the class procedures and requirements to make cheating more difficult. Most unit or semester tests are proctored. Some teachers give alternating tests to students sitting close together; others design special seating arrangements to separate friends and make copying from another's test more difficult. Instructors might require students to turn in copies of Internet sources they use in their papers.

Internet plagiarism is often difficult to detect. Students can copy complete research papers from the Internet. In the Responses from Readers section of the May 2, 2000 Bovee and Thill newsletter delivered via e-mail to subscribers, Stuart M. Kurland, associate professor of English at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh, wrote:

> I'd fight student plagiarism by using the Internet. And I don't think doing so would undermine the trust between students and faculty—any more than radar undermines the trust between law-abiding motorists and the police (who tend not to set up the radar in locations where everyone obeys the speed limit).
>
> Cheating, like speeding, involves a calculation that one won't get caught, or that the violation is worth the risk; if there's no meaningful enforcement, or threat of enforcement, the rules would soon become meaningless. A colleague introduced me to an excellent free resource for monitoring student work: the Northern Light search engine (http://www.northernlight.com) which only takes a few distinctive key words to find matches in public domain sources (p.8).

While Northern Light no longer has a free web search engine (Priscilla@northernlight.com, personal communication, August 13, 2003), other sources are available. David Grebe (2003) discusses A&M University's success with identifying plagiarism through Turnitin.com. Grebe reports that other institutions such as Dartmouth College, Georgetown University, and the U.S. Military Academy at West Point have also contracted with Turnitin.com.

Ethical-Issue Assignments

A third area for encouraging ethical behavior is to incorporate ethical issues into the classroom assignments and discussions. Olson (1995) suggests that "…students do not have to learn new information so much as deepen and clarify their understanding of what they already do and know" (p. 2). Although teaching an entire unit that explores business ethics may be beyond the

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scope and time allowance of our courses, ethics situations can be built into the course assignments. Giving assignments that cause students to examine their own values will allow them to formulate their own set of what is and is not acceptable.

In our course, we often stress analyzing your audience and writing specifically for the benefit of your reader. A discussion in the classroom, when assigning a persuasive letter or speech, can be held about what to include in the information that is conveyed to the audience. Is some information harmful to your argument? How much can/should be withheld? These types of discussions, couched in a natural business context, will guide the students to important critical thinking. Kienszler (2001) mentions four important aspects of critical thinking which encourage ethical thought and behavior: identifying and questioning assumptions, seeking a multiplicity of voices and alternatives on the subject, making connections, and fostering active involvement (p. 1). Requiring our students to use these skills as they complete assignments for the course will promote an identification of ethical communication and behavior. Questioning of assumptions generally leads to a quick realization of the difference between what is and what ought to be. This questioning is hard for college-age students to do on their own. Teaching students to seek out and weigh multiple voices (audiences) will encourage them to consider what they---rather than their instructors or society---think is ethical. It will give a new meaning to the question, "Is it honest?"

Selected case studies can be valuable in encouraging student thinking. Some students will have sufficient experience to enable them to contribute to the case approach themselves.
For example, one student wrote of his ethical dilemma in which loyalty to a friendship was pitted against his pledge of confidentiality. The student related that a close friend and former colleague had called him at work to ask him for an internal, controlled document. The caller, a former colleague (we'll call him Jim), had worked for the company for 15 years before leaving to pursue a position with one of the company's competitors. Jim's reputation for honesty and integrity had caused the student to seek Jim out as a mentor when the student joined the company two years ago. Jim proved to be of great help; the student developed a strong sense of trust, perhaps even obligation, for Jim before Jim left to work for the competing company. The student found it hard to believe that Jim would ask him to violate his pledge of confidentiality by delivering the document. How should he handle this situation? This case might be used for class discussion, for thought papers, or for letter-writing or oral-communication assignments.

The Internet offers a real-life connection to companies and other business organizations that can provide students with a current, relevant perspective on ethics in the business world. In his article, Frank Urbancic (1998) suggests that the Internet be used for case studies, reading assignments, and research. Referring students to appropriate websites or requiring them to seek out pertinent websites on their own will add to the legitimacy of the assignments they are asked to do. They will see how the assignment relates to an actual business situation. A recent search, using the inquiry "business ethics" on the search engine at google.com, brought up over two million sites that deal with business ethics. These resources can be used by instructors to plan assignments and by students to complete the assignments.

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Personal Examples of Integrity

The fourth offensive, another excellent method of providing relevance to ethics, is to use the examples of modern men and women in the business world who have been very successful while maintaining high ethical standards. Using daily news, the Internet, current periodicals/books, and personal observation, teachers or, better yet, students can identify individuals who model integrity. A review of the above-mentioned sources enables us to begin a list with nine individuals whose lives merit further study in the search for persons to serve as worthy role models for ethical behavior.

Randy Pennington and Marc Bockmon (1995) in their book *On My Honor, I Will* identify several business leaders known for their integrity. Among those they discuss are business founders Sam Walton, James C. Penney, and Mary Kay Ash.

For their roles in trying to correct wrongdoing within their respective organizations, Cynthia Cooper, Coleen Rowley, and Sherron Watkins were honored as persons of the year in the December 22, 2002 issue of *Time Magazine* (Lacayo & Ripley, 2002).

Those identified by tributes made to individuals for their integrity include Jon Huntsman (Cheney, 2002), Patrick G. Ryan ("Aon," 2003), and John Willard Marriott ("Statement," 1985).

Conclusion

Cheating in Higher Education continues to be a problem. However, educators can effectively reduce student violations by promoting honesty and integrity through several avenues. The importance of ethics and honesty can be emphasized through being specific in definition and using honor codes-pledges established by the University. Classroom procedures to inhibit cheating can be used. Assignments dealing with ethical questions (including case studies) and classroom discussions relating to situations in which ethical questions might be resolved may also contribute. Using the Internet will provide an overwhelming body of information dealing with business ethics. In addition to personal observation, the Internet, daily news, and current periodicals/books are good sources for finding modern business people to serve as models of integrity for our students to follow. Cheating in Higher Education is a serious problem, but we can fight it effectively.

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APPENDIX A

Ethical Choices – Senior Level College Students

Please use the accompanying scantron form to record your answers to this questionnaire. When finished, please turn in both the questionnaire and the scantron form. *Thank you very much for your participation!*

1. What is your gender?
    a. male
    b. female
2. What year in school are you?
    a. junior
    b. senior
3. What is your grade-point average category?
    a. 3.4 - 4.0
    b. 2.7 - 3.3
    c. 2.0 - 2.6
4. Do you belong to a fraternity or sorority?
    a. yes
    b. no
5. In which state is your home?
    a. Texas
    b. New Mexico
    c. Louisiana
    d. Oklahoma
    e. None of the above
6. When you were a child, how often were principles of honesty discussed in your home?
    a. never
    b. occasionally
    c. frequently
7. Currently, how often do you attend an organized, religious meeting?
    a. at least weekly
    b. at least monthly
    c. at least yearly
    d. never
8. How often does the question, "Is it honest?" influence your behavior?
    a. never
    b. occasionally
    c. frequently

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9. What is the number of college courses you have cheated in during the last year?
    a. 6 – 10
    b. 3 – 5
    c. 1 – 2
    d. None
10. What percentage of college students at this University do you think cheat?
    a. 75 percent or above
    b. 50 – 74 percent
    c. 25 – 49 percent
    d. less than 25 percent
11. Has parental pressure ever caused you to cheat?
    a. yes
    b. no
12. Has instructor pressure ever caused you to cheat?
    a. yes
    b. no
13. Has the influence of friends ever caused you to cheat?
    a. yes
    b. no
14. Has needing a job or entrance into graduate school caused you to cheat?
    a. yes
    b. no
15. Has the need to compete with other students ever caused you to cheat?
    a. yes
    b. no
16. Has a large work load caused you to cheat?
    a. yes
    b. no
17. Has having insufficient study time caused you to cheat?
    a. yes
    b. no
18. Do you feel guilty when you cheat?
    a. yes
    b. no
    c. have never cheated
19. Do you disapprove of cheating in school?
    a. yes
    b. no
20. Is cheating a normal part of life?
    a. yes
    b. no
21. If you saw someone cheating, what would you do?
    a. nothing

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b . talk to the one cheating
c. report to someone in authority

22. Have you ever cheated on a daily quiz?
    a. yes
    b. no
23. Have you ever cheated on a unit test?
    a. yes
    b. no
24. Have you ever cheated on a mid-term?
    a. yes
    b. no
25. Have you ever cheated on a final exam?
    a. yes
    b. no
26. Have you ever copied another's assignments?
    a. yes
    b. no
27. Have you ever concealed a professor's error?
    a. yes
    b. no
28. Have you ever obtained test information from other students?
    a. yes
    b. no
29. Have you ever allowed someone to copy your work?
    a. yes
    b. no
30. Have you ever copied someone else's assignments?
    a. yes
    b. no
31. Have you ever plagiarized from books or articles (presented someone else's work as your own?
    a. yes
    b. no
32. Have you ever copied someone's test work?
    a. yes
    b. no
33. Have you ever taken a test for someone else?
    a. yes
    b. no
34. Have you ever had someone else take a test for you?
    a. yes
    b. no

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Moving Beyond Traditional Codes of Ethics

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Abstract

Traditionally, codes of ethics have been "rules to live by." Organizational members are instructed to use the codes to help with decision making. Yet study after study has revealed that employees "rarely" use the codes, generally are "unfamiliar" with a code and its contents, sometimes don't even know that the "code exists." Even after extensive training concerning the code and the organization's culture and morality, employees report that the codes "seem unreal, not applicable, and unusable." So what's gone wrong? Why are intelligent, articulate, educated employees unable/unwilling to see the value of such codes? To begin to answer these questions, the author studied the electronic development and implementation of one such code for the International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT). For this study, the author identifies key processes used in the development of the code, and the communication activities surrounding that development. Although well-conceived and implemented, the IBT's code seems to have hit a dead end. Resistance to the code developed almost immediately, and has grown during its three-year development. As the code was reviewed, it became apparent to this researcher that the code addressed two very different kinds of decisions. The first involves relatively straightforward situations that lend themselves well to "question and answer" formatted codes. These situations may be simple or may be very elaborate, but are easily dissected in the traditional step-by-step process recommended in many codes. Detailed codes are sufficient and possibly even necessary for these situations. But the second kind of decision deals with highly complex issues and situations that cannot be broken into pieces. Ethical decision-making processes that recommend a linear approach do not work. In fact, much of the resistance identified in the development of IBT's code concerns the application of the code to just these situations, leading the author to conclude that highly structured, detail-oriented codes of ethics are not effective in complex situations. Instead, the author argues for a new kind of emergent ethics that embraces the complexity of everyday work situations and enables employees to apply ethical practices to everyday complex situations.

Introduction

Academicians and practitioners alike are in general agreement that we have yet to discover the "magic bullet" in business ethics, a meaningful, universal, and realistic theoretical foundation for business ethics that will both help prevent yet another round of high-profile corporate blunders and also encourage ethical decision-making in everyday activities. Not surprisingly, research in the field seems to come in waves, triggered no doubt by corresponding increases in these high profile blunders. Yet the recommended solutions remain eerily consistent from wave to wave.

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Project RISE (Respect, Integrity, Strength, and Ethics) is the latest in a series of activities by the International Brotherhood of Teamsters to end a decade-long oversight of the union by the federal government (IBT, 2002). It consists of two key components: an extensive code of ethics and a self-study. While both components are crucial elements of its plan (IBT, 2002), it is the code of ethics that is the focus of this study. The code, along with extensive information on its development and implementation, can be found on the union's website at http://www.teamsters.org/rise/rise.htm.

Project RISE specifies four phases in the development of this code including fact finding and code development, approval by the union's membership, training, and enforcement action. Originally scheduled for completion by December 21, 2000, the code appears to be bogged down in the first phase. The first three steps in this phase, which consisted of development of infrastructure, gathering information, and drafting the code, proceeded on schedule and were completed in early 2000. A second draft of the code was posted to the website on schedule, but subsequent activities have ceased. Steps 4 and 5 have not been completed. These steps proposed onsite meetings at various locals throughout the United States and Canada, and extensive training for union members and officials. Although more than two years behind schedule, the self-study, which is Step 6, was completed in early 2003 and is now available for purchase via the website.

The IBT has used its website extensively to communicate about the code. Although Project RISE plans require special meetings of all 550 local unions to review the code of ethics, as of July 2003, those meetings have not occurred. Input from union members has been solicited and received only through the union's website.

Development of IBT's code has been an interactive process. Review and comments were sought via the website concerning the first draft of the code of ethics as written by the Project RISE "Drafting Team" (IBT, 2002). Revisions were incorporated, resulting in a second draft. Because of these comments and questions raised, the union found it necessary to included substantial explanatory material and rationalization in the second draft. In fact, draft number two is both the code itself, and an annotated version of the code. The code consists of three chapters totaling 8,817 words. The annotated version contains those same three chapters plus, four introductory sections, an ending glossary, and substantial annotated comments on the three chapters. Total word count for Part 2 is 20,475.

Through the analysis of this annotated version of the code, the author identifies and differentiates between simple and complex decisions. Thus this project proceeds by first identifying and discussing complex systems, then applying these concepts to ethics.

Complexity and Ethics

Complexity science has introduced an entirely new perspective when evaluating the development and use of codes of ethics. Bar-Yam (2003) provides a simple definition "complexity is the amount of information necessary to describe a system" (page 6). Complexity science is a

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continuum; systems are placed along this continuum based on the amount of information it takes to describe the system. So a system that is not complex will fall on the lower end of the continuum; a highly complex system will fall on the upper end. Yet just knowing how much information is needed to describe a system is not enough. Understanding a complex system requires that we understand the nature of the relationships between the whole and its parts. In fact, a complex system is often seen as **more** than the sum of its parts. Thus complex systems are not easy to understand, analyze, or explain. Rather they can be seen as a compilation of dependent and independent parts; a complex system has interdependent elements. It is the interconnectivity of these elements that enables a complex system to adapt to its environment.

Griffin (2002) applies the notion of complex systems to the practice of ethics, first theorizing that there are two over-arching perspectives on the nature and scope of business ethics. The first is a micro view that assumes that ethical decision-making is a localized, individualized process that begins with personal ethical imperatives and then expands to incorporate external factors. In the micro view, decision-makers need access to a comprehensive set of ethical principles (a code), in order to make "correct" choices. The organization and the individual are separate entities with separate identities. Employees see themselves as separate from the organization and the organization as something that exists on its own. A code of ethics is a mechanism of the organization to control the employee. The macro view, on the other hand, focuses first on a global understanding of ethics. It is this focus on the global level that introduces the concept of complex systems. Because actions and reactions of a complex system emerge as relationships expand, effective action within the system requires giving up the illusion of control. Thus a code of ethics would be ineffectual in decision-making. Instead, this approach to ethics:

> stays with our experience of interaction and regards the ethics of action as a process of perpetual negotiation. This process of communicative interaction is one in which we together create what happens to us and it is one in which small differences can be amplified. What each of us does matters even though we cannot know what the outcome of our actions will be. It is possible that small actions can escalate to transform global situations. For me, this is an empowering perspective and also one that makes it impossible for me to escape the responsibility I have for my own actions. I argue that unlike the perspective that moves off to some whole outside our experience ….this perspective encourages us to pay attention to what we are doing and encourages us to believe that this is effective in some way, even though we cannot know how (Griffin, 2002, page 87).

Griffin (2002) positions ethics as a leadership function in an organization and its development treats as a leadership issue. Both are "action into the future, and, therefore, about the identity of persons who are both changeable and stable" (Griffin, page 203). By positioning ethics in this realm, Griffin advises against the traditional collaborative delineation of appropriate and inappropriate behaviors. Instead, ethics is treated as a formative skill developed through personal goal setting. Just as individuals plan to become leaders, they plan to become ethical actors. Thus

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an employee becomes ethical in the same way she/he becomes a leader. It is through integrating the personal with the organizational that individuals make contracts **with themselves** to negotiate the future ethically. It is the ability to deal ethically with the unknown that sustains a culture of ethical behavior; it is not the availability of a code of ethics. Explains Griffin (2002):

> Organizations are not things at all, let alone living things, but rather they are processes of communication and joint action. Communication and joint action as such are not alive. It is the human bodies communicating and interacting that are alive. This immediately focuses attention in the communicative interaction between living human bodies…process(es) sustaining and potentially transforming identity directly in participating in ordinary interaction between people (page 212).

Everyday situations, as well as unique conflicts, must be seen and evaluated as integral elements of our identities, not as something separate from our identities. Explains Griffin:

> … a significant weakness in this whole way of thinking is the manner in which it abstracts and distracts from our ordinary everyday experience of interacting with each other in the living present. Such abstraction distracts our attention from our own responsibility for what we are doing and what happens to us in organizations. It leaves us feeling that we are simply the victims of the system. (Griffin, page 206)

As Griffin (2002) concludes, "The underlying concern in both has to do with persons and …changeability and stability. This combination…is at the core of what identity is about and therefore at the core of what ethics and leadership are about" (pages 214-215).

So the goal of ethics should be to create a new personal identity that incorporates a sense of personal responsibility to deal simultaneously with both stability and change. It is not to develop an elaborate code of ethics.

The notion of ethics as advanced by Griffin (2002) is non-instrumental and complex in nature. Griffin is not alone in his perspective. Other authors including Quinn and Jones (1995), Kahn (1990), and Brady (1986) see ethics as intrinsically good. Ethics is an inherent element of every interaction and a component that we cannot avoid.

Thus a non-instrument, global, intrinsic notion of ethics centers the individual, not the organization. Ethical attention is ingrained, not something that we get by reading a code of ethics or looking up a situation in the code to find out what we should do.

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Methodology

If ethical decision-making is complex, it should take on the above-mentioned characteristics of complex systems. First, it will take a great deal of information to describe the system. Second, understanding the system is more than understanding its parts. It's crucial that the relationships between the parts—the interdependence and interconnectivity—are considered also. Ultimately, it will not be easy to describe, understand, or analyze the process. The IBT's Code of Ethics and its development as chronicled on the union's website provides a unique opportunity to differentiate between the system—the code itself—and union members' attempts to describe, understand, and analyze it. Thus this research was completed in two stages. First, the author looked at the amount of information needed to describe the system by reviewing all of those pieces that are not actually part of the code—the four introductory sections, ending glossary, and the annotated comments. Next, these messages were analyzed using NVivo software for interconnectivity—how many citings referenced another passage or section of the code. Finally, a qualitative analysis of the union's efforts to explain the code is presented.

Results

The IBT's Code of Ethics consists of two parts. Part 1 is "enforceable standards of conduct and the proposed system design to ensure compliance and enforcement" (IBT, page 1). Part 2 is "both the …provisions and the commentary…The commentary introduces, clarifies, and explains the Code's proposed standards and the proposed system for compliance and enforcement" (IBT, page 1). Part 1 consists of three chapters covering fiduciary responsibilities, democracy, and compliance and enforcement. Part 2 consists of those three chapters, substantial commentary on those chapters, plus a preface, introduction, core values, principles underlying the code, and a glossary. Although the code's table of contents lists core values, that section in Part 2 is empty.

Quantity of Information

Part 1 is thus seen as the decision-making system while Part 2 contains the information needed to describe the system. The total information needed to describe the system is 232 percent of the amount of information in the system itself. Even the smallest difference, for Chapter III, required 132 percent more information to describe it than to define it. Table 1 delineates the differences between the two parts by listing word counts for each section.

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Table 1
IBT Code of Ethics Word Comparisons

	Part One	Part 2	Percent Increase
Preliminary Parts	0	138	n/a
Preface	0	476	n/a
Introduction	0	605	n/a
Core Values	0	0	0
Basic Principles	0	1607	n/a
Chapter I	3865	8320	215
Chapter II	1052	2969	282
Chapter III	3900	5150	132
Glossary	0	1210	n/a
Totals	8817	20475	232

Interconnectivity
Another characteristic of complex systems is the interdependence of its elements, or its interconnectivity. For the purposes of this research, interconnectivity was defined as passages in the IBT's code of ethics that needed references to other passages for complete understanding. Using NVivo software, both Part 1 and Part 2 of IBT's code were searched first for the words "see", "chapter", "section", and "constitution". Once these words were identified, the passages were analyzed to determine the nature of the reference. If the reference was not to an issue of connectivity, then it was eliminated from the analysis. For instance, the word "chapter" was used once to identify a new stage in IBT's existence, i.e. "a new chapter in the life of the union." The word "see" was also used numerous times in non-referential situations. Analysis revealed that the referential use of the word "see" was always in the context of the code's glossary, other chapters in the code, or the IBT's constitution. As detailed in Table 2 Interconnectivity, Part 1 contained just one reference item while Part 2 contained 45 references. With seven different sections covering 64 pages, that's an average reference rate of over six connections per section and one every page and a half. On this basis, the original code is not a complex system; yet it becomes complex when the annotations are added. The understanding of the code rests in the annotated version; without it, the relationships between the various elements are unknown and unimportant.

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Table 2
Interconnectivity

	Part 1	Part 2
References to "See Glossary"	0	25
References to "See Chapter…."	0	12
References to "See IBT Constitution	1	8

Qualitative Analysis
The final aspect of identifying a complex system concerns the difficulty individuals have in defining, understanding, and analyzing the system. While the previous quantitative analyses point to this difficulty, it is only through an accompanying qualitative review that the true nature of these difficulties emerges. Thus the following results are intended to more clearly identify the extent and nature of the difficulties. For the sake of clarity, verbiage that appears as supplemental in the annotated version of the code (Part 2) appears in boldface. Original language is in regular type.

In the introduction to Part 2 of the code, the union is very clear on the need for a code of ethics, and on its goals. The code is described as "**a central guide and reference…. (that) is intended to express our core values and guiding principles**" (IBT, 2003). "**The Code is also a tool to encourage dialogue on issues of ethics**" (IBT, 2003). "**The Code does not contain all of the answers. When all is said and done, compliance requires good faith on the part of the Union's officers, staff, and members**" (IBT, 2003). The final paragraph of the introduction reads "**For this Code to be effective, the IBT and its affiliates must actively foster and maintain a culture that supports ethical behavior. The Union must encourage dialogue and discussion of ethics issues**" (IBT, 2003).

The code section titled "Preliminary Materials" is more detailed. "…**the preliminary materials are designed to help in the understanding and interpretation of the Code. They should be read as a helpful grounding before reviewing the specific provisions of the Code**" (IBT, 2003). Finally, the last paragraph of the section titled "Basic Principles Underlying the Code" summarizes the union's position "**The purpose of the Code is to inspire and encourage ethical behavior**" (IBT, 2003).

In reviewing the commentary included in Part 2 of the code, it becomes clear that much of it involves rationalization of the code itself. For instance, the first section of chapter 1 details improper influences; i.e. "Agents of the Union are prohibited from participating in decisions that

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could have a substantial effect on their personal wealth or income…" (IBT, 2003). The commentary then explains the need for this guideline:

> **An ordinary person would have difficulty ignoring the fact that a decision could have a substantial favorable or adverse effect on that person's personal wealth or income. The decision may involve selection of a vendor for the Union or it may involve dealing with a company whose employees are represented by the Union. Such a decision should be made without the interference of a personal financial interest ….The guiding principle for agents of the union should be simply to avoid getting involved when their wealth or income could be affected** (IBT, 2003).

Similarly, the second chapter of the code begins with three explanatory paragraphs that appear only in the annotated version of the code:

> **The IBT Constitution requires all officers of the International Union and its affiliates to take an oath of office which includes the words: "I will never forget that it is the members who put me here." The officer must also swear to "maintain and strengthen democratic principles in our Union."….The ultimate source of power and authority for Union officers, employees, and representatives is the consent of the members of the Union. That power is legitimate only to the extent that it is obtained through democratic principles….The following provisions provide a framework for democracy in the Union** (IBT, 2003).

In the subsection titled "Tolerating Dissent", we find this statement in the basic version of the code: "Every member and employee of the Union is prohibited from attempting to discourage dissent by personally threatening, injuring, or in any way retaliating against a member for expressing particular views…" (IBT, 2003). The explanation in that section reads "**Freedom of expression and association are essential to the proper functioning of any democratic institution. The Union supports free speech and association for its members** (IBT, 2003).

Finally, in the subsection titled "Disclosure", we find this explanation:

> **The following rules governing disclosure represent a balance between competing interests. On the one hand, members of the Union are entitled to know how the Union is being run, so they can make informed decisions….On the other hand, there are reasons for not opening all Union records to all members all the time** (IBT, 2003).

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Discussion

It is clear from both the quantitative and qualitative analyses presented above that the practice of ethical decision-making within the International Brotherhood of Teamsters is complex. It's also apparent from its code that the IBT treats the process as a complex system even if it is not directly acknowledged as one. The information needed to describe the system is substantially longer than the information contained in the system (8,817 compared to 20,475 words). Rather than just the sum of its parts, this process is highly interdependent; references both to other sections of the code and to the IBT's constitution are numerous. Not only is the system description long and interdependent, it's clear from the nature of the commentary that parts of the system require varying amounts of explanation and rationalization. For instance, the explanation for the subsection titled "Tolerating Dissent" is actually shorter (25 words) than the original text (30 words). Since the annotated version was written in response to questions from union members, it appears that this concept met little resistance, thus requiring little explanation.

That is not the case with the section dealing with improper influences. It's clear that there were major discussions concerning this section because of the lengthy rationalization for its inclusion. The original statement of less than one sentence contains 23 words and is direct in its nature: "Agents of the Union are prohibited from participating in…." (IBT, 2003). The rationalization contains 89 words, including: "An ordinary person would have difficulty ignoring the fact….The decision may involve selection of a vendor….or it may involve dealing with a company…" (IBT, 2003). So not only is the explanation/rationalization section substantially longer for this section, its character has changed also. It has moved from terse, straight-forward statements, to rambling definitions and examples. Here is a sample of these differences:

> Part 1: "Agent…"
> Part 2: "An ordinary person…"
>
> Part 1: "…decisions…"
> Part 2: "…The decision may involve selection of a vendor for the Union or it may involve dealing with a company whose employees are represented by the Union."
>
> Part 1: "…substantial effect on their personal wealth or income…"
> Part 2: "…Such a decision should be made without the interference of a personal financial interest….The guiding principle for agents of the union should be simply to avoid getting involved when their wealth or income could be affect." (IBT, 2003).

What is seen as resistance on the part of union membership to this code, has moved the practice of ethics in the IBT from the micro, decision-making level, to a defining nature

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of self. The union moves from defining individuals as "agents" to "ordinary person." Thus the code becomes more than rules to live by. It becomes the process that the IBT uses to define itself. The code wasn't written after the union had defined itself; instead, the union was defined through the development of the code. Through further analysis, another interesting difference appears between the code and the annotations. The annotations are in fact, dialogic in nature. Whereas the code itself appears as one-way, indisputable statements, the annotations are two-way, conversational exchanges. By initiating this dialogue, it's clear that the IBT recognizes that the code can only serve as guidelines, regardless of the issue at hand. It knows that the code can only "come alive" to the membership through these explanations and examples.

This struggle is really about integration of the code into the fabric of the union, and its application in daily union activities. Clearly, the IBT hopes that a more complete code with substantial annotation will be its magic bullet. There is no doubt that ethical decision making is a complex process.

So what does this mean for organizations? How does this affect development, implementation, and evaluation of ethics?

First, treating ethics as a complex system refocuses our energies. Writing a comprehensive code and posting it on a website (or distributing hard copies) misses the most important element in the process, and that is the process itself. An organization emerges through this process; it does not just use the process to insure compliance with rules and principles. Thus as Griffin claims, ethics is a "process of perpetual negotiation. This process of communicative interaction is one in which we together create what happens to us and it is one in which small differences can be amplified" (Griffin, 2002). Ethical decision-making is viewed as interactive communication, not as rules-driven behavior.

With this perspective, promoting ethical decisions first requires that individuals understand that the organization is not an entity separate from them. The organization is constituted through their daily actions and interactions. Secondly, ethics is not a micro-level activity. Ethical decisions are not made by looking at a set of rules. As Brady (1986) says, the role of ethics goes beyond the typical "knowing that" to "knowing how." Employees need to understand the interdependent nature of relationships in the workplace. Effective ethical decision-making requires the ability to deal with the unknown. Ultimately ethics may begin with a code, but it will end with the definition/redefinition of the organization.

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How Managers Give Effective Instructions to New Employees: Some Sample Scenarios for Teaching Supervisory Communication

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Abstract

Jablin's Organization Assimilation Theory proposes that there are four stages through which people assimilate into an organization: anticipatory socialization, encounter, metamorphosis, and disengagement or exit. Immediate managers or supervisors are one major factor in providing a smooth transition for new employees to get through anticipatory socialization and encounter stages. It is believed that effective instruction from immediate managers enhances both new employees' learning and their morale, resulting in increased productivity and more efficient work. Based on the author's internship experience and research on supervisory communication, this presentation discusses factors for effective retail store managers' instructions to new employees. These factors include articulation of global objectives, step-by-step procedures, ongoing feedback, and balance between freedom and rigidity. Sample scenarios that illustrate the factors will also be provided as well as some simulative cases as teaching resources. The four factors can be employed in teaching supervisory communication through integrating the provided simulative cases into classroom instruction, as well as expanding on the theoretical framework for effective supervisory communication for new employees.

Introduction

Nowadays, it is common to see people change their jobs or get a part-time employment to supplement their income. People are usually nervous when assuming a new role in a new workplace. Certainly, employers and co-workers expect you to be a competent communicator and employee in order for the organization to achieve its goal. That expectation not only amplifies the pressure on new employees but may also prevent the supervisor from giving detailed instructions as the supervisor may assume that an employee already has knowledge from his or her educational background and/or previous work experience. This gap between the employers' expectations and the actual knowledge of new employees affects both the new employees' performances and the organizational effectiveness as a whole. Therefore, we need to pay attention to how supervisors or managers give effective instructions to new employees.

It seems that there is a pattern among supervisors who are effective and efficient in giving instructions to new employees. For example, in a retail store some tasks that may seem to be trivial and to require no skills, such as responding to customers' inquiries on the phone, greeting customers, working as a cashier, or coordinating with other sections in the store, can be a big

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responsibility for new employees, regardless of their educational background. Effective supervisors can help alleviate the nervousness of new employees as they employ certain communication strategies. As a result, employees complete the tasks and feel satisfied while at the same time the organization achieves the goals they expect from the employee.

In this paper, the effective communication strategies of retail store supervisors giving instructions will be delineated. I will first discuss the organization assimilation theory as a rationale for why we need to pay attention to effective instructions for new employees. Then, four factors of effective instruction that I conceptualize from my experience will be presented. Finally, I will provide some sample scenarios and implications for teaching students how to give effective instructions, scenarios that can be used in business communication courses that cover supervisory communication.

Organization Assimilation Theory

Communication scholars have conceptualized the pattern of people working in organizations. Jablin (1982) proposed organizational assimilation theory, which explains the process of new employees integrating into organizations, as he states:

> Essentially, organizational assimilation encompasses those on-going conscious and unconscious, behavioral and cognitive processes by which individuals join organizations, become integrated into the cultures of organizations, negotiate their roles in organizations, and in most cases exit these organizations and join new organizations and begin the process again as their work careers unfold (p. 31).

The assimilation process consists of four stages. First, in the anticipatory socialization stage, new employees prepare themselves or are prepared to start working for an organization. Communication in this phase usually occurs during the job recruitment or interview settings and prospective employees' knowledge about the organization, expectations, and beliefs are formed. Second, the encounter stage is concerned with the initial period of employment. New employees usually put a lot of effort into making sense of their new work, new roles, and new environments. This second stage can be the most stressful time for new employees and will affect the rest of their work for the organization. Next, if employees can adjust to the workplace and learn new behaviors successfully, they enter the metamorphosis phase. The encounter and metamorphosis stages are, to some degree, continuous and they can occur simultaneously. Finally, when the employees leave the job or organization, they move to the disengagement or exit stage. This last stage may include job transfer within the same company or a complete exit to start a new job in a new organization. Then, the cyclical process of assimilation starts again.

In general, organizations may want to keep employees working for them as long as possible to save time and money in recruiting and training new employees. If we take a closer look at the four stages of the assimilation theory, we see that it is important for organizations to put more effort in the encounter stage to help new employees adjust to the new workplace than in the other

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three stages. One simple way that costs less time and money is to provide new employees with effective instructions, particularly from their immediate supervisors.

Unfortunately, both academic research and corporate practices pay little attention to the process of supervisory instructions. When looking at literature on supervisory communication, I found that most research discussed supervisor-subordinate communication processes in general with their related constructs and outcomes (Berman & Hellweg, 1989; Johlke & Duhan, 2000; Johnson, 1992; Waldron, 1991). Ramsey (1987) discusses the importance of teaching supervisors to supervise in conscious, skilled, and competent ways in business communication courses. However, his article focuses on general supervision while supervisors' functions cover several specific areas such as giving instruction, providing feedback, giving support, and resolving conflicts, to name a few. In addition, in my former training experience my clients usually requested communication training for their supervisors in task-specific areas such as business presentations, running meetings, negotiations, or foreign language training, while the need for training supervisors to give effective instructions was overlooked.

Four factors of supervisors' effective instructions

I have observed several factors contributing to successful and satisfactory work situations for new employees, including effective instruction from immediate supervisors. Effective instructions helped me personally to acquire knowledge of each job, envision my roles and functions in the organizations, and reduce my stress. In other words, good instructions affected my work in the cognitive, behavioral, and affective domains. I noticed that when successful job outcomes were achieved, four factors of instructions I had received were observable.

First, a supervisor needs to provide the global objectives of the organization as well as the specific ones when giving an instruction or job description to new employees. At one point, I worked for a kitchenware retail store. As a person who barely cooks, I had no idea what that store had to offer their customers. My job at that time was to communicate with incoming customers and respond to telephone inquiries. My supervisor introduced me on the first day not only to my roles but also what the store did. Had I been told only what to do in my position, I would not have been able to handle unexpected situations that occurred during my job. For example, I was told that the store sold both new and used equipment as well as maintenance services. Therefore, I had enough information to respond to customers' questions if they asked me for a repair service. In addition, knowing the general goals of the organization made me feel that I was a part of that store and I was not working there separately from other sections.

The second factor of effective instruction I have observed is to provide step-by-step procedures to new employees. I once worked as a cashier in a small grocery store. This job may sound easy but it actually requires some training and instruction, particularly for people who are not familiar with the machines. Also there are different methods of payment such as checks, credit cards, debit cards, food stamps, or cash and different stores have different systems to deal with the payments. Therefore, it is not strange at all to see cashiers-in-training taking quite some time to

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handle only one customer. At that time, my supervisor was patient enough to teach me how to deal with different methods of payment step by step. This effective instruction made me learn my job and gave me a sense of comfort and confidence in handling the task.

Third, once the new employees have learned their jobs, they need to hear constructive comments from the supervisor. Even though giving feedback can be considered a separate area that often takes place in the performance appraisal period, on-going feedback for specific tasks or instructions that supervisors give to new employees is crucial. The feedback should be ongoing so it can improve the new employees' performance on a continual basis and make the employees feel less evaluated. For example, at the kitchenware store I worked for, my supervisor talked to me informally a couple of days after I started my job. He gave me a compliment on the use of voice when answering phone inquiries as well as suggestions on what I should do when customers asked about something that I did not know. This feedback was very constructive as it both emphasized my strengths and offered suggestions for improvement in a timely manner.

Finally, an effective instruction should offer a balance between freedom and rigidity for new employees. If the organizational members are empowered or offered some freedom in their work, they will feel the value of their membership in the organization. One way to create the empowerment is to provide some flexibility in giving instructions. I had to admit that when I first worked for the grocery store, I was extremely nervous. I felt heavily burdened because I had to deal with all the incoming money from customers. However, the owner of the store told me to find my own way to keep a record of the prices and incoming money. She also told me that mistakes may happen even to professional people; therefore, there was no need to feel the pressure as long as I did not cause big damage. New employees may feel the same way I did when they start their new jobs, particularly if they take their job responsibility seriously. Flexible instructions may allow employees to work in their own ways while achieving the set goals, providing them with suggestions but not imperatives. Emphasizing the punishment if mistakes occur may destroy the employees' morale.

Implications for teaching effective supervisory instruction-giving in business communication courses

The four elements of supervisors' effective instructions can be applied when teaching supervisory communication in business communication courses in two ways. The framework can certainly serve as a content unit that teachers cover with students so that students can develop their skills in giving effective instructions. This can be done as a lecture, discussion, or simulation and role-play. Teachers can discuss the four elements with students and give them scenarios to practice. At the same time, this framework can serve as a guideline for assessing students' performance in giving instructions.

I have used this framework in combination with scenarios for students to role play in my class. I first presented the framework to students in a mini-lecture format and provided an example of giving instruction to employees in a workplace to them. Then I asked students to get into groups

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of four to five people. Each student received a supervisor's role that he or she had to act out. I usually gave my students a few minutes so that they could prepare what they would say but I did *not* encourage them to write out a word-for-word script for their instructions. They were allowed to use their own creativity and add on any relevant information they needed. Then the rest of the group would listen to instructions from their classmates and give feedback to one another based on the four elements in the framework. The following are scenarios that I created:

1. You are a manager of a bookstore in your town. You just hired three new cashiers who are working part-time while going to school for their undergraduate degrees. Since your store is medium in size, all cashiers are not only required to take care of the money issue but they also have to help customers locate books on the shelves. Give an instruction to your new employees so that they can understand their job descriptions and perform their tasks effectively.

2. You are a manager of a small Italian restaurant in your neighborhood. The owner of your restaurant just hired three new waiters/waitresses. You are responsible for giving the initial instruction so that the new employees understand their roles. All three have previous experience in a restaurant business but they are not familiar with Italian food.

3. You are head of the Customer Services section of a garage in your neighborhood. The garage regularly serves clients who need a regular maintenance such as having engine oil changed. They usually have to wait for 15 to 20 minutes while their cars are inspected. Give an instruction to your new three subordinates who are hired to help you in your section.

4. Your company sells dietary products online and your customers usually call to get more information about products, purchase, or complain. You just have taken on three student interns from a college in your city to help handle those customers' calls. You are responsible for instructing them and let them know where to get assistance if needed.

In general, I found that students did enjoy this role-play activity as they had an opportunity to interact in small groups. They could try out the framework in a non-threatening atmosphere and received feedback from their classmates. Unfortunately, I did not have a chance to teach business communication or organizational communication classes when working on this project. Thus, I used this activity in my basic public speaking classes to prepare students for their informative speeches. Even though giving an instruction requires skills in presenting information to the audience, this task is usually performed by people who are at the supervisory level. Therefore, I found that the activity was challenging to my students as they did not have enough work experience to perform a supervisory role. It might be interesting to try this activity in a more advanced class.

In addition, there are two more issues that teachers who adopt this framework should be aware of. First, this framework was theorized from the instructive communication of supervisors, not

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including other communicative tasks such as motivating employees and appraising their work. Even though those communication tasks of supervisors are intertwined in a supervisor's role, teachers should emphasize the framework's applicability in the context of giving an instruction, not in other communication tasks. At the same time, the four elements constitute a loose framework; that is, the details of each element can be adjusted on a case-by-case basis. For example, supervisors may not need to provide complete organizational objectives if new employees are transferred from the other departments in the same organizations. New employees with similar work experience may not want to hear every single step of the work procedure, as that may sound intimidating to them. Therefore, supervisors really have to assess their own situations and use this framework to give instructions to new employees accordingly.

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A Comparison of Students' and Employees' Knowledge of Electronic Résumés

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Introduction

The increased use of technology has brought about numerous changes in the recruiting practices of many businesses (Charles, 2000; Quible, 1998). Projections are that online recruiting "is expected to grow from $411 million in 1999 to $4 billion by 2005" (Criscito, 2000, p. 2). Faced with these projections, students and employees will need to update their job search skills to keep up with the changing job market of the 21st century. Since U.S. Department of Labor statistics show that today's average worker will change jobs nine times between the ages of 18 and 34, students and employed persons need to be prepared for the use of technology in the employment search (Criscito, 2000).

Use of the Internet in the job search has increased markedly in the last decade. According to Criscito (2000), "in 1995 only 5% of the 8,000 résumés Microsoft received monthly were sent electronically. In 1999, that number had changed to 50%, and the number of résumés had increased to 10,000 a month" (p. 2). The impact of electronic résumé-management (ERM) systems on the employment process has been the subject of a number of studies. A 1993 study (Yate, 2003) determined that 78 percent of firms surveyed were using automated résumé-tracking systems. Baker, DeTienne, and Smart (1998) examined the use of ERM systems by Fortune 5000 companies and reported that 36 percent of responding firms used such systems. In an earlier study conducted in the mid-90s (Kennedy & Morrow, 1995), almost all firms with a minimum of 1,000 employees had automated applicant-tracking systems. In a study conducted in 1996 (Roever, 1997), none of the 236 companies in rural Missouri reported the use of résumé-scanning software. Thus, a marked difference seems to exist in the use of these systems by large and small companies. A more recent study of 46 companies of various sizes (ranging from fewer than 25 employees to over 1,000) reported that 85 percent of employers surveyed accept electronic résumés. Over two-thirds of the companies that accept electronic résumés also store them in a database for future reference (Jennings, Carnes, & Whitaker, 2001).

In addition to employers' increased use of technology, students and prospective employees have also been affected significantly by the new technologies as they consider their own job search processes. Increased communication between employers and prospective employees via electronic mail has resulted in an increase in job seekers' accessing corporate Web sites and Internet job boards, such as E-Span, Monster Board, and Job Trak (Bonner & Chaney, 2004; Greene & Martel, 2001; Ream, 2000).

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Job seekers are now facing many changes in the formatting of résumés. In addition to preparing attractive hard copies of résumés in the traditional format, which are still appropriate for job interviews, job candidates will need to prepare electronic versions of their résumés since many companies are expecting résumés to be in an electronic format. Electronic résumés are résumés that are formatted so that they may be scanned by computer or transmitted via e-mail (Eyler, 1999). A distinction should perhaps be made between scannable résumés and e-mail résumés. Scannable résumés are designed for scanning by optical character recognition equipment and are usually mailed to the company in which the person is interested. Scannable résumés may also be transmitted by facsimile (fax) machines that enter the résumés into the prospective employer's database. E-mail résumés are sometimes referred to as online résumés because they are transmitted online (Bonner & Chaney, 2004).

The use of automated applicant tracking systems that includes the use of scanning technology (Eyler, 1999) has made a significant impact on the way businesses process résumés (Roever, 1997). These automated tracking systems are designed to search for key words that represent the qualifications of the employee they are seeking (Ream, 2000). Résumés should, therefore, be scanner friendly. In other words, they should be formatted so that the scanner will read the information correctly (Solly & Fischer, 1996). Because today's job seekers are very knowledgeable about computers and use them regularly as a communication and research tool, they are able to take advantage of the employer acceptance of electronic résumés since it gives them an efficient process for expediting the job search (Jennings et al., 2001, Quible, 1998).

Guidelines for Formatting Electronic Résumés

Because of the increased use of electronic résumés, both students and employees must learn how the new technology applies to them as they conduct job searches. The fact that employees are changing jobs more often than in the past due to corporate downsizing, some of which was due to the fallout from September 11, 2001, means that they must be prepared to submit their materials using current technology. While many elements of traditional résumé formats remain, some elements have been dropped from technology-oriented résumés. A review of the literature produced a list of widely accepted guidelines for formatting electronic résumés.

When formatting electronic résumés, job seekers should set the width of the page to read a maximum of 60 characters across and use the space bar, rather than tabs, where spaces or indentions are desired (Ream, 2000). Asterisks (*) or plus signs (+), rather than bullets, are preferred for highlighting key points (Quible, 1998). While round, solid bullets will often scan, hollow or unusually shaped bullets will not (Criscito, 2000). Standard typefaces, such as Courier and Times New Roman, should be used; a font size of 10 to 12 points is recommended, except for Times 10 point (Criscito, 2000; Eyler, 1999). Typefaces such as serif or script should be avoided (Yate, 2003). Using all capital letters and/or boldface is recommended for section headings; italics and underlining should be avoided (Eyler, 1999). While the newer optical character recognition software can read italics, it is not as readable (Criscito, 2000).

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Abbreviations should be used judiciously; common abbreviations for degrees and certifications (BBA, MS, CPA) and state names are read by most résumé-scanning systems (Bonner & Chaney, 2004). Acronyms commonly used in certain professions, such A/R and A/P on an accountant's résumé, are usually accepted (Ream, 2000). Vertical lines and boxes should be avoided; few horizontal lines should be used (Eyler, 1999; Yate, 2003). The applicant's name and address should be centered at the top of the résumé (Quible, 1998). The font size used for the name should not be larger than 20-point (Criscito, 2000). The telephone number and e-mail address should be placed on separate lines. The use of boldface for the name, address, and telephone number should be avoided (Yate, 2003).

A section labeled *Keyword Summary* should be placed after the applicant's name and address; this list of keywords should be nouns and noun phrases rather than verbs that are recommended for traditional résumés. In other words, the position *Computer Systems Manager* rather than *managed computer systems*, would be used (Gunner, 2000; Sorenson, DeBord, & Ramirez, 2001). Since every job has its own jargon and terminology, applicants should examine national employment publications for *Help Wanted* listings in their fields of specialty (Bonner & Chaney, 2004; Criscito, 2000). Further, general keywords may be selected to reflect the applicant's personal traits, such as team player, creative, and problem solver, and other qualifications widely considered desirable, such as languages spoken, willingness to travel or relocate, and computer and communication skills (Charles, 2000; Eyler, 1999). The *Keyword Summary* section should cover such areas as degrees, university granting the degree, major, certifications, special skills/knowledge, and employment history, including job titles and duties performed. Concrete descriptions, such as C, C++, and Java, should be used for computer language skills (Criscito, 2000). This keyword summary should be limited to 50 words (Baker, DeTienne, & Smart, 1998).

Résumé preparers should remember that some sections usually included on traditional résumés, such as *References* and *Special Interests*, are not typically found on electronic résumés (Criscito, 2000; Eyler, 1999; Quible, 1998). They should also remember to avoid including detailed information on employment beyond the last ten years since more concise job information is preferred. Students and employees of businesses have long been told that their résumés should be short (a maximum of two pages in length) and that they should omit dated work experience beyond ten years since the implication is that technological changes may have made their earlier experience obsolete. Electronic résumés have increased the use of these principles since human resource managers prefer an "executive summary" approach to résumés. In addition, individuals with dated job skills run the risk of being overlooked as prospective employees. Thus, information that is more recent and concise is preferred on résumés.

In addition, the length should be kept to one or two pages, with the candidate's name at the top of each page (Ream, 2000; Roever, 1997). When a hard copy is mailed for scanning, the résumé should be printed in black ink on standard 8 -by-11-inch, white, off-white, or light gray paper, printed on only one side, and mailed flat in an envelope with no stapling or paper clips (Criscito, 2000; Eyler, 1999; Gunner, 2000; Yate, 2003).

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Problems with viruses make it important that prospective employees send their résumés as text-only in either RTF (Rich Text Format) or ASCII (American Standard Code for Information Interchange). Companies will often indicate the preferred submission format. When no format is specified, RTF is preferred because it will support special characters, fonts, and tabs, resulting in an attractive appearance. However, ASCII is often preferred because is universally recognized (Noel & Hunter, 2000; Sorenson, DeBord, & Ramirez, 2001).

Research Objective and Question

In considering the purpose of the research, the hypothesis was that employees would be more knowledgeable about electronic résumé guidelines than students because they are keeping abreast of technological changes as part of their jobs. It was further assumed that because of corporate downsizing employed persons have had to become knowledgeable about technological changes in job search skills as they apply for other jobs. Students, on the other hand, may not have been faced with conducting a job search and would therefore lack the technological expertise of employed persons. Thus, the primary objective of the research is to determine the comparative knowledge levels of students and employees. The question to be answered is: Are employees more knowledgeable than students about electronic résumé guidelines?

Survey Procedures and Results

To determine students' and employees' knowledge of guidelines for preparing electronic résumés, a questionnaire containing ten guidelines related to electronic résumés was administered to 452 students at a Mid-South university and to 314 Mid-South employees. A convenience sample of students enrolled in both lower- and upper-division courses in introduction to management, business communications, and international business communication at a large Mid-South university participated in the survey. Students were surveyed near the beginning of the term to avoid the effect of coaching. A convenience sample of Mid-South employees from business, education, government, and medicine also participated in the survey. Employees attending seminars conducted by the researchers, members of a local professional marketing association, and university employees made up the sample population. Both samples were, therefore, nonrandom and purposive, which is considered appropriate in situations in which a larger population cannot be easily accessed or enumerated (Babbie, 1990).

The ten guidelines provided were related to correct typeface and font size and the appropriateness of using such formatting features as bullets, bold-faced type, and underlining. Also included were such content-related questions as inclusion of references and placement of the *Keyword Summary* section.

As shown in Table 1, the largest percentages of both student and employee populations were female. The largest percentages of both the student and employee population were below the age of 25.

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Table 1
Demographics of student and employee respondents

	Population 1: Students		Population 2: Employees	
Demographic Factor	**Frequency**	**Valid Percent**	**Frequency**	**Valid Percent**
Gender				
Female	250	55.3	159	56.2
Male	202	44.7	124	43.8
Age				
Below 25	335	74.1	141	44.9
25-39	86	19.0	113	36.0
40 and above	31	6.9	60	19.1

Statistical analysis was run using SPSS, Version 10. Frequencies and percentages of students' and employees' responses are shown in Table 2. (The correct response to each statement is indicated in parentheses after each statement.)

Table 2
Frequencies and percentages of respondents' knowledge of selected electronic résumé guidelines

	Students						Employees					
Guideline	**Correct**		**Incorrect**		**Don't Know**		**Correct**		**Incorrect**		**Don't Know**	
	f	**Valid %**	**f**	**Valid %**	**f**	**Valid %**	**f**	**Valid %**	**f**	**Valid %**	**f**	**Valid %**
Courier is a suitable typeface for an electronic résumé. (True)	161	35.6	101	22.3	190	42.0	117	37.3	79	25.2	118	37.6
The recommended font size for an electronic résumé is 10 to 14 points. (True)	337	74.4	47	10.4	67	14.9	235	74.8	24	7.6	55	17.5
A bullet, rather than an asterisk (*), is used to highlight a key point. (False)	252	55.8	96	21.2	104	23.0	311	67.6	36	11.5	65	20.8

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The space bar, rather than tabs, is used where spaces or indentions are desired. (True)	121	26.8	210	46.5	121	26.8	94	29.9	141	44.9	79	25.2
Bold-faced type should not be used. (False)	131	29.0	203	44.9	118	26.1	87	27.7	163	51.9	64	20.4
Underlining may be used where appropriate. (False)	255	56.4	86	19.0	111	24.6	160	51.0	89	28.3	65	20.7
Verbs, rather than nouns or noun phrases, are preferred for key-words. (False)	164	36.3	137	30.3	151	33.4	137	43.6	99	31.5	78	24.8
The applicant's name and address should be the first lines on the résumé, with each line centered. (True)	323	71.6	44	9.8	84	18.6	215	68.5	44	14.0	55	17.5
Keyword Summary is usually the first section after the applicant's name and address. (True)	130	28.8	105	23.2	217	48.0	131	41.7	63	20.1	120	38.2
References are commonly in-cluded on elec-tronic résumés. (False)	198	43.8	128	28.3	126	27.9	125	40.1	119	38.1	68	21.8

A high percentage of both students and employees answered incorrectly (46.5 percent vs 44.9 percent) the guideline related to the use of the space bar, rather than tabs, where spaces or indentions are desired. Further, both students and employees answered incorrectly (44.9 percent vs 51.9 percent) related to use of bold-faced type. Both students and employees answered incorrectly (56.4 percent vs 51.0 percent) the guideline related to the use of underlining. More students than employees (43.8 percent vs 40.1 percent) answered correctly the guideline related to the inclusion of references on an electronic résumé. The guideline marked *Don't Know* by the largest number of students and employees was related to the location of the *Keyword Summary*.

Mean responses and standard deviations were calculated and are shown in Table 3. The guideline with the highest mean response for both populations was related to recommended font size.

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Table 3
Knowledge of selected electronic résumé guidelines: Mean responses of students and employees

	Population 1: Students		Population 2: Employees	
Guideline	**Mean**	**S.D.**	**Mean**	**S.D.**
Courier is a suitable typeface for an electronic résumé.	.94	.88	1.00	.87
The recommended font size for an electronic résumé is 10 to 14 points.	1.60	.73	1.57	.77
A bullet, rather than an asterisk (*), is used to highlight a key point.	1.33	.83	1.47	.82
The space bar, rather than tabs, is used where spaces or indentions are desired.	1.00	.73	1.05	.74
Bold-faced type should not be used.	1.03	.74	1.07	.69
Underlining may be used where appropriate.	1.32	.84	1.30	.79
Verbs, rather than nouns or noun phrases, are preferred for keywords.	1.03	.84	1.19	.81
The applicant's name and address should be the first lines on the résumé, with each line centered.	1.53	.79	1.51	.78
Keyword Summary is usually the first section after the applicant's name and address.	.81	.86	1.04	.89
References are commonly included on electronic résumés.	1.16	.83	1.18	.77

To determine whether significant differences existed between the mean responses of students and employees, the t-test statistic was used. Statistical differences existed (at the .05 level) between students' and employees' responses to three of the ten guidelines as shown in Table 4.

Table 4 *T-test Results: students' and employees' responses*

Guideline	**t-value**	**Significance**
Courier is a suitable typeface for an electronic résumé.	.681	.496
The recommended font size for an electronic résumé is 10 to 14 points.	-.481	.631
A bullet, rather than an asterisk (*), is used to highlight a key point.	2.411	**.016***
The space bar, rather than tabs, is used where spaces or indentions are desired.	.626	.531
Bold-faced type should not be used.	.641	.522
Underlining may be used where appropriate.	.090	.928
Verbs, rather than nouns or noun phrases, are preferred for keywords.	2.862	**.004***
The applicant's name and address should be the first lines on the résumé with each line centered.	-.683	.495
Keyword Summary is usually the first section after the applicant's name and address.	3.496	**.001***
References are commonly included on electronic résumés.	.584	.559

* .05 level of significance

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Students and employees differed on the correct responses to the guidelines related to use of bullets, rather than asterisks, for highlighting key points (employees were correct more often than students); the preference for verbs rather than nouns for keywords (more employees answered incorrectly than students); and the placement of Keyword Summary (employees were correct more often than students).

Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Students and employees were provided ten guidelines related to preparing electronic résumés and were asked to indicate whether the guideline was true or false. The guideline with the highest mean response by both students and employees was related to recommended font size. Results of the t-test to determine statistical differences (< .05) between students' and employees' responses revealed that differences existed on three of the ten guidelines: Employees responded correctly more often than students on the two guidelines related to the use bullets, rather than asterisks, for highlighting key points and the placement of *Keyword Summary*. Thus, the conclusion can be drawn that employees are more knowledgeable than students on two of the ten guidelines.

With the trend toward increased employer acceptance of electronic résumés, students, employers, and employees should be knowledgeable about current technologies used in the job search. To help job seekers update their job search skills, the following recommendations are made**:**

- Students and employees should take the initiative in educating themselves in technological changes associated with the employment process by consulting their local libraries and bookstores for recent references, such as *Adams Electronic Job Search Almanac* that contains essential elements of electronic résumés and numerous online resources.

- Teachers can help students prepare for technological changes affecting the job search by integrating into their business communication courses the appropriate knowledge, such as guidelines for preparing electronic résumés. Teachers can also contribute to students' job search proficiency by requiring assignments that would be beneficial in their job search, such as formatting electronic résumés in addition to traditional résumés.

- Research assignments in a business communication course could include student reports on recent journal articles related to use of technology in the employment process and searches of company websites to determine their requirements for employment, specifically requirements related to submitting on-line résumés.

- Employers should communicate to their employees the procedures they use for recruiting employees, specifically changes related to the use of technology. Both electronic and traditional company bulletin boards, training sessions, word of mouth,

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and newsletters may be used to keep employees abreast of current procedures. For employees who are seriously considering in-house advancement, special workshops should be conducted to provide employees with the technological expertise needed for promotion within the organization.

- In the absence of company-provided training related to the job search, employees should take advantage of continuing education courses at local universities to keep their job search skills current.

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Is English a Brand: Language of Origin's Influence on Product Evaluation

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Abstract

In Asia, there is a growing assumption that English capability is a requirement to enter the global economy. In China alone, the population of students studying English outnumbers students in America. One central channel in international marketing communication is language, including packaging, advertising, and product information. This paper explores the potential synergy of these two trends by examining potential benefits accrued to products produced by English speaking nations. The construct language of origin is tested for validity and potential positive influence from English language studies. A wide area Web-based survey, administered in Taiwan, resulted in 582 respondents in a conjoint-based design. Analysis of variance found that respondents who were language majors exhibited higher levels of consumer ethnocentricity than those who had not majored in language. This finding raises questions about the assumptions surrounding the international nature of English, since English students in this survey do not go on to be more accepting of imported products. Conjoint analysis found no favorable halo effect for products that were related to English speaking countries of origin. These findings raise a flag of caution when considering English in the international market and emphasize the importance of localization in product marketing, including marketing communications.

In Asia, there is a growing assumption that English capability is a prerequisite for entry to the global economy. English is a required course of study in most Asian nations, now starting from elementary school in both Taiwan and the People's Republic of China. The population of students studying English in China alone outnumbers students in North America. These government policies indicate the success of English as an international language. Simultaneously, the success and spread of market economics has increased the use of commercial communications between international firms and consumers, resulting in a global marketing communication. Consumers encounter product information daily from numerous sources. One central channel in this marketing communication is language, including the language in packaging, advertising, and product information. Within the context of international markets, the choice of language needs to be addressed even by firms that may not consider themselves *international*. This paper explores the potential synergy of these two trends—the widespread learning of English and the spread of consumer goods because of opening markets—by examining benefits accrued to products produced by English speaking nations. The

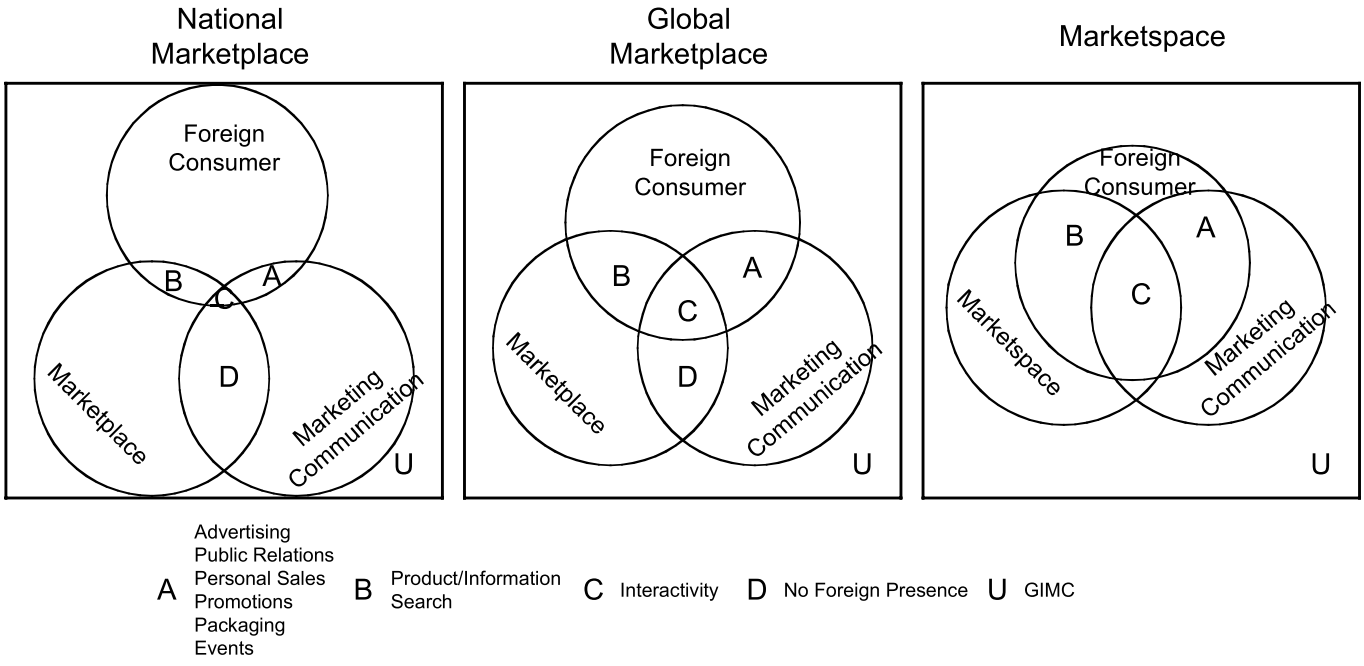
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construct of language of origin is examined to determine whether English language studies positively influence consumers' attitudes toward products from English speaking countries.

Marketing communication in the global market

The globalization of markets, observed by Levitt in 1983, included a merging of consumer preferences and a standardization of products on a worldwide scale. Over a decade later, Usunier (1996) pointed out that much of the observed cultural globalization is based on the assumption that a modern lifestyle is represented by the American way of life, where the world tunes into CNN for news and learns English in schools (Pennycook, 1994). Although it is unclear what globalization means vis à vis a global culture, it is clear that companies cannot opt out of international communication in the 21st century. In the traditional physical marketplace, marketing communication was sent out to foreign markets through some combination of global and local strategies. The foreign consumer set, shown in Figure 1, could be completely controlled by decreasing or increasing intersection A, with an emphasis on a single domestic national marketplace. If a firm chose not to interact with a foreign market, a foreign consumer entering the marketplace, searching for a product, simply would not find any information (intersection B). Increased globalization led to rising volumes of communication sent to foreign consumers (intersection A) who had increasing interaction with foreign firms (intersection C), yet still often could not find the product information in the local market (for example, products placed in movies communicated to consumers, yet such products were not always available for local information searches by interested consumers).

Figure 1. *Changes in marketing communication sets*



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With the maturing of interactive information technologies, foreign consumers now receive communication from the firm even when not purposefully targeted. In the resulting marketspace, ignoring a foreign market (intersection D) simply ceases to be an option. Not supplying consumers with the marketing communication they seek, or supplying inappropriate communication, can have negative results for consumers (Schultz, Tannenbaum, & Lauterborn, 1993). Thus, firms face the challenge of constantly communicating internationally but with little certainty of what the communication medium entails. This exploratory study examines the possibility that English has a beneficial role to play in the marketspace, and that such an advantage is increased by the local study of English. In the case of non-differentiated products, which are easy for consumers to understand and do not require any special instructions in a native language, a predisposition towards the English language could have a halo effect for products from English speaking nations in general, much like a country of origin effect.

Attitude toward the country of origin is generally considered to have two main dimensions: cognitive (Haubl, 1996) and affective (Verlegh & Steenkamp, 1999). Affective can include triggering associations and even emotions (Batra, Ramaswamy, Alden, Steenkamp, & Ramachander, 2000; Fournier, 1998), being part of the symbolic aspect of country of origin (Obermiller & Spangenberg, 1998), and potentially interacting with foreign language (English) studies. A final aspect of country of origin is that it may function within the context of what is considered *right* or *correct* by consumers, as in consumer ethnocentricity (Shimp & Sharma, 1987) that drives the preference for domestic products. These characteristics are potentially open to influence by the trend of English education as young people are exposed to textbooks depicting lifestyles in English speaking countries in a positive light, along with the normative aspect of studying English because it is an educational requirement.

Within Taiwan, consumers have been found to have some preference for imported goods in general. Lin and Sternquist (1994) found that Taiwan department stores often promote products as *imported*. Warden, Lai, and Wu (2002) observed that English in Taiwan is often used as a visual cue to represent a Western standard of living, thus simultaneously taking advantage of preconceived stereotypes and reinforcing them, especially for young people who are students of English. Stereotypes people hold about other countries influence their evaluations of products (Bilkey & Nes, 1982); for example, French speaking consumers rated French products higher than English speakers in Canada (Wall & Heslop, 1986). Predeterminants of country of origin effect are not well understood, even though the resulting attitudes have been widely studied (Gurhan-Canli & Maheswaran, 2000), leaving open the possibility that one influence could be English studies. Although language may have a small and subtle effect, it could become more important in cases of dispersed information combined with low motivation. Such a situation can maximize the country of origin effect in general (Gurhan-Canli & Maheswaran, 2000), a phenomenon similar in nature to likelihood of a low motivation state, as shown in the elaboration model of Petty, Cacioppo and Schumann (1983), which states that in low motivation states,

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consumers will be influenced more by small contextual cues surrounding products, rather than central core product features. Language can be just such a cue.

Country of origin research has traditionally centered on extrinsic cues (Bilkey & Nes, 1982; Steenkamp, 1990) such as price and brand name; however, other aspects have been considered, such as cultural and national historical ties (Wall & Heslop, 1986). Forney, Pelton, Caton, and Rabolt (1999) examined the influence of culture on country of origin between the close cultures of the U.S. and Canada, finding some differences. Yavas and Alpay (1986) found that consumers who share cultural values tend to make similar evaluations of *made-in* labels, while different cultures were found to lead to differences in attitudes (Knight & Calantone, 2000). Higher levels of education and income have been related to increased acceptance of foreign produced goods (Anderson & Cunningham, 1972; Schooler, 1971; Dornoff, Tankersley, & White, 1974), and younger people are often found to be more positive toward imports (Wall, Heslop, & Hofstra, 1988; Schooler, 1971).

English appears in local advertising in nearly all Asian countries even though the local population may have little mastery of English. English has become associated with the advanced countries, such as the United States and the U.K., conferring upon a product an increased level of evaluation. Warden, Lai, and Wu (2002) labeled this effect language of origin where the use of English was found to increase the evaluation of low-differentiated products. O'Shaughnessy and O'Shaughnessy (2000) explored the possibility of nation as brand through such topics as association and conditioning, but conclude that the notion of nation itself is so nebulous as to be unwieldy in use as any general country of origin cue. They cite the example of products from the Far East that use English or French labels in order to mislead consumers about the product origin (O'Shaughnessy & O'Shaughnessy, 2000). Language then, less nebulous than nation but not as specific as made-in labels, may play a role in forming country of origin cues. Consumers may even obtain some social status from the use of English. This paper builds on the work of Warden, Lai, and Wu (2002) to describe the language of origin construct and explore the effect it may have in a branding context. Conversely, non-English speakers may attribute country of origin of a product as some country subjectively thought of as representing *English*. A parallel example may be seen in Taiwan, where the term American person (美國人) is widely used to represent all non-Asian persons on first encounter, especially among children. This classification term is used like the ancient Chinese adjective yang (洋) that designated some object or idea that was perceived to have arrived from overseas and was thus non-Chinese, regardless of region of origin.

Based on the review, the following propositions were explored in this study:

P1. Blocking for country of origin (COO) effect, nondifferentiated products from English speaking nations will obtain higher ratings than the same products from non-English speaking nations (this is the proposed language of origin construct).

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P2. Chinese university students majoring in English will display decreasing levels of consumer ethnocentricity over their four years of study.

P3. Chinese university students majoring in English will display increasing favoritism towards products from English speaking nations over their four years of study.

P4. Within Chinese culture, consumers who have previously pursued English studies will have lower consumer ethnocentricity than those who did not.

P5. Within Chinese culture, consumers who have pursued English studies will rate products from English speaking nations more highly than products from non-English speaking nations.

Study 1: Language of origin construct

Warden, Lai, and Wu (2002) found that in an online shopping simulation, respondents in Taiwan rated low-differentiated products higher when the language used was English. In order to test for the potential existence of a language of origin effect , Study 1 surveyed only university students in Taiwan majoring in English as the most likely population to exhibit such an effect. A single cue study, using country of origin as the only cue, was chosen in order to maximize any results. In a 1996 study examining attitudes of Chinese toward imported products, Zhang found that the single cue presentation resulted in high country of origin results.

Country of origin effect is only present when all other product types and attributes are considered equal among alternatives (Gaedeke, 1973; Kaynak & Cavusgil, 1983; Lumpkin, Crawford, & Kim, 1985). Considering this, it was important to find products with similar attributes. There is also the possibility that a country image has the potential to confound results when looking for any influence. For example, in Malaysia, consumers' evaluations of products were dominated by the developed countries of U.S.A., Japan, France, and Italy (Mohamad, Ahmed, Honeycutt, & Tyebkhan, 2000). Countries with overwhelming influence on attitudes had to also be avoided as was also the case of preference for one's own country (Taiwan and China were not included as product sources to avoid this last issue).

Method

A pre-study survey was designed with questions based on the Warden, et al., (2002) study. The dependent variables were responses on a one (negative) to seven (positive) scale rating product financial risk, quality, and technology level. Independent variables included six countries (USA, UK, Australia, Germany, France, and Italy) and six products (iron, blow-dryer, coffee machine, barbells, cooking hot plate, bug light). These countries and products were familiar to students in Taiwan. Respondents rated each of the products, on the three questions that were repeated six times (each time from a different country). The order of the countries and the products were randomized. A 3 X 6 X 6 design employed MANOVA analysis, with a total of 145 respondents answering the paper-based survey, at two universities in central Taiwan. All respondents were first determined to be non-English majors in order to establish a baseline of products and origins

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for the sample frame in general. Results showed a significant difference among countries on all three dependent measures (Risk: $F = 26.25$ $P < 0.000$, Quality: $F = 30.28$ $P < 0.000$, Technology: $F = 60.41$ $P < 0.000$, $df = 5$), a significant difference among products (Risk: $F = 8.01$ $P < 0.000$, Quality: $F = 7.87$ $P < 0.000$, Technology: $F = 16.31$ $P < 0.000$, $df = 5$) and no significant interaction between country and product. Post hoc Tukey comparisons were employed to find subsets of products and countries that showed no significant differences on the three dependent measures. The resulting countries (Australia, France, and Italy), and products (iron, blow-dryer, and coffee machine) did not display any pre-existing country of origin effect or product preferences for respondents and were thus adopted for use in the following English major survey.

University English majors

The English major survey followed the pre-survey approach with only three countries and three products from each country. Questions were expanded to six, two for each area of risk, quality, and technology, directly adopted from the Warden et al. (2002) study and including: performance risk (high risk of incurring a performance problem to low risk), financial risk (high risk of financial problem to low risk), overall quality (low quality to high), likelihood of breakage (likely to break to unlikely), workmanship (poor workmanship to good), and technology of product (low technology to high). Again, the paper survey was printed with randomized order for both countries and products. The consumer ethnocentrism (Shimp & Sharma, 1987) scale of ten questions (Bearden, Netemeyer, & Mobley, 1993, p. 32-33) was translated to Chinese and included. Only English majors were sought to participate in this survey, with surveys being distributed to ten English departments at national universities in all regions of Taiwan. A total of 500 survey forms were sent with 273 valid forms returned.

Results and discussion

Participants

The average age of respondents was 22, with 74 percent female. Seniors comprised 39 percent of the sample with the remaining made up of 36 percent juniors, 17 percent sophomores, and 8 percent freshman. All respondents were English majors in foreign language departments of national universities in Taiwan. The six country of origin questions of risk, quality, and workmanship exhibited a reliability Alpha of .96 and a Guttman Split-half reliability of .93 while the consumer ethnocentricity questions exhibited a reliability Alpha of .91 and a Guttman Split-half reliability of .86, both acceptable levels.

The full factorial design, 3x3x6 (three products by three countries by six questions), resulted in 54 responses for each participant. Exploratory factor analysis of the origin questions was undertaken to reduce the data. Results showed two factors that clearly divided along country lines, with all questions indicating origin of France or Italy loading together (eigenvalue = 22.32), while questions indicating origin from Australia loaded alone (eignvalue = 3.17). These two factors accounted for a total of 47.2 percent of the total variance.

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Factor analysis of the ethnocentricity questions also exhibited two factors (see

Table 1) that were purified by removing question eight, which did not load clearly (*I prefer to support products made in Taiwan although it costs more*). The resulting two factors accounted for 73.18 percent of total variance. Ethnocentric views in factor B (eigenvalue = 1.2) appeared related to purchasing products that were not produced domestically, while factor A views were mostly related larger social issues (eigenvalue = 5.4), such as unemployment and national loyalty.

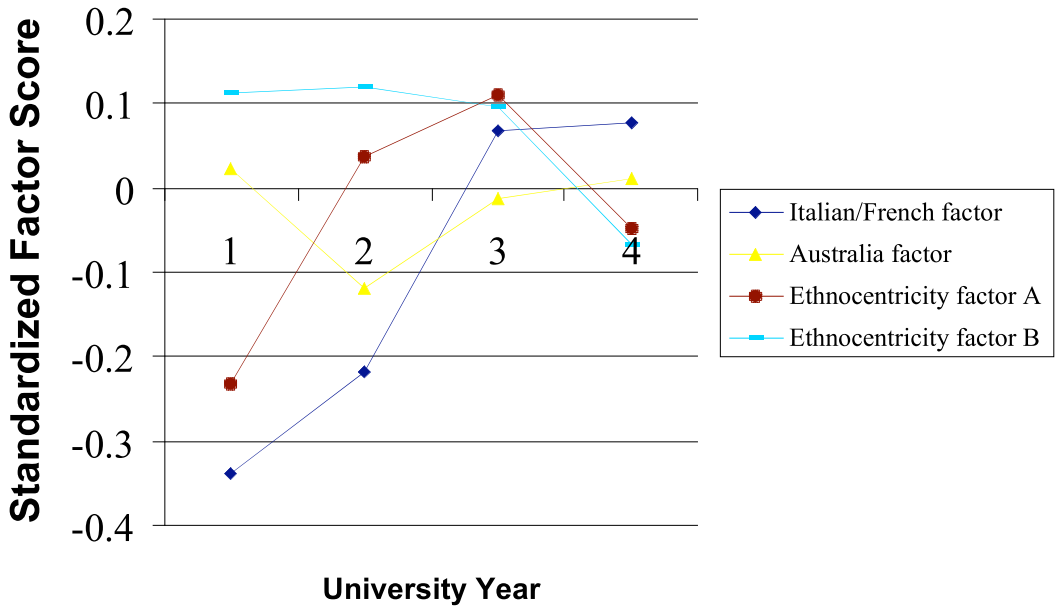
Table 1
Ethnocentric factor results using Varimax rotation

	Factor A	Factor B
Q4 It's wrong to purchase foreign products.	.915	.082
Q3 Taiwanese do not really buy imported goods.	.903	.113
Q5 An authentic Taiwanese should buy products made in Taiwan only.	.899	.173
Q6 We should buy domestic products only to prevent other countries becoming rich.	.795	.317
Q10 Taiwanese who buy imported goods should be responsible for those who lose jobs.	.74	.330
Q7 Taiwanese who buy foreign products will cause damage to enterprise and unemployment.	.722	.372
Q2 Taiwan products are the best.	.597	.317
Q9 In foreign countries, we should buy only the products that cannot be obtained domestically.	.274	.843
Q1 We should import only the products that are unobtainable in Taiwan .	.134	.874

The resulting factor means show the standardized scores over the four grade levels. Grouping the first two years and then comparing results with the last two years reveals a significant increase in the scores given to the Italian/French based products ($t = 2.22$, $df = 250$, $P < .027$), while the remaining three scores show no significant difference.

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Figure 2
Factor mean results (all scores standardized)



The most important finding of Study 1 is lack of a strong overall language of origin effect (rejecting Proposition 1). However, results from the stratified sample of university students allow a temporal element to be inferred (based on year of study), which under examination does exhibit a language of origin effect that declines over the four years as the non-English speaking countries of Italy and France receive increasingly higher scores. Consumer ethnocentricity, which should play a central role in language of origin, also appears to be undergoing change during these learning years (rejecting Proposition 2). Ratings given to the Australian products are rated higher by first and second year students, but not by third and fourth year students, thus giving an unclear picture to any favoritism toward the English speaking country (rejecting Proposition 3). This sample did not, however, show if such a trend is specific just to university students in English departments, or is similar among all college students and the wider Chinese population. In order to directly compare those who had studied English as a university major with all others, and investigate other demographic influences, a wider area sample was used in Study 2.

Study 2: Language of origin country

Study 1 confirmed the reliability of the survey approach and suggested university students may undergo a consumer education during their first years away from home. While being exposed to

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the English language and Western-based values as well as products that reflect Western culture, these young people did not appear to be influenced by the language of the country of origin when evaluating products. Study 2 follows up with an expanded survey including a large sample size with non-student respondents in order to directly explore the actual influence English studies have on preferences for products from English speaking countries.

Method

The survey for Study 1 was modified for online use, including the same variables. The online design included a graphic of the product with the country of origin indicated in large Chinese characters. The six questions were placed next to the product graphic with seven point scales clickable on the screen (see Appendix A). Each combination included one of the three products and one of the three countries, with a single package displayed until the respondent completed rating the six dependent variables. When finished with one package, another package would be displayed until all nine packages were completed, with products and countries randomized for each respondent. This implementation followed a full factorial conjoint design so that utility part worth values could be examined and compared.

Conjoint analysis has been widely applied in marketing research (Cattin & Wittink, 1982; Green & Rao, 1971; Green & Srinivasan, 1990), and is one of the most widely used methodologies for measuring consumer preferences (Carroll & Green, 1995). Conjoint analysis is employed for its emphasis on understanding tradeoffs consumers make when evaluating competing options (Green, Krieger, & Wind, 2001). Manipulated variables (attributes) in conjoint experiments represent clear different states (levels) to the subjects who rate combinations (bundles) of product features. In this case, the differences were product and country of origin. Respondents were drawn from around Taiwan through advertisements placed on two widely used Web portals. One portal was a youth oriented site with an emphasis on creating cyberspace meeting areas for discussions of social activities, while the second portal was more traditional, with a mainly adult professional audience. These two portals increased the opportunity to draw from the population a sample that included both young and older respondents. By clicking on the survey's advertisement, respondents were directed to the research server, where the survey was introduced and respondents could choose to continue.

Participants

A total of 612 self-selected respondents entered the survey Website, with 582 complete and usable data sets. Females outnumbered males (57 percent compared to 41 percent, with 2 percent unreported), with a mean age of 25.4 (SD 0.7). Areas of employment for respondents included nearly half students (48.2 percent) with over a quarter (26.2 percent) working in company offices and 6.8 percent self-employed with the remainder distributed among teachers (1.9 percent), company blue collar workers (2.1 percent), factory workers (3 percent), and homemakers (2.4 percent). The sample reflected the high education of Internet users, with 67.2 percent having or completing an undergraduate degree, and 7.7 percent a master degree. In order to investigate any influence from area of study in college/university, majors were reported. A

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quarter of respondents currently or previously were studying business, 10.5 percent engineering, 11.3 percent electronics, and 9.2 percent an English-related program. Given the findings of Study 1, this resulting sample was deemed highly suitable for comparisons between language majors and non-language majors, as well as between age and education level.

Results

The six country of origin questions of risk, quality, and workmanship exhibited a reliability Alpha of .95 and a Guttman Split-half reliability of .91. Consumer ethnocentricity questions exhibited a reliability Alpha of .92 and a Guttman Split-half reliability of .89. The first result confirms the finding of Study 1 that English majors exhibited increasing levels of ethnocentricity, with respondents who were majoring currently or had majored previously in English showing higher levels of ethnocentricity 2.14 (SD 1.28) than those who did not major in English 1.82 (SD 1.2). Overall, the level of ethnocentricity is low, but the difference is significant (t=1.94, df=529, p=.053), with a Cohen value of 0.26, reinforcing the finding from Study 1 of increasing ethnocentricity among students of English (rejecting Proposition 4). The very existence of such a difference is unexpected and counter intuitive.

Further analysis of the data examined the importance of the two main independent variables: product and country of origin. Since a full factorial design was employed, conjoint analysis could be used to uncover utility values (part worth values) that explain the amount each respondent valued the combinations of these two main factors. For the total sample, respondents preferred combinations that included France as a country of origin and ranked packages from Australia and Italy negatively (meaning when either of those countries was the source of the product, ratings decreased). The products' utilities showed that the coffee machine increased the package rating, the hair dryer decreased the rating, while the iron had nearly a neutral effect. None of the effects were statistically significant, however, confirming the neutrality of the countries and the products derived from the pre-test. Overall, the two factors of country and product were also nearly equally important to respondents when considering the conjoint packages.

Language as a previous or present major was used to next divide the sample and find any difference based on language study. On the risk questions, Australia and Italy both showed statistically significant differences between the two groups, with Australian products perceived by English learners as more risky and Italian products being considered less risky. All other questions showed no difference between English majors and non-English majors, meaning that language of origin did not influence respondents who were more familiar with English (rejecting Proposition 5). Dividing the sample along demographic factors, such as age, income, gender, etc., produced no significant differences among the utility scores. Table 2 indicates the comparison of English majors and non-English majors.

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Table 3

Results between previous English and non-English majors

		Part-Worth Utilitiy Values					
		Risk	t-test	Quality	t-test	Technology	t-test
Australia	English Major	.112 (.728)	t=2.06	-.086 (.671)	t=.253	-.207 (.906)	t=.799
	Non-English Major	-.069 (.59)	df=490	-.105 (.511)	df=499	-.285 (.65)	df=499
France	English Major	.118 (.714)	t=.55	.074 (.458)	t=.227	.196 (.714)	t=.525
	Non-English Major	.07 (.59)	df=490	.091 (.532)	df=499	.249 (.706)	df=499
Italy	English Major	-.231 (.627)	2.94	.012 (.566)	t=.033	.011 (.667)	t=.273
	Non-English Major	-.002 (.528)	df=490	.014 (.454)	df=499	.036 (.634)	df=499*
Ethnocentricity Means							
	English Major	4.86 (1.28)	1.94*				
	Non-English Major	5.18 (1.2)	df=529				

Note: Values in parentheses represent standard deviation; significance level represents difference between the two levels of the utility values tested with a paired *t*-test, df=490.
* $p < .05$

Discussion

Ironically, it would appear that among those with more English education, who are more likely to utilize the international marketplace for product information search, such as the Web, no language of origin benefit is observed. This echoes Heslop, Papadopoulos, and Bourk's (1998) finding that although French Canadians shared the French language with France, products from France did not obtain higher product ratings. In the current study, those people with the highest level of exposure to English appear to have no assumptions about products from an English speaking country. Most striking are the results from both Study 1 and Study 2 that English majors experience higher levels of consumer ethnocentricity as they complete their university studies and higher than non-English majors. In Japan, Hinenoya and Gatbonton (2000) found a similar result that may help to explain this phenomenon. Although not specifically examining consumer ethnocentricity, that study proposed that successful English learners would exhibit lower levels of ethnocentrism. Results found no such link, and in fact showed that successful university language students displayed higher levels of ethnocentrism, leading Hinenoya and Gatbonton to conclude that ". . . the pressure to do well in examination English may outweigh any effects of ethnocentrism, traits, values and beliefs (p. 236)."

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Such results may be seen in terms of Chinese or Japanese cultural distance from the cultures where English is spoken as the native language. Starting from elementary school, students in both China and Japan are indoctrinated in their respective cultures. Although English is introduced early, and generally emphasized as an important tool to success, its accompanying cultural baggage may be left at the doorstep. The emphasis placed on examinations for entering high school and university forces students to conform more to the core values of their own culture, rather than less. Entrance to foreign language departments, in Taiwan universities, over the previous two decades, has been based on relatively high scores on the unified university entrance exam (in the top 10 percent of all examinees). This does not, however, imply that those testing into the language departments have been outstanding language students, but rather, outstanding students in the educational system, which is exam-oriented. These young people have succeeded in gaining entrance to the foreign language departments through their early adoption of core Chinese social values, which include studying in order to score high on exams—a powerful current and historical core value in Chinese social structures.

These results point out the very shallow nature of English learning in Asia. Rather than bringing learners into the complexity and richness of the cultures associated with the language, English is being adopted as simply a communication tool—nothing more. In fact, those learning more of the language, and its associated cultures, may be, paradoxically, increasingly less impressed with the cultures associated with English. Warden and Lin's (2000) study of motivations for studying English in Taiwan concluded that the main motivation was increased domestic monetary opportunities, and no motivation towards *integrating* with the culture foreign culture was found. Thus, the language of origin effect appears to be a country of origin effect in disguise. This study did not allow respondents to *guess* or *assume* the country of origin of the products under consideration, but made their origin clear. Warden et al.(2002) asserted that low differentiated products can benefit from the use of English, but that is shown here to be overturned when the actual country of origin is known. It would appear that simply using English, when no country source is mentioned, leaves respondents to assume the source country of the product is the U.S. or the U.K., which did show very strong country of origin effects in the current study's pre-test. In their examination of French Canadians, Heslop, Papadopoulos, and Bourk (1998) concluded that the attitudes toward developed nations were very powerful. This attitude overwhelmed any effect due to cultural similarity between the buyer's and seller's country. Zhang (1996) also found an overpowering country of origin effect from the United States and Japan, and little support for any cultural proximity influence. That study did not attempt to block this effect by choosing a product type with reduced country of origin influence, as was done in the current study.

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Managerial implications

Results most clearly show that any benefit gained from language of origin is due to assumptions made about the country of origin. The language cue may lead a consumer to guess where the product is from, and the consumer will assume the most well known country is the source. Western firms should not assume any benefit will be accrued to consumer perceptions of products simply because the firm is located in an English speaking country. Even consumers who have spent years studying English may have no special preference for products from countries where English is spoken. This can be understood by examining English instruction in Taiwan, which takes place within the context of the traditional Chinese education system with its emphasis on memorization and testing—an approach common throughout Asia. The fact that English majors have not developed lower levels of ethnocentricity may be an indicator that the current EFL instructional methodology seems to do little in the way of sensitizing students to foreign countries and cultures. Simultaneously, in the absence of a strong country of origin signal, a product may be served by increasing the language cues that link the product with the assumed source.

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Appendix A: Online Survey Screen

本調查問卷的目的在於瞭解各位的看法，每個問題並無所謂對或錯的答案，調查結果僅作為團體意見分析之依據，您的選答絕對保密，所以敬請放心地依自己的意見回答。請詳閱左邊之產品及其原產國，之後，讀閱右列問題並從中選擇符合您意見的那一答案並在 該 ○ 內點選。

請注意！ 國家及產品可能會改變



吹風機

此產品的原產國是:

澳洲

	1 非常低	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10 非常高
您認為此產品的效能風險(效能非如該產品本應備有之機率)是:	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
您認為此產品的價格風險(物非所值之機率)是:	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
您對此產品的品質評價是:	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
您認為此產品故障的可能性是:	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
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Evaluation Across Cultures: National Perspectives Explain Differences Between Singaporean and US Evaluators

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This study compared Singaporean and American faculty evaluators' assessment of written responses to workplace scenarios requiring critique and counter-argument of a boss's ideas. Two responses were collected from each of 234 upper-level business school students at a major university in the Republic of Singapore: one response prior to the students taking a business communication course and one response following the course. Singaporean and US evaluators independently scored these responses on four analytical tools (Rogers & Rymer, 2001). The evaluations from US evaluators were significantly higher on task fulfillment and reasoning units than the Singaporean evaluations and only the US evaluators found improvement in responses written after the course. Textual analyses suggest that the discrepancies between the evaluation teams may stem from content preferences associated with national perspectives--US evaluators favored an external 'proactive' focus based on potential gains, whereas Singaporeans preferred an internal focus based on avoidance of potential losses. Results suggest that analytical tools targeted for a particular population (such as Singaporean business students training for workplace writing) and developed to bridge written genre can be meaningfully used across countries; however, evaluators' perceptions country-to-country are likely to impact the assessment of content.

Introduction

As the workplace becomes increasing global, there are signs of renewed interest in accountability and in related vehicles for testing, certification, and benchmarking student performance, including in business communication programs preparing new hires. For example, prestigious schools throughout the European Union have formed the Consortium of European Management Schools (CEMS) that facilitates a joint assessment program to measure student language preparation for group interaction (Bennett & Obenaus, 2003). Leading the way in Asia, Singapore recently implemented the Scholastic Aptitude Test while other assessments for university admissions and placement, such as the English Qualifying Examination and the Graduate Management Admissions Test with its Analytical Writing Assessment are now entrenched there. Like the CEMS initiative in Europe, a large business school in Singapore joined some US business schools in offering case-based performance assessments to provide feedback and quantify student improvement. In conjunction with this, Singaporean and US faculty began a conversation that reawakened questions about whether communication effectiveness can be evaluated consistently across borders. If it is important to evaluate the preparedness of students for the global workplace, then it is desirable that evaluators around the world share judgments of quality, is it not? Evaluators of such tests as IELTS or GMAT are given descriptors and training that do

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not vary between countries, on the assumption that a judgment of writing quality from an evaluator in one country will be equivalent to one made by an evaluator with the same disciplinary focus in another. We question whether this assumption is justified.

We know that within countries teams of evaluators rate consistently; indeed, such has come to be expected when there is sufficient training on a scoring scheme with set of benchmark writing samples. But even with rigorous training, research shows that across countries evaluation teams apply the same scoring scheme differently (Purves, 1992). Indeed, some dismiss the goal of evaluating consistently across borders, believing that such attempts are reductive and deterministic, and that they gloss over the fact that any group is highly idiosyncratic (Zamel, 1997; Kubota, 1999; Siegel, 1997). Others suggest that rather than attempting to apply the same evaluative schemes across groups, evaluation might in some way acknowledge each group's unique cultural contexts and anticipate that certain competencies may be valued to a greater degree in some contexts than in others (Atkinson, 1997; Carson, 1998; Ramanathan & Kaplan, 1996a, 1996b).

If we agree that evaluation is an important aspect of programs intended to prepare individuals to communicate effectively in the global workplace, then we need to compare our judgments of quality to explore issues of consistency. Might consistency in evaluation across borders be achieved if evaluators shared a professional, disciplinary focus and pedagogical imperatives, such as business school faculty training soon-to-be hires for the workplace?

Purpose

This study revisits the issue of writing evaluation across countries but with a much narrower focus than the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) study (described below). We focused on teams of faculty evaluators in business schools who were responsible for training upper-level university students, or soon-to-be new hires for the workplace. One team of evaluators worked at a major business school in Singapore, the other at a top-tier business school in the Midwestern US. Much like the IEA study, our teams of evaluators were trained under the very same protocol. Moreover, since our concern focused on preparing business students for the workplace, we employed scenarios as assessment prompts that required students to respond to workplace writing tasks. We evaluated responses, which had already been scored holistically, using analytical tools that were developed specifically for business education (Rogers & Rymer, 2001). Our primary intent was to explore whether evaluators who shared a disciplinary focus and many pedagogical goals, but who lived and worked in two quite different cultural contexts, would apply these targeted tools differently in any way. As reported in the Results section, the correlative data we obtained via the holistic and analytical evaluations led us to conduct a series of textual analyses of several sub-samples, including of responses where we discovered quite dramatic inter-team disagreement.

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Literature review

The research addresses questions generated by prior studies on the use of analytical tools across groups, genre and countries. It also extends what we know about textual and contextual matters that influence evaluators' decisions regarding quality.

Using analytical tools across groups, genre & countries
By requiring evaluators to make decisions about particular features--rather than the composition as a whole as for holistic evaluation--analytical tools have long been viewed as a way to identify linguistic and rhetorical features affecting evaluators' judgments (Connor, 1990; Lloyd-Jones, 1987; Rogers, 1994). So it is not surprising that analytical tools have been developed and used to compare writing evaluation across groups, genre, and countries, with some failure and some success.

For the International Study of Written Composition, a highly ambitious ten-year study sponsored by the IEA, evaluators scored a variety of writing samples (e.g., letter of advice, narrative writing, and argumentative writing) written by thousands of children (ages 12, 16, and 18) from 14 different countries (Purves & Takala, 1982; Gorman, Purves, & Degenhart, R. E., 1988; Connor, 1990). For this massive cross-national evaluation, an analytic scoring scheme was developed to facilitate comparisons of quality, content, organization, style, lexical and grammatical features, spelling and orthographic conventions, as well as handwriting and neatness. (Purves, Gorman, & Takala, 1988). In the end, comparison across borders was not achieved, leaving Purves to conclude quite boldly that "the study ended in failure" (Purves, 1992).

Evaluating only the persuasive essays in the IEA study written by students from three English-speaking countries, Britain, New Zealand, and the US, Connor experienced more success. Quantifiable scales were found to be reliable, to isolate features that contributed to overall quality, and to enable detailed comparisons among linguistic and rhetorical features used by students from these three English-speaking countries. For example, compared with British and New Zealanders, US writers used less data, wrote in a less passive and nominalized style, and demonstrated a preference for colloquial and interactive features (Connor & Lauer, 1988; Connor & Biber, 1988). As Connor concluded, these results have implications for teaching persuasive writing (Connor, 1990).

More recently, Rogers and Rymer (2001) developed analytical tools to bridge two quite different types of writing in an attempt to provide feedback to students entering MBA programs. Their tools for evaluating task fulfillment, coherence, reasoning units, and error interference were originally designed to diagnose MBA applicants' writing skills using the essays written for the GMAT Analytical Writing Assessment as a way to help these new entrants understand how writing strengths and weakness might impact their performance on the quite different kind of writing they would be required to produce for their MBA studies. In other words, these analytical tools were intended to bridge contexts, identifying fundamental traits of writing that were significant for two quite different types of writing--the essay on the one hand and various written responses to

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management cases on the other. In addition to bridging genres, Rogers and Rymer's (2001) research also demonstrated that the tools can be employed across two quite different US business school contexts, a top-tier elite business school and a mainstream school, leading them to invite researchers to explore whether the tools might be employed meaningfully by evaluators in two quite different cultural contexts.

Taken together, this research suggests that while it may not be possible to develop instruments that can be applied consistently across many genre, age groups, and nationalities, it is possible to develop analytical tools targeting various disciplinary or professional groups. Rogers and Rymer's (2001) work suggests that evaluators in different US contexts but with the same disciplinary and professional focus share values regarding writing quality in relationship to task, coherence, reasoning, and errors. Would this hold true across countries? We know from Connor's (1990) research that analytical tools focusing on a particular type of writing provide useful comparative data across different English-speaking countries. One question for this research then was to investigate if Rogers and Rymer's (2001) analytical tools for business writing would also yield reliable and meaningful cross-country comparisons, particularly in relationship to evaluation.

Influences on evaluation

Research further shows that evaluators are influenced most by content development, including Western forms of argument that are unfamiliar to non-native speakers of English. Disciplinary expectations also play a role in differing evaluator perceptions.

As research has shown for some time, of all the writing characteristics of interest to evaluators, the nature of the content has an impact on both holistic and analytic assessment of effectiveness. For example, Harris (1977) found a tendency for teachers to give the most weight to content and organization when evaluating student essays. In a follow-up study involving a larger sample of argumentative essays and more systematic research design, however, Freedman (1977; 1979a & b) found content to be the most significant influence on evaluators' holistic scores. Using a four-point holistic scale, evaluators were influenced by content (the development and logical presentation of ideas) first, then organization (order, transitioning, and paragraphing), and to a lesser degree sentence structure and mechanics (usage and punctuation). "The difference between the average score given papers strong in content versus the average score given papers weak in content was 1.06," Freedman reported (1977, p.163). Sometime later, Breland and Jones (1984) reconfirmed this conclusion.

In a series of studies Connor and Lauer identified a number of content variables as useful for predicting the overall quality of student persuasive writing, such as the quantity and types of persuasive appeals (Connor, 1990; Connor & Lauer, 1985, 1988) and audience awareness (Connor, 1987, 1990). Related to this they found that non-native speakers of English did not score as well as native speakers on an analytic tool based on Toulmin's requirements for the development of an argument (e.g. how to formulate an effective claim, how to use data to support that claim, how to use warrants to link the data to the claim). Building on their work, Ferris (1994) showed that native

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speakers were more inclined to produce counterarguments, another aspect of Toulmin's argumentation, than non-native speakers. Like Connor and Lauer, he concluded that these differences stemmed in part from the fact that non-native speakers were writing from a different discoursal and rhetorical framework (perhaps attributed to differing rhetorical conventions in their native languages) than native speakers (Ferris, 1994; Connor, 1990, 1987; Connor & Lauer, 1985, 1988).

This research recalls Shepherd and O'Keefe's (1984) work on reader adaptation. They found that some types of content seemed to be more appealing to readers than other types of content. "Constructing an effective message is not a matter of generating just any message to fit some abstract pattern," they concluded, " but rather of exploiting the information available in the situation to construct the most effective specific appeal" (1984, p. 151). As readers, we might expect evaluators to be influenced in one way or another by the extent to which the writing is adapted to the particular concerns, interests, and perhaps even cultural experience of the evaluators.

In addition to differences between native and non-native speakers, an established stream of research illustrates that social contexts of writing and disciplinary experience impact expectations for writing (e.g., Bazerman, 1988; Bizzell, 1982; Herrington, 1985; McCloskey, 1987; Nystrand, 1989; Swales, 1998). Studies investigating writing in a wide range of disciplines, from engineering to literature, from biology to English composition, show that different disciplines have different expectations for writing. Looking at classroom interactions, Herrington (1985) and Doheny-Farina (1986) showed that values, language, thought processes, and genre expectations were evident in discussions of content. Observing the discourse of three academic communities, each organized on a different floor in a small, three-floor university building, Swales (1998) found unique discourse particulars stemming from the specializations of each group.

Research also demonstrates that expectations for writing vary with disciplinary focus in the professional world. Written rhetoric is guided by certain workplace conventions involving issues, ideas, and arrangements (see also Brown & Herndl, 1986; Paradis, Dobrin, & Miller, 1986; Rogers, 1989; Winsor, 1996, 1999). This research suggested to us that the business communication focus of the prompts, evaluation tools, and faculty evaluators might influence our evaluation in some way. Since our teams of evaluators shared a disciplinary focus and obligation to prepare the respondents for the workplace, perhaps we would find more agreement than resulted from the IEA study, despite that fact that our teams crossed cultures.

In the aftermath of the IEA study, Purves (1992) stated he saw no particular need for more research on scoring, prompt development, or the merits of different scoring schemes, yet he expressed continuing curiosity about how evaluators' perceptions color their judgments. People in the arts and in sports, he concluded,

> trust the judgments only so far as they trust the jury. In many fields jurors go through extensive training. In writing assessment, the training tends to be about average and in writing research it tends to be minimal.

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> No matter how extensive or thorough it may be, the rating is still a perception, a subjective estimate of quality (p. 118).

For some time the notion that a text itself is autonomous and can be judged against some absolute standard or template has been rejected. Meaning exists, Raymond (1982) explained, "not exclusively or even primarily in the text itself, but in the several marriages each text makes with the minds of its individual readers" (p. 400; see also Gere, 1980). Given this, Raymond argues that the chief value of training evaluators may be less to achieve inter-rater reliability and more to prompt them to examine their assumptions and to arrive at agreements about what is important and unimportant in writing for their consistencies. Consensus reached at one institution, he concluded, will and ought to vary from the consensus reached at another institution (Raymond, 1982).

Speaking of the Singaporean context specifically, Chee (1996) reminds us the while English competency is high among university students in Singapore and the US and while English is the language of instruction, there are differences that may impact evaluators' perceptions of quality:

> Writing is fundamentally a social process, and as such, it is influenced by the philosophical foundations and value systems of the society in which it is grounded. In Singapore the medium of instruction is English while many of the values that underlie Singaporean society and education derive from Chinese, Malay and Indian culture (p. 35).

These streams of research suggest that content development and related issues of native/non-native language background, disciplinary and professional experience, and individual perception impact evaluation. Therefore, we might expect to observe some of these issues coloring the conclusions of the Singaporean and US evaluation teams in our study, even though the teams were uniformly trained, used the same analytical tools and scoring protocol, and evaluated the very same writing samples. This prompted several questions for our study:

- Would those analytical tools most closely tied to content issues (the task fulfillment and reasoning units tools, in this case) have more impact on Singaporean and US evaluator judgments than tools tied to organization (coherence tool), sentence structure, and mechanics (error interference tool)?
- Would the disciplinary focus of the tools (designed for business training) and of our evaluation teams (business communication faculty) impact inter-team agreement?
- Would national differences between the Singaporean and US evaluation teams impact the evaluation in any way? Would rhetorical strategies be affected by variables such as power distance realized in tone or linguistic strategies of directness / indirectness?

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Background to the current study

Since this core sample was part of an assessment program intended to provide students with feedback on their skills in business writing, faculty evaluators at the Singaporean school had previously scored all the responses holistically. The holistic evaluation team included one of the authors, who was a visiting professor at the Singaporean site with a full-time appointment at the Midwestern school which was home to one of our evaluation teams in the later study. Holistic scoring procedures involved evaluator training, blind scoring of each response by at least two evaluators, and standard controls to insure a high degree of inter-rater reliability similar to those used by Educational Testing Service to holistically score writing performance tests like the GMAT Analytical Writing Assessment. Later in our research process, the holistic scores on the responses became valuable to check the validity of our analytical scores.

Also of interest here is that fact the holistic scoring conducted in Singapore showed no significant improvement in mean score between the responses written prior to and after the business communication course. Furthermore, many students showed a decrease in holistic score between pre-assessment and post-assessment. This perturbing finding, which initially prompted this study, raised two questions: Would analytical scoring reveal differences between the pre and post assessments? Moreover, would differences be revealed via analytical evaluation by a more experienced team of evaluators in a different cultural context?

Method

In a nutshell, our investigation involved analytical scoring (blind condition) by two teams of evaluators, a team in Singapore and one in the US, of responses to two comparable workplace scenarios by upper-level business students at a major university in Singapore. These scores were compared with previously recorded holistic scores, which had been assessed in Singapore as described above. Subsequent to our analysis of holistic and analytical scoring data, we also conducted a series of textual analyses. Taken together, these analyses provided both statistical and textual data. Below we describe the nature of the responses comprising our samples, the respondents who wrote them, and the Singaporean and US evaluation teams. A review of our analyses concludes this section.

Core sample and holistic evaluation

The core sample for this study consisted of 468 written responses comprising two responses from 234 upper-level business students at the Singaporean site of this study. These students wrote one response before and another shortly after they had taken a business communication course. The sample represents all responses from the 234 students, out of 646 originally tested, for whom the post-assessment score differed from the pre-assessment score by 2 (of 6) scoring levels, up or down. This method was used in preference to a random sample as we were most interested in those students who showed appreciable change in writing ability rather than those whose writing showed only minor changes. As was found for the entire cohort, the difference between mean

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scores for post-assessment and pre-assessment in this sample was not significant (at $p<.05$). This indicates that, surprisingly, a student whose writing style was significantly different following the course was as likely to get a lower score in the post assessment as a higher one. Table 1 shows the holistic scores of this group.

Table 1
Holistic scores of pre and post assessment responses

	Pre-test	Post-test	Increase
Whole group (N= 613)*	3.37	3.48	0.11
Sample (n = 234)	3.13	3.34	0.21

* Excludes those respondents who missed either test

Respondents
The respondents were upper-level business and accountancy undergraduates taking a business and managerial communication course at the university in Singapore. This population was representative of the university business school's student body and Singapore as a whole. Although precise figures on the ethnic composition of the university are not available due to university policy, Singapore itself is composed of three major ethnic groups: ethnic Chinese (76.5%) Malays (13.8%), Indians (8.1%), with other ethnic groups comprising 1.6% of the population.

English is an official language in Singapore and is the medium of government and commerce, and as such it is a first or second language for the younger generation. All students in Singapore receive their primary and secondary education through English-medium education, and are expected to pass the A-level examination in English during their final year of high school. Those students whose A-level scores fall in the lower range, as well as foreign students, sit for a test during university enrollment and receive English proficiency assistance in their first year if necessary. English is a fully indigenized language in Singapore, and although the majority of Singaporeans have a mother tongue other than English, government policy since independence has been successful in ensuring that the generation from whom our sample was drawn are fully bilingual.

Singaporean and US evaluation teams
The Singaporean team consisted of seven evaluators, including one of us; the US team also included one of us and totaled four. All the evaluators had experience teaching business communication ranging from 2 to 20 years, including experience in giving feedback on various kinds on student writing. All the evaluators were graduates with experience in teaching communication in business, engineering or education faculties of degree or diploma-granting post-secondary institutions (universities or Singaporean Polytechnics). The Singaporean and US evaluation teams differed in experience of analytical evaluation using these tools. All the US evaluators had over a decade of experience with holistic and analytical scoring including research activities used to develop the analytical tools; all US team members had used these tools for student consultations and teaching (see Rogers & Rymer, 2001). By contrast, although some of

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the evaluators in Singapore were familiar with the analytical tools, which had been introduced in conjunction with their school's holistic assessment program, none had experience using them for systematic evaluation prior to this study.

The Singaporean and US teams were also culturally distinct. The Singaporean team included 4 locally born staff; 2 Australians, both resident in Singapore (including one of the authors); and 1 Austrian-born long-time local resident. This team is typical of the Singaporean university system, which employs a high proportion of foreign staff. By contrast, the US team was comprised of Caucasian Americans, all US-born. Except for the authors, all the evaluators were paid for their professional services in this evaluation.

Analytical scoring

For this study the core sample of 468 responses were scored by Singaporean and US teams of evaluators using four analytical tools: task fulfillment, coherence, reasoning units, and error interference (Rogers & Rymer, 2001). To insure that the analytical tools were uniformly administered by the Singaporean and US evaluation teams, the authors and one of the US evaluators who was highly experienced with analytical scoring, developed an Analytical Scoring Protocol (see Appendix) based on literature for analytical scoring and practices that have developed in conjunction with assessment programs in major business schools. Important protocol specifications included insuring that the pre- and post-responses be scored intermittently and randomly following traditional procedures for blind scoring and inter-rater reliability. During the analytical scoring we also made an effort not to discuss which scenarios were used for the pre- and the post-assessments, although the authors and some of the Singaporean evaluators knew this information, as they were involved in the holistic scoring.

For the analytical scoring process, all the evaluators, including the authors, were blind to the holistic scores that had been previously awarded. Once the protocol was agreed upon, there was no communication between the evaluating teams or the authors until the scoring was completed, which took each team several scoring sessions occurring over several weeks.

Sub-samples and follow-up analyses

As described in the Results section that follows, the analytical scores of the Singaporean and US evaluation teams revealed both similarities and differences. In order to learn more about the differences between teams of evaluators, we conducted follow-up analyses of three sub-samples: a diversity sample, a task sample, and an outlier sample.

The diversity sample consisted of responses from the core sample that had received widely different scores from the Singaporean and US evaluation teams. Totaling 59 responses (16 from the pre-assessment and 43 from the post-assessment), this sub-sample was limited to responses with inter-team scoring differences of two scoring levels and above on any of the four tools.

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We, the authors, independently evaluated this diversity sample with the following question in mind: What features of these responses might explain the differences in the analytical scores awarded by the Singaporean and US evaluation teams? We began with quick, independent readings without knowledge of the either the holistic or the analytical scores, each taking notes during the individual reading process. Upon comparing notes, we agreed that the responses had a lot of similarities (e.g., a "bottom line" structure or an introduction providing the aim and layout of the content to follow), leaving us to wonder why the Singaporean and US teams had evaluated them so differently.

Therefore we followed up with a second independent reading of the diversity sample, this time with knowledge of all the scores. Following this reading we agreed that the differing scores between the Singaporean and US evaluation teams might have some relationship to specific rhetorical or linguistic features sometimes associated with communicative tone (e.g., hedging, pronoun use, and overall directness), but we could not find clear conclusions (e.g., the Singaporean evaluators reward hedging).

To further explore content-related tone and other possible explanations for the inter-team scoring differences, our next step was to examine, as a separate sub sample, those responses that the Singaporean team scored high on task. The inter-team scoring differences were most extensive on the task tool: 145 of the 234 pre-assessment responses and 182 of the post-assessment responses were given higher scores on task by the US team, with the mean difference in score 0.4 and 0.9 (on the 1-6 scale) respectively. We decided, therefore, to concentrate on the task tool, as this was the most significant in terms of inter-team discrepancy. As a first step it was necessary to identify what the Singapore team valued in terms of task, so we selected a 'task sample' to answer this question.

The task sample consisted of all those responses that Singapore evaluators scored highest on the task tool, with mean scores of 5.5 and above (on a six-point scale with 6 being the highest possible score). We found such seven responses from the core sample of 468 responses. Looking at these responses independently, we found that there was a similarity in the type of reasoning employed, which was not entirely surprising since the reasoning tool is known to correlate highly with task (Rogers & Rymer, 2001). Indeed, these responses presented the information their superior had requested in the scenario from an assumption of weakness--i.e. that the firm was at risk of 'losing out' unless perceived weaknesses were remedied or concealed from competitors. This observation will be expanded below.

Following from the above, we pulled a third outlier sample consisting of those responses deemed to be 'outliers' on the basis of task alone. These were responses where the US scores exceed the Singapore scores (or vice versa) by 2 scoring levels in the pre-assessment (8 responses), and in the post-assessment where Singapore scores are higher by 2.5, or US scores by 3 levels (6 responses). Using our process of independent readings with notes and subsequent discussion, we focused this reading on

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task. Analyses of this third sample strengthened our view that differences in framing was the principal distinguishing feature between responses favored by US evaluators compared to those which gained approval from the Singaporean evaluators. US-favored responses were noticeably less defensive in focus and spoke from a standpoint of maintaining strength, rather than avoiding weakness.

The results of our textual analysis follow the statistical results described below.

Results of quantitative analysis

In this study we hoped to understand where the two evaluation teams differed, and how the teams conceptualized the tools. We also hoped to cast some light on the finding that prompted this study – that holistic scoring by Singaporean evaluators suggested no improvement in students' writing ability following a Business Communication course at the Singapore site. Would the analytical approach reveal improvement not captured by holistic scoring, and if so on which tool? Would the American team confirm the finding of no improvement, or if not where and why would disagreement arise?

To provide an empirical starting point for our textual analysis, we looked for degree of change in each evaluation team's scores between pre-assessment and post-assessment, and compared the mean scores between teams for each test on each tool. We also looked for inter-team correlations on tool scores (to see areas of agreement and areas of discrepancy) and intra-team correlations between tools as a means of understanding how the tools were conceptualised. The tests used were independent sample t-tests for ordinal claims and Pearson correlations for information on how the tools were conceptualized by the evaluators.

Means scores on analytical tools: Singapore & US
Scoring was completed with inter-rater reliabilities for scoring on the four tools in the range of 91-96% for the Singapore team and 94-97% for the US team. Although there was substantial disagreement between teams, the intra-team reliability at both sites was high, suggesting that the inter-team discrepancies were due to stable systematic factors rather than random error. A summary of mean scores by both teams can be seen in Table 2 below.

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Table 2
Mean Pre-assessment /Post-assessment Scores on Analytical Tools

Tool	Site	Pre-test	Post-test	Increase
	Singapore	3.01	3.10	0.09
Task	*US*	3.43	3.99	0.56**
	Difference in Means	0.42**	0.89**	
	Singapore	3.55	3.58	0.03
Coherence	*US*	3.48	3.88	0.4**
	Difference in Means	0.07	0.30**	
	Singapore	3.38	3.37	- 0.01
Reasoning Units	*US*	3.46	3.84	0.38**
	Difference in Means	0.08	0.47**	
	Singapore	3.81	3.86	0.05
Error Interference	*US*	4.23	4.32	0.09
	Difference in Means	0.42**	0.46**	

**Significant at p< 0.01 (two tailed) n=234 (n=232 US post test)

In line with the original holistic scores, comparisons of pre- and post-assessment scores on the analytical tools revealed no statistically significant movement on any of the four analytical tools--task, coherence, reasoning units and error interference--when scored by the Singapore team of evaluators. The largest difference among the Singaporean team between pre-and post-assessments was on task, which is intended to measure a writer's ability to correctly identify and appropriately address the purpose of writing. On the six-point scale, however, the mean increase was only 0.09 on task, so we cannot claim that progress in this aspect has been demonstrated by the ratings given by Singapore team. Increases on the other three tools were even smaller, with the mean score on the reasoning units lower in the post-assessment than in the pre-assessment. Confirming the holistic scores, analytical scoring by Singaporeans showed no significant change between the pre- and post-assessment.

By contrast, the same responses, scored by the US team showed statistically significant progress on task, coherence and reasoning units, although the difference in error interference scores between tests was not significant. Furthermore, the scores given by the US team were significantly higher than those of the Singapore team on two tools in the pre-assessment (task and error interference) and all four tools in the post-assessment.

Correlations: holistic with analytic scores
Correlations were calculated between the four tools for each evaluation team and between the evaluation teams. The correlation between analytical scores and holistic scores were also calculated.

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Correlations of analytical scores with holistic scores (the latter only assessed in Singapore, prior to this study) reveal that for both teams, task followed by reasoning units correlates most closely with the original holistic assessment. Correlations between task and holistic scores were in the region of .44 to .52, and between reasoning units and holistic scores 0.31 to .49. This was true in pre and post assessments, for both teams of evaluators. The weakest correlation was between holistic scores error interference (below 0.3 in all cases). However, all correlations were significant at $p<.01$, which indicates that the tools are functioning as they should be (Rogers & Rymer, 2001).

Correlations between analytical tools

Correlations within each team are suggestive of the way these traits are conceptualized by evaluators. For both teams, highest between-tool correlations were between task and reasoning units (.785 and .706 - for Singapore team pre- and post-assessment respectively, .758 and .734 for the US team) followed by coherence-reasoning units and task-coherence. Perceptions of task fulfillment are apparently influenced heavily by perceptions of the persuasive strategy. This point was important in our later finding that persuasive 'focus' was the feature that created discrepancy between the evaluation teams.

Correlations between the two teams are shown in Table 3. The highest correlation is between reasoning unit scores as measured by the two teams in the pretest. Disagreement was again evident on the task tool, as Singapore task scores showed higher correlation with the US reasoning units and coherence than with the US task score.

Furthermore, the correlation between task scores is considerably lower in the post-assessment than in the pre-assessment. (.167, down from .392). This parallels the greater number of discrepant inter-team task scores already noted. Reasoning unit scores in the post-assessment, too, showed a large drop in inter-team correlation compared with the pre-assessment (.258, down from .555). As task and reasoning units correlate highly, this suggested that the explanation for the inter-team disagreement on task scores might be found in the reasoning and argumentation of the responses.

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Table 3
Pearson Correlations: Singapore vs. US Inter-team

			Singapore			
			Task	Coherence	Reasoning	Error
US	Task	Pre-test	.392**	.264**	.368**	.126
		Post-test	.167*	.084	.100	.054
	Coherence	Pre-test	.449**	.443**	.404**	.228**
		Post-test	.322**	.334**	.345**	.286**
	Reasoning	Pre-test	.552**	.481**	.555**	.265**
		Post-test	.236**	.231**	.258**	.174**
	Error	Pre-test	.147*	.230**	.209**	.251**
		Post-test	.147*	.138*	.191**	.285**

** Correlation is significant at p <0.01 level (2 tailed)
* Correlation is significant at p <0.05 (2 tailed)

In summary, the students in our sample were consistently rated higher in writing skills by US rather than Singaporean evaluators. The results suggest that US evaluators found improvement following the Business Communication course, but Singapore evaluators did not, either before this study in the holistic scoring or in the analytical scoring used in this study. Furthermore, the discrepancy between evaluation teams was greatest in the area of task, and the gap widens in the post-assessment. The emerging picture was that students had acquired skills that were valued by the Americans, but not, apparently, by their Singaporean compatriots. The next step was to examine the texts themselves to arrive at a theory to explain this finding. This is discussed in the following section.

Results of textual analyses

Textual analyses revealed that varying framing strategies distinguished US-favored from Singapore-favored responses. Framing, in this case, was suggested in the implied relationship of the writer's organization with its external contacts (customers and competitors). An *internal* (or reactive) focus implies 'our competitors are a threat, we must remedy our defects to remain viable'. This perspective urges defensive reaction to perceived weaknesses, responsibility for contracts, and a need to protect the company reputation. It appears motivated primarily by fear of failure and need for validation from other parties.

Alternatively, an *external* (or proactive) focus may be employed. An external focus implies 'our company is a threat to our competitors. We have superior expertise to offer, but we need to show it'. This approach urges aggressive action to maximize the value of existing assets. The motivation underlying this form of appeal appears to be 'fear of being overlooked'.

Our analyses strongly show an internal focus is favored by evaluators in Singapore, whereas US evaluators show a preference for external framing. In the entire core

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sample respondents often used a mixture of these two strategies or little framing at all. Where there was a bias toward one focus, however, there was a corresponding imbalance in the task scores awarded by the different evaluation teams. Below, we shall provide some examples from the responses to illustrate this contrast.

Examples from the pre-assessment

In the pre-assessment, the respondent is writing as an assistant to his boss, who is the founder of a ball bearing manufacturing company. The respondent has to critique and strengthen his employer's argument, which is a sales pitch to another company using customer satisfaction as the selling point. As support, the boss has a PowerPoint slide that states that his company has a complaint rate of only 1 in 100 customers. This, he argues, equates to 99% satisfaction with his company's ball bearings. The respondent must identify the fallacy and suggest how the argument could be made stronger.

Internal framing for the pre-assessment

Notice in the Singaporean-favored response below, how the writer suggests a need to manage the customer's perceptions by rephrasing the number of complaints as a percentage rather than '1 out of 100' in order to make failure 'seem' less likely.

> 1.1 "I suggest that we use a percentage to represent 1 out of every 100 customers, as it may seem the chance of having ball bearing failures is more remote"

This response assumes that a 1% chance of failure is high and that failure of the product is therefore likely (the case included no information on industry standards). The use of 'may seem' implies the necessity to disguise the possible weakness of the product by clever wording.

In sample 1.2, internal focus necessitates that the writer to urge his manager to compensate for perceived vulnerability to criticism. The emphasis in the suggested amendment is to minimize the impact of the 1% failure rather than touting the 99% satisfaction.

> 1.2 'I feel that more evidence has to be produced to convince ABC motors that 99% of our customers are satisfied. We could include information from feedback forms completed by customers and evidence of follow-ups by customer service personnel….such fact would be more convincingly prove that IBI customer are indeed satisfied with our ball bearings (errors in original).

The implication in sample 1.2 is clearly that the customer (ABC Motors) might find the figure of 99% satisfaction difficult to believe, and will therefore require further evidence. From the necessity to 'convincingly prove' customer satisfaction it is likewise assumed that such satisfaction is in doubt. The writer further proposes to show evidence of 'follow ups' by customer service personnel, as though the customer might be unwilling to accept the CEO's word for this. While the 99% satisfaction is

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mentioned, it appears to be a fragile claim and is presented in terms of potential weakness in the firm's credibility, rather than as a selling point.

External framing for the pre-assessment
In US-favored responses, it can be seen that the writer perceives the firm to be in a position of strength with respect to the customer, as in sample 1.3 below.

> 1.3 'IBI has been in the business of producing motor parts for many years. Over the years, we had built up our reputation of producing reliable motor parts. Our customers now include major automobile manufacturers such as Nissan, Honda, Ford and many others. You could probably used this point to impress onto them the reliability of our products and our reputation.'

Here the reputation is established (for many years…. we had built up our reputation) credibility assumed (major clients named) and product quality assured (impress onto them the reliability of our products). This is a marked contrast to the 'internally focused' examples above, where the reputation is seen to be at risk, the customer's approval is eagerly sought and the product's possible unreliability must be concealed.

As may be seen in sample 1.4, externally focused responses project an image of confidence that internally focused arguments do not.

> 1.4 'We should also add depth to the presentation by focusing on the 'nitty gritty' and the details. As IBI provides quality products for a diversity of industries, the presentation could follow up with examples of [major clients]. Of course it would be advantageous if we could stress that ball bearings produced by IBI are suitable and reliable for the European as well as the Asian climate and IBI's standards would not be compromised.'

The information presented here reflects a position of strength. It is assumed that greater detail and increased transparency will add to the persuasive appeal – clients should be given details of production and clients. Strengths are emphasized – the writer notes that the bearings are suited for European as well as Asian climates. There is no suggestion that the firm's reputation may be threatened by greater frankness. This approach differs markedly from that shown in 1.1, which the Singaporean evaluators preferred, in which the writer is at pains to manipulate the perceptions of the customer, as closer examination appears threatening to the claim being made.

Examples from the Post-Assessment
In the post-assessment task, respondents were once more criticizing the argument of their boss. In this case, the boss has it in mind to scrap previously generous educational benefits which allowed extended study in top universities, in favor of shorter better-targeted courses at less prestigious institutions. This is due to the increasing costs, and the point that such generous benefits do not appear to guarantee loyalty. The respondent, put in the role of junior assistant, will be affected by the proposed change.

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The boss asks the respondent to draft a counter-argument to his proposal, and by so doing suggest ways in which his proposal might be strengthened.

Internal framing from the post-assessment
In post-assessment example 2.1, the writer attempts to assist his manager by critiquing the manager's argument in favor of scrapping educational benefits that had previously allowed employees to study at top business schools.

> 2.1 'It is of a common concept that traditional graduate studies, especially in top business schools around the world are more prestigious and more comprehensive. The degrees from shorter alternative graduate courses are likely to pale in comparison to those from traditional graduate studies… [you must] convince Ms. Wong and the other senior consultants that these alternative programs not only save costs and time, they are beneficial to the students as traditional programs'

The critique in 2.1 should help the manager refine his argument so as to convince 'Ms. Wong' and the other directors. The appeal rests entirely on the quality of the 'traditional programs', which the writer uses to make the point that employees denied educational benefits will be disappointed, and leave the firm. Unlike the 'external focus' examples cited below, there is no attempt to recognize the quality of the employees. The focus draws on organizational deficiencies-- the firm needs employees trained in top business schools to give the organization credibility. The *argumentum ad populum* in the first clause 'It is a common concept' suggests the writer's concept of the company within its competitive environment: it must be cautious of business norms in order to retain credibility among peers. The firm is perceived as shaped by its environment rather than as having a role in shaping it.

In excerpt 2.2, the writer attempts to counter the argument that less prestigious schools offer better-targeted non-degree courses that might be a more cost-effective method of training employees.

> 2.2 'You have also suggested that alternative programs offered by less-prestigious schools are generally cheaper and smarter. However, top business schools are well established and have a reputation for producing good students. Hence, students from the top schools may benefit more in their education. Furthermore, the certificates issued by the top business schools are well recognized as the public know that these schools provide a high standard and quality of education.'

As in example 2.1, here again the argument for cost-effectiveness is answered with an appeal to social credibility. The inference is that the firm will lose the approval of 'the public' if certificates from top business schools are not on display.

Another observation concerns the sentence 'students from top schools may benefit more from their education'. The appeal appears to be on the basis of benefit to the student, a 'social responsibility' rather than one made on strictly business criteria. This

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was evident in many of the Singapore-favored responses: the notion that the company had an obligation to deliver on a previously implied promise of education. This further reinforces the suggestion of weakness, as the employees are construed as unable to gain these benefits by other means than by appealing to the manager's pity.

As a side-note, it is perhaps worth noting the directness in example: 'You have suggested…' followed by explicit disagreement and a counter-argument. There is no hedging (e.g., 'it might be suggested…' or 'a possible counter-argument might be…'). Indeed, we noticed that the preferences of the evaluators did not seem to be markedly swayed by directness or indirectness; both evaluation teams seemed to tolerate a wide variety of tone.

External framing from the post-assessment
In externally focused responses, writers did not make lengthy reference to the quality of the major business schools or the possible loss of reputation that might be incurred with a switch to shorter courses. Instead, the persuasive appeal was based on the quality of graduates rather than the quality of the schools. This is to say that the best employees deserve the best education, or they may not join the firm as seen in sample 2.3 below.

2. 3 'A simple survey conducted recently by the firm showed that the most attractive benefit that consultants, especially the best applicants look for in our firm is our educational benefit….this educational benefit serves as a good recruitment point for us to attract the best graduates from each cohort. It is an even stronger motivator for those best people to reach the highest capacity….The suggestion to provide alternative programs that are less costly demeans their abilities.

Here the 'self-positioning' is slightly different from that in the pre-assessment responses favored by our US evaluators. Here the writer identifies with the employees with respect to the firm, whereas in the first assessment the writers identified with the firm with respect to other firms. The 'position of strength' therefore resides with the quality of those employees (among whom the writer is included).

In example 2.4, for example, consultants are seen as holding a degree of power over the firm: 'if they were to stop upgrading themselves…' It is further assumed that (a) the consultants presently maintain their education and (b) the company is at present competitive, but has the potential to become less so with the implementation of the decision.

2.4 'In order to cater to the needs of our customers, consultants need to upgrade themselves. If they were to stop upgrading because of the change in the benefit scheme, Transair will be in a disadvantageous position. We might not be able to provide better and more appropriate services to our customers. Transair will be less competitive in the industry as a result.'

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In example 2.4 the firm is portrayed as the loser, whereas in the Singapore-favored responses like 2.1 and 2.2, emphasis was on the potential personal loss to the employees.

While superficially similar, external and internal focus reflect contrasting views of the writer's in-group (the group on whose behalf the message is composed – in our study, the in-group comprises the company in the pretest and the employees in the post test). Internally focused reasoning is reactive, defensive, and under-confident. This form reflects a modest view of the company's value and a need for external validation of the in-group's value. External focus, however, reflects the writer's confidence in the in-group. While cooperation of another party might be required, the in-group does not require validation or confirmation of its product's value from the external source.

Discussion

Why did Singaporean and US evaluator preferences vary markedly? It might be expected that Singaporean evaluators would award higher marks to their own compatriots than would US evaluators. The local evaluators are more accustomed to local dialect features in written expression, and as instructors there is an obvious threat to professional pride from low performing students at the end of a course. Furthermore, the US university where our evaluation team was based is known as a 'prestige' school where high standards of writing are demanded of students. However, the expectation of 'local bias' was not borne out. In fact, the reverse appears to be the case: the American evaluators awarded the highest scores, and the difference between evaluation teams was more marked in the post-assessment, after the Singaporean respondents had taken business communication.

As the examples from our analyses show, national perspectives appear to have had a significant impact on evaluation, the Singaporean team favoring responses with an internal focus, the US team favoring an external perspective. Our analysis led us to investigate these perspectives via historical sources. In sharing the resulting descriptions below, we recognize that these are not static, but rather are perspectives that are constantly being negotiated, particularly in this time of global change and positioning.

National Perspectives Seen in the Responses

The Republic of Singapore is home to 3.38 million people. Since independence from Great Britain and separation from Malaysia in 1965, Singapore has moved from being an economic backwater to a showpiece of Asian capitalism. This prosperity is a great source of pride to Singaporeans but is seen by them as fragile and dependent on constant improvement to keep pace with the rest of the developed world. Many Singaporeans alive today know the reality of poverty and the need for struggle to avoid it. The proximity of less fortunate neighboring countries reinforces this knowledge.

As Singapore's first Prime Minister, now Senior Minister and elder statesman Lee Kuan Yew remarked recently in a speech to university students:

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> Much depends on our younger generation, your generation. Do you have the guts and gumption that your parents and grandparents displayed when they faced the stark choice of either working together to make Singapore succeed, or face the humiliation of failure, wishing we had never been ousted from Malaysia? Amid the comfort and affluence of present-day Singapore, do you feel that urge to stay ahead of the pack in order to maintain our lead? You have the advantage of building on the efforts of your elders: educational and economic opportunities among the best in the world, in terms of physical and social infrastructure, travel, education and work abroad to expand your horizons. They give you a precious advantage over others in the region. But the others are hungrier and more driven to get ahead (Lee, 2003).

Here we see the ideology that drives Singapore: Singapore is a nation that by virtue of its size is not a superpower and in the global economy is competing against larger nations. Singapore cannot hope to define the global economy, but must work to remain in control of its own destiny.

The United States, by comparison, is considerably more secure in its position as the world's remaining superpower. The diverse American population is loosely tied together by propositions in which they believe. In the near past the national ideology could be described as quite vague (Hart, Jennings, & Dixson, 2001); however, in the months after September 11, American discourse and the popularity of the administration's discourse seemed to bring the strength of this national ideology to the forefront. While some may argue that this recent manifestation reflects a darker side, the perspective is that of bringing 'light to the world'. In recent discourse, the world is presented as a follower, rather than a threat or a pack that must be outrun. An example of the 'national rhetoric' is seen in a recent presidential address:

> Americans are a resolute people who have risen to every test of our time. Adversity has revealed the character of our country, to the world and to ourselves. America is a strong nation, and honorable in the use of our strength. We exercise power without conquest, and we sacrifice for the liberty of strangers.
>
> Americans are a free people, who know that freedom is the right of every person and the future of every nation. The liberty we prize is not America's gift to the world, it is God's gift to humanity. (Bush, 2003)

Our purpose in this paper is not to comment on the merit of these worldviews, but to argue that this national mythos or familiar rhetoric shapes and reflects an underlying cultural bias toward a certain type of framing. In the case of Singaporean evaluators, the preference is for internal focus in reasoning: perceived flaws should be minimized or covered, lest they pose a threat. Reputation must be guarded, external validation and recognition sought. The in-group is construed as the 'underdog' in its relations with outside parties. Expected standards are set by others.

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US evaluators, by contrast, show a preference for framing that displays confidence. The necessity suggests a superior quality in order to gain a deserved reputation. Flaws in the in-group are seen as less significant than those of potential comparison groups and can be discussed frankly. Failure is regarded as a consequence of in-group inaction rather than of external threat. Standards are set by the in-group and are not challenged by comparison with outside parties.

This study suggests that the ideology above influenced the scoring process on the part of our evaluation teams. An American team showed a clear preference for those responses that attempted to persuade through an external focus, whereas a team of tutors in Singapore either penalized or failed to reward such an approach.

Although our focus has been on evaluator judgments, it is interesting to consider the student writing that began it. Do the higher scores awarded by the US team, and the lower scores from their own tutors, suggest that their persuasive strategies are more 'American'? We cannot make that claim based on this evidence. Firstly, it should be remembered that most students used a mixture of external and internal focus, with few showing a clear preference for one over the other. While the US task scores showed an increase between pre- and post-assessment that may point to learned behavior as an explanatory factor, the same phenomenon might also be explained by a difference in the tasks, such as the second task's requirement that the respondent speak against the company policy, rather than simply the boss's argument.

If there is transference of communication strategies between the countries, one might speculate that one reason would be in teaching materials. The business communication course at the Singapore site at the time of this study made use of Locker's (2000) *Business and Administrative Communication* as a prescribed text, with Guffey's (2000) *Business Communication, Process and Product* recommended for additional reference. As the Singapore market is small, there is little local material and in all subjects, US business practices and models tend to be held up as the desired standard. Thus, when students are taught American norms but assessed by local evaluators, there may well be a certain dissonance created between the styles of argument that are taught and those actually expected. A generational dimension may also be present: senior university staff in Singapore went through an education system that was substantially more British than the current one. This gradual shift may have generated a corresponding, subtle shift in preferred rhetorical styles.

One possibility for future further investigation into national perspectives is that of precisely when these perspectives begin to operate. Could it be, perhaps, that workplace socialization or maturity in Singapore society engenders a shift away from persuasive strategies that may be seen as arrogant or pushy? If there is a preference for external focus, is it a stable change that reflects a changing Singaporean mindset, or a reflection of inexperience that will change when the student cohort reaches the workforce and acquires 'real world' knowledge of communicative norms?

As for future research in this area, there are some interesting questions that at present lack an answer. Firstly, it is still unclear how the differing judgments of student

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writing were arrived at. Did evaluators 'reward' one type of focus or 'punish' the other? Secondly, although we have identified the phenomenon, we have no tool for assessing or quantifying it. While various tools (like the Rogers and Rymer 'reasoning units' tool) may be used to score reasoning strategy, they deal with judgments of quality rather than particular strategies.

Future research should also seek to replicate this finding with differing audiences. Do business managers share our evaluators' preferences? Do letters and memos in the business environment reflect the contrast of focus identified in this study?

Conclusion

This research suggests that analytical tools targeting a specific population and disciplinary focus can be quite consistently applied within evaluator groups but less so across evaluator groups even when the groups share a disciplinary focus and work in universities with comparable populations in English-speaking countries. Although the US and Singapore evaluation teams followed the same procedure and marked the same scripts, there were perceptible differences in mean scores awarded by the two teams, particularly in the post- assessment. The explanation for this may stem from different interpretations of the tool descriptors, different interpretations of the task requirements, or the greater experience of these tools among the US evaluators resulting in an increased willingness to award high scores. Against this view, however, it must be observed that both teams reported high levels of inter-rater reliability, suggesting that any error in the scoring was systematic rather than random. Inexperience or inability to apply the tools correctly would be likely to produce poor reliability and a wide range of interpretations of the tool descriptors, yet this did not occur. Our evidence suggests that interpretation was consistent within teams, if not between teams. Moreover, textual examination ruled out tone, directness, dialect features and error as significant factors, suggesting instead that the key determinant in discrepant evaluator judgments of task and reasoning across teams had something to do with how writers framed the information.

Generally, this study tends to bear out previous findings (Freedman, 1977, 1979 a & b) that content has the greatest impact on evaluators' scores. Error, non-native constructions and dialect features of Singapore English were not a major source of difference in evaluation judgments between Singapore and US evaluators. The source of discrepancy between evaluations appears to be judgments of quality of content, specifically related to the framing of persuasive appeals. However, judgments of quality of content are influenced by the national environment in which those judgments are made. It would be a mistake, we suggest, to assume that good persuasive writing is a stable entity between national contexts that reflect widely differing ideologies.

This result has implications for international assessments and teaching. It cannot be assumed that evaluators in different countries have the same expectations for the way content is developed or share the same interpretation of what it means for writers to fulfill an assigned task, even when these evaluators are given descriptors. One possible

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explanation may be the fact that evaluating content requires subjective judgments of 'acceptability' or 'disruption' for which evaluators may have different thresholds. Indeed, in this study we have seen that evaluators' judgments of quality were colored by what we came to call national perspective--Singaporean evaluators favored responses in which content took an internal focus with a 'we must be better' stance; US evaluators favored an external focus with a marketing, pro-active flair.

The notion that national perspective may impact evaluator judgments across borders recalls the suggestion made by Purves (1992) that "perception" plays a role in evaluation. Using targeted evaluation tools, a common sample, diverse evaluator groups, and comparative scoring data and textual analyses, we were able to observe different perspectives across evaluator groups, perspectives that were manifested in the way content was framed. The analytical tools developed by Rogers and Rymer (2001) provided a means of comparison, not simply of students' writing but also of evaluator judgments across borders, providing avenues for future research.

The importance of this line of research is twofold. Firstly, the dominance of English as a world business language creates a superficial similarity, but serves to mask underlying national differences. Can we assume that because two people have a language in common they will be persuaded by similar arguments or swayed by similar rhetorical strategies? Our research suggests not. While textbooks are replete with advice on intercultural situations, most of this centers on more obvious differences such as dress, greetings, attitudes toward time and so forth. Text-level differences are much harder to perceive and therefore to control, because such differences are subtle and harder to modify. If it is possible to identify an 'Organizational Voice' (Rogers 2003), but should we not also expect a 'National Voice'?

A second implication exists for educators. Like business, education is increasingly globalized. Universities conduct testing of international students to assess language skills and communicative competencies. Educators teach students how to communicate across borders. We suggest that it is desirable that tutors and evaluators seek to understand how their own national perspective colors their pedagogical judgments, as well as incorporating this understanding in teaching.

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Appendix

Arrangements for Analytical Scoring

John Morrow and Priscilla Rogers
University of Michigan Business School, August 2001

Preparing for Evaluator Training

1. Review the case(s) used to "prompt" the responses you're evaluating.

- Consider what is required to write a response that effectively meets the criteria in the analytical tools you're using for the evaluation--e.g. boss requested a critique of his argument and, secondarily, some suggestions for how it might be improved.
- List particular difficulties writers face when responding to the case(s)—e.g. giving your boss concrete suggestions for improving his argument, which is flawed, and at the same time saving his "face."

2. Select a set of "training samples" from the case responses. A set of samples should include responses that mirror the range of analytic scores and the variety of responses evaluators will encounter during the evaluation process. For example, a set of training samples might include responses (2 to 4 of each) that score:

1. high (4 and above) on all the analytical tools
2. low (3 and below) on all the analytical tools
3. high on Task but low on everything else
4. low on Error Interference but high on everything else
5. mixed, particularly responses receiving a mix of scores that seem to be recurring

Select additional samples as needed.

3. Score analytically the samples. Keep a key of the sample numbers and your analytic scores.

4. Number randomly each individual sample. Key here is assigning each sample a number that does not indicate any holistic or other grade it may have received prior to this analytical evaluation.

5. Cover/hide on all responses any information (e.g. holistic score; grade; name) that might influence the objectivity of the analytical scoring. For example, if there is a cover page including such information, it can be turned to the back and folded so that evaluators don't see it. Other information can be hidden with covering tape. It is *not* advised to permanently remove such information (via removing the cover page or using white out) from the response, as it can be easily lost.

6. Use 3 boxes for the evaluation, labelled: 1st read; 2nd read; DONE.

7. Prepare materials for each evaluator including:

- General Description of Analytical Scoring (may be distributed prior to training)
- Analytical Scoring Evaluation Procedures
- Sample responses for training

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- Case(s) used to "prompt" the responses
- Analytical Tools

Conducting evaluator training

1. Review briefly the desired outcome of the evaluation (e.g. efficiently yet rigorously produce reliable analytical scores on each response that can be reported to students and administrators, and that are useful for research).

2. Read the case(s) aloud and list together writer challenges. Reading aloud creates a group experience while insuring the care needed to fully "digest" the situation, characters, and tasks presented in the case(s). This aloud reading pays off in time savings later.

3. Read aloud each analytical tool and discuss how each tool might pinpoint strong and weak responses. Reading aloud is critical as it can help each evaluator apply each tool for what it actually *is* rather than what each evaluator *might assume it to be*. (There are many ways to evaluate coherence, for example). Reading aloud and together may help evaluators not only understand, but also begin to "own" the particular focus of each analytical tool.

Especially critical here is the "reader-writer" focus of each tool. In evaluating "error," for example, one might be to be influenced by the sheer number of errors. The Rogers/Rymer Error Interference Tool, however, prescribes that error be evaluated on the extent to which it interferes with the reader's ability to understand what the writer is trying to communicate and/or the extent to which errors may hurt the writer's credibility.

All the Rogers/Rymer tools present the writer-to-reader communication as central to the evaluation.

4. Score several training samples following the Analytical Scoring Evaluation Procedures. Compare scores, listing and discussing them. Repeat this with new samples until the group can score reliably (perhaps 4 or more times).

During the actual scoring, this training process may need to be repeated intermittently to insure scoring accuracy and inter-rater reliability.

Note: If strong differences of opinion, even conflicts, arise during the training then the training is probably going well. High inter-rater reliability requires thorough group analysis of the case(s) and tools. It is expected that disagreements will emerge. At the same time, it is important to reach consensus on the nature of the task (primary and secondary) as it relates to the receiver's expectations in the case(s).

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CHANGE COMMUNICATION

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While SDWT self-directed work teams (SDWTs) result in benefits for organizations, what happens to managerial communication strategies and an authoritarian style of workplace decision-making as a firm changes to SDWTs? Do subordinates feel a part of the SDWT, and do they recognize changes in the managers' communication? As Watson (2001) suggests, making statements about change is easy; getting employees to buy into and have enthusiasm for those changes is hard. Grenier (1988) in his research of companies utilizing SDWT found that managers were not always successful in letting go of the reins. Managers often say they are going to give control to their subordinates, but keep some vestiges of managerial control, greatly affecting the change implementation.

This research project collected data about team communication and communication of organizational information within the workplace during the change from traditional authoritarian, top-down leadership to SDWT in different areas of a manufacturing plant.. Both the management groups and the subordinate groups provided their perceptions of changes that occurred in communication.

Background to the Study

Many researchers have studied change communication. Schmidt and Finnigan (1993) demonstrated that teams must be kept informed and must communicate effectively to achieve and modify their goals, as well as to continually improve performance. Lewis (1999) assessed responses of participants within the change process to attitudinal statements regarding communication behaviors and tactics, noting that identifying "ideal" sets of behaviors would allow for modifications in specific situations. As more communication occurred throughout the change process, team members appeared more motivated, a characteristic that Barker (1999) also observed. Lamude and Scudder (1995) found that managers were more likely to motivate subordinates when using more participative influence strategies such as appeals. Increases in levels of communication within a team can result in increases in innovativeness according to research by Monge, Cozzens, and Contractor (1992). In the workplace, SDWT members also showed more task focus when less authoritative communication strategies are used (Yukl, Kim, & Falbe, 1996).

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These research efforts presented interesting and important analyses; however, none specifically examined perceptions of communication behavior between managers and work groups from both perspectives over the implementation period. In the current study we wanted to find out how team members changed in reaction to the supervisors changing their styles of communication from authoritarian to team-oriented.

Team communication—that is, information shared by team members to conduct daily activities—is important to team development. A collaborative environment requires a positive communication relationship characterized by trust, mutual respect, and openness between superiors and subordinates as well as between co-workers. Work teams are thought to support cooperation and help foster a climate characterized by fairness, openness, and trust as the teams place increased emphasis on co-worker communication. Clampitt and Downs (1993) found that employees believed effective communication enhanced their productivity. In particular, those workers who needed personal feedback performed better when such communication was offered. In their study of two company's SDWT effectiveness, Spreitzer, Cohen, and Ledford (1999) note that employees perceived communication training, meeting effectiveness training, and team-building training as related to overall success of the teams. It is generally assumed that groups with greater levels of cooperation encourage higher levels of both informal and formal communication. Cooperation is necessary to link interdependent functions together and assure their contribution to the overall goals of the organization. Greater interdependence requires a greater cooperation of effort (Pinto & Pinto, 1990). Specifically, the high cooperation team exhibits greater propensity to engage in communication for brainstorming, obtaining project-related information, reviewing progress, and receiving information on their performance. This finding may be due in part to higher trust existing among cooperating project teams. As work teams develop, they take on greater responsibility, which leads to greater interdependence with increased need for information sharing.

In addition to team communication, organizational information—that is, general information about business performance and organizational activities—is believed to contribute to SDWT success. Besser (1996) found important indicators at Team Toyota were "policies that promoted feelings of equity among employees, open communications, strong human resources department; bureaucratic flexibility, job security, and individual importance" (p. 87). Team Toyota has three components for open communication: (1) information available to management is communicated to all employees, (2) communication freely moves upward in the organization, and (3) employees view the information they receive as honest and trustworthy. In a 1996 study of the effectiveness of self-managed work teams, Cohen, Ledford and Spreitzer found that communication of organizational information, as an element of team design, was positively related to self-managed team performance. Fairhurst and Wendt (1993) suggest that communication relationships within the organization and between teams are critical to the success of team-based programs. Also, a survey conducted by Allen and Brady (1997), indicated that the quality of information received from top management was noted as a contributing factor to team-based activities. Watson's (2001) study findings were different for the short and long term in that he found communication changes happened less in the short term and more in the

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long term. Together these findings concerning SDWT interactions both within the team and with managers suggest that supportive organizational communication from top management contribute to successful team outcomes.

The basic argument for focusing on both team communication and organizational information is that both are vital forms of information and will affect team cooperation and development. Therefore, we expect that both organizational information and team communication would have positive effects on the willingness of team members to participate in team activities.

Purpose of the study

Our research site was a large (over 800 employees) unionized plant operated by a major aluminum products manufacturer located in the Southwestern United States. This company is the largest and most desirable employer in a small town (less than 20,000 residents), with limited turnover in the workforce. The work environment, a highly stratified system, included managers, support staff, supervisors, foremen, and lead people, with highly centralized communications and decision processes.

As the company implemented the change from autocratic to team-based decision making, the multiple communication changes occurred. The research project focused upon the initial 18-month period of SDWT implementation. We were interested in finding out what changes in communication resulted from the shift from managerial decisions to team decisions following organizational change. We believe that changes of communication forms used by managers and team members as organizational change occurs serve as indicators of optimum SDWT development. The company in our study believed SDWTs would improve the organization climate, increase the output of the workers, and reduce turnover.

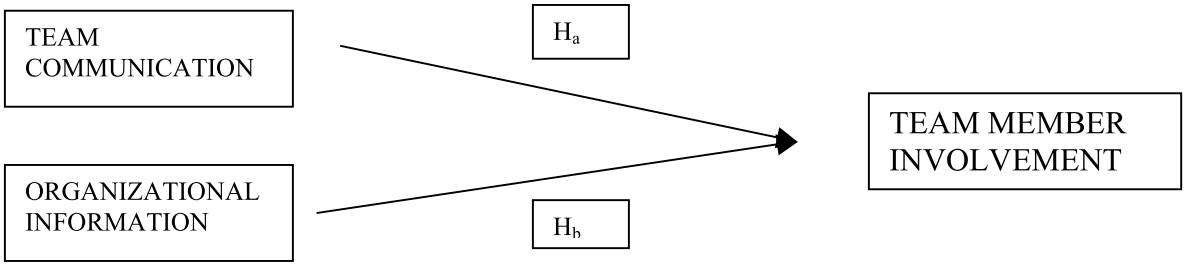
The hypotheses that we tested included the following:

> H_a: In the SDWT environment, ratings of team communications by the employees will be positively related to a team member's willingness to participate in team activities.
>
> H_b: In the SDWT environment, ratings of organizational information will be positively related to a team member's willingness to participate in team activities.

Our model (Figure 1) shows that managers take on new forms of communication, both when providing team communication and giving organizational information. Both communication forms are examined for their effect on "team member involvement," a measure of team members' active participation in team management activities. The hypotheses that were tested are indicated by the H_a and H_b boxes.

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Figure 1. *Effect Of Communication Forms On Team Member Involvement In SDWTs*



Methodology

Subjects

When the initial data collection began, the company was in very early stages of SDWT development, a multi-level structure with multiple departments adopting teams. The study focused on five SDWTs in three areas: three plant maintenance teams, one customer service team, and one production team.

- The maintenance teams consisted of 24 male mechanics (8 per team) working in various areas throughout the plant operation. The maintenance teams represented about one-third of the maintenance staff and were selected as the initial teams in their area for the conversion to SDWTs. Prior to the implementation process, each group had a foreman and assistant foreman.
- The customer service team consisted of 15 front office personnel (mostly female) responsible for customer contact in the order-processing department. Before implementation, they reported directly to the customer service manager.
- Finally, the production team worked in the custom products area, a department of 21 hourly employees producing custom design products. This area had an area manager, one foreman, and two assistant foremen before the implementation of SDWTs. The foreman or managers remained the conduit from upper management to the teams.

The subjects (survey respondents) averaged 40.5 years of age, 15.6 years of company tenure, and 8.6 years of tenure in their current position; 80 were male and 31 were female. A majority of the females were members of the customer service team, while the maintenance teams were all male.

Research Design

A longitudinal-causal-comparative design was used to investigate the perceived communication and influence tactics utilized by managers during the 18 month change process. Data collection occurred at 6-month, 12-month, and 18-month intervals. Each of the five SDWTs participated in every data collection over the 18-month period. Structured interviews and questionnaires were used to collect the data for all team members and managers.

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The structured interviews were conducted during site visits. All team members and managers were interviewed. Each interviewee was asked the same questions, with answers taped to permit analysis later. Subjects were interviewed based on availability, with a goal of interviewing as many participants as possible during the company specified time period. A total of 100 structured interviews were conducted over the 18-month period using this process. Since the interviews are ethnographic in character, they lend themselves to qualitative data interpretation rather than quantitative. The interviews allowed us to draw inferences about what was happening to the social construct reality of the organization's members as the changes were taking place. As Barker (1999) noted, interviews allow you to see "the good, bad, and ugly" sides of the organization and give you insight into the discursive processes that are used to construct, reconstruct, and destroy meanings within the organization in this case as it changed to SDWTs.

Individual team members also provided information on the communication strategies used by their managers. Questionnaires were distributed during site visits, completed at the convenience of the subjects, and then mailed back to the researcher. A total of 180 surveys were distributed, from which 111 usable surveys were returned across the three time periods, with 37, 41, and 33 employee surveys from periods one, two, and three respectively. While studies have been completed from an interview and observation format (i.e., Barker, 1999; Watson, 2001), we did not find a study that used questionnaires to test what was happening at given intervals to reinforce what was gained qualitatively through the interviews.

Grounded theory was used in the interviews and in interpreting the observations, and analysis of questionnaire data allowed for a cross check on the interview and observation data. Strauss (1987) comments that the "experiential data are essential data, because they not only give added theoretical sensitivity but provide a wealth of provisional suggestions for making comparisons, finding variations, and sampling widely on theoretical grounds. All of that helps the researcher eventually to formulate a conceptually dense and carefully ordered theory" (p. 11). Grounded theory allows researchers to use as many different sources as possible to build an information base, and then integrate the information to expand known theory (Besser, 1996). Combining interview and survey data gives us a glimpse of the individual, group, and organizational levels providing a nearly complete view of the implementation process.

The structured interviews consisted of questions designed to gather information on SDWT development. During periods two and three, after the teams were in operation, team members were asked questions relating to team-member involvement, which is a measure of work team development. Team-member involvement measures the level of team member's participation in improving area performance and decision making, each of which contributes to developing team processes.

Two items taken from the structured interviews were used to form a measure of team member involvement. The two items are: "How often do team members make suggestions for improving area performance?" and "As a team member, how often do you participate in decision making

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for your area's activities?" The alpha reliability for this measure is .81, meaning that these two questions accounted for 81% of the variability in the respondents between the three time periods.

Also, information on subjects' attitudes toward communication processes within the organization and communication within their work team was collected. These questions were designed to assess ways in which information sharing occurred and to assess the attitudes regarding the processes used.

To measure the effectiveness of the resulting change in the communication methods used by managers, multiple regression was used to determine the effect of organizational information and team communication on team member involvement for the two questions listed above over the three time periods.

Results

The issues of team communication and organizational information flow were examined for their effect on team member involvement. The data from the survey questions listed above were used for these regressions. The regression equation presented in Figure 2 for the effect of the two forms of communication on team-member involvement was significant ($F=11.50$, d.f. 2, 97, $p<.01$, $R^2=.19$). R^2 indicates that the equation accounts for 19% of the variation in the scores of team involvement, a large effect size, according to Cohen (1992). A closer look at the regression results reveals that team communication had a significant positive effect on scores of team involvement.

Table 1.
Regression Equation for Team-member Involvement

Variable	B	T-value	F	R^2
Organizational Information	.23	.96		
Team Communication	.73	3.67**		
Constant	3.83	.00	11.5**	.19

**p<.01

The findings demonstrate that team communication was a significant predictor of team member involvement, while organizational information was not significant.

Discussion

A goal of this study was to identify whether organizational information and team communication affected the willingness of team members to participate in team decision-making activities. Our

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findings indicate team communication predicted the level of team member participation in the group.

Predictions of Forms of Communication
The two hypotheses—that the team communication and organizational information would predict team member involvement—received partial support; only team communication was significant in predicting team member involvement. This outcome may serve to highlight the relative importance of team communication over organizational information for generating participation and for day-to-day workplace processes. Organizational information may create good feelings about the organization as a whole, and provide knowledge of the company as a whole, but team communication is more likely to stimulate the willingness to participate in team decision-making.

Overall, across the interviews team members expressed their surprise and delight at the new approach taken by management. Given their long history of strained union-management relations, team members and managers alike entered the process as skeptics. But as the process evolved, the nay-sayers soon disappeared. As one manager mentioned, "I did not realize that by simply asking, the employees would willingly take on responsibilities, such as scheduling overtime, that the foremen dreaded" (interview response). Also, many team members commented how they enjoyed the new management style, saying they felt they were being addressed in a manner that valued their work. As a whole, the individuals perceived their positions became more important with the SDWT implementation.

The current study also found the connection between communication form and team development to be strong. The analyses, based on structured interviews, support the role of communication in team development. As team member ratings of communication increased, participation in team decision-making, an essential part of team development, also increased. The aspect of longitudinal sampling provides added corroboration to the value of communication to SDWT development. Watson's (2001) research also found longitudinal sampling to be beneficial to tracking an improvement in team communications. As the employees buy into the concept, they begin to believe in it and utilize team communications more.

Conclusions and Recommendations

A limitation to the study was the use of one manufacturing firm. Replication of this research is warranted in order to be able to generalize to other organizations. However, the process and support theories used in this study can be used by others. Employees may have been more observant because they knew they were part of a study; the Hawthorne Effect is always a consideration in these situations. Because it is a small town, the employees interact more socially than those in a large metropolitan industrial setting, which may also be a factor in this situation but not other research situations.

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From the interviews we learned that communication of work-based information in team communications proved to be a deciding factor in generating member involvement in team activities. The interviews from this project indicated that manufacturing organizations may need to spend more time and effort, before the actual change, improving team communication and providing training to help personnel recognize the importance of their communication for team development. The implication that communication is closely linked to the job contributes more to employee participation than does general company information not directly related to the job is also important.

Changing organizational decision-making is not easy. When problems arise, managers need to ask what is going to be done rather than telling subordinates what to do. By doing this, managers indicate an acceptance of the team decision process. Change communication mandates new conversational forms if the change is to be successful. By actually measuring the changes over time, researchers will be able to discern what works quickly and what communication changes may take longer to work.

Movement to a team-based management structure represents a shift in power that produces a communication change. Managers and supervisors have to be trained to empower others. Changing your form of communication helps convince others you are sincere about changing the decision making within the organization. As Besser (1996) suggests SDWTs are significantly different from the traditional U.S. management style and are not a panacea for improving employee commitment or satisfaction by themselves. The way in which the communication is changed between and among the people involved determines how successful SDWTs are for any given situation.

Often breakdowns in the change process are a result of a breakdown in the communication process. Future research might consider videotaping and reviewing the videotapes for additional empirical bases to identify communication that is the most effective in specific situations involving management changes. Ashkenas and Jick (1992) found people did not change until specific actions were identified. Videotaping occasional team activities would allow managers as well as team members to hear the verbal communication and view the nonverbal portions of the communication simultaneously, thereby aiding their understanding of where and how communication breakdowns are occurring.

Empirical efforts to replicate and broaden the testing of communication issues as management moves to SDWTs are essential in order to draw more definitive conclusions. Future studies should expand on the interviews and include a communication tasks questionnaire along with the interviews in order to gather more definitive information between time periods. Also, it is important to identify if and when communication channels change. By identifying a time period that is required, companies that may wish to change to SDWTs will have a better understanding of the time commitment and the fact it does not happen immediately. We need to identify communication stages in the change process. As research into SDWT change communication continues, researchers need to work to ‘make sense’ of all the aspects in SDWT implementation.

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A Comparative Analysis of Individual Communication Processes in Small Group Behavior between Homogeneous and Heterogeneous Groups

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This study compares the communication behaviors (i.e., turn taking and speaking time distribution) of a cross-cultural small-group communication environment to further investigate the generalizability of Du-Babcock's (1999) findings. The study also adapted Oeztel's (1998) effective decision-making theoretical model (EDMT) to broaden the investigation to include cultural dimensions and group composition influences on communication behaviors in small group meetings. The findings suggest that although culture is a contributing factor, the influence of culture and group composition on the communication behaviors of individuals in a homogeneous or in a heterogeneous group decision-making meeting is mixed.

Introduction

The purpose of this study is twofold. Firstly, my overall objective is to study turn-taking behavior and further investigate the generalizability of the results of an earlier Hong Kong investigation (see Du-Babcock, 1999, pp.544-574) by extending the research to a different geographical location where English is the dominant medium of communication, but where participants came from diverse cultural backgrounds. The earlier study found that the length of speaking time among individuals was almost the same in the English and Cantonese meetings, but differences existed in the number and length of turn-takings: group members took more and shorter turns in the Cantonese meetings and fewer and longer turns in the English meetings. Secondly, the current study adapted Oetzel's (1998) effective decision-making theory (EDMT) to examine the extent that cultural dimension (individualism-collectivism or I-C) and group composition (homogeneous-heterogeneous) influence small group turn-taking behaviors.

The reason for undertaking this research arises from the results of my earlier published empirical study in turn-takings (see article in *Management Communication Quarterly*, 1999, 544-574) and a business pilot study on business ethics and communication that found a large majority of both individuals and groups make decisions emphasizing short-run gains (increased profits) and make unethical decisions at the expense of compromising both long-term gains and ethical standards. Taken together, the results from these studies (which focus on the Hong Kong environment) suggest the need for further and broader investigation of intercultural small group communication environments. The current study attempted to integrate the key issues derived from these two earlier studies and further investigate how

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cultural I-C and group composition impact small-group behavior in respect of turn-taking behaviour and speaking time distribution.

The key issues and problems addressed in this current research therefore revolve around the importance of small group communication behaviors in decision-making meetings among individuals who came from similar cultural backgrounds (homogeneous groups) and different cultural backgrounds (heterogeneous groups). It also seeks to identify the extent to which one dimension of national culture (individualism-collectivism according to Hofstede, 1991, and Trompenaars, 1993) influences the way people interact differently in homogeneous groups and in heterogeneous intercultural groups. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to re-examine whether culture and group homogeneity affect turn-taking and speaking time distribution. The objectives of this research were therefore to investigate whether:

1. Cultural I-C is a contributing factor in the number of turns taken and the distribution of speaking time; and
2. Individuals from collectivistic cultures (e.g., Hong Kong, China, Japan, Indonesia) and individualistic cultures (e.g., US) exhibit different communication behaviors when participating in homogeneous groups as compared to heterogeneous groups.

Review of Related Literature

Individualism-collectivism (I-C) is a theoretical dimension of a cultural construct that has been used to predict a variety of communication behaviors, such as low- and high-context communication styles (see for example, Gudykunst, Matsumoto, Ting-Toomey, Nishida, Kim, & Heyman, 1996) and conflict styles (Ting-Toomey, 1988). Individualism stands for a society in which the ties between individuals are loose, whereas collectivism refers to a society in which people from birth onwards are integrated into strong, cohesive groups, which throughout their lifetime continues to protect them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty (Hofstede, 1991, p.260). Although the contrast of cultural I-C has been used to explain and organize a wide variety of behaviors in a number of different cultures, the use of cultural I-C to explain turn-taking communication behavior remains limited and inconclusive (Oetzel, 1998).

A very extensive comparative study by Gudykunst and his colleagues (1996) shows that cultural I-C has a direct influence on behavior and that the individualistic and collectivistic tendencies influence how individuals perceive themselves, which in turn impacts on their communication behavior (e.g., communication styles). Although this research has contributed important insights about culture and behavior, Oetzel (1998) has argued that small-group contexts in many of the studies involved cross-cultural comparisons and that the studies did not focus on cross-cultural communication. These oversights are important, particularly since the world economy has become globalized and individuals are more likely to communicate in a culturally diverse business environment with people possessing differing levels of English-language proficiency (assuming English is a world business language). Working in culturally diverse groups differs from working in culturally homogeneous groups (Cox, 1994; Watson, Kumar, &

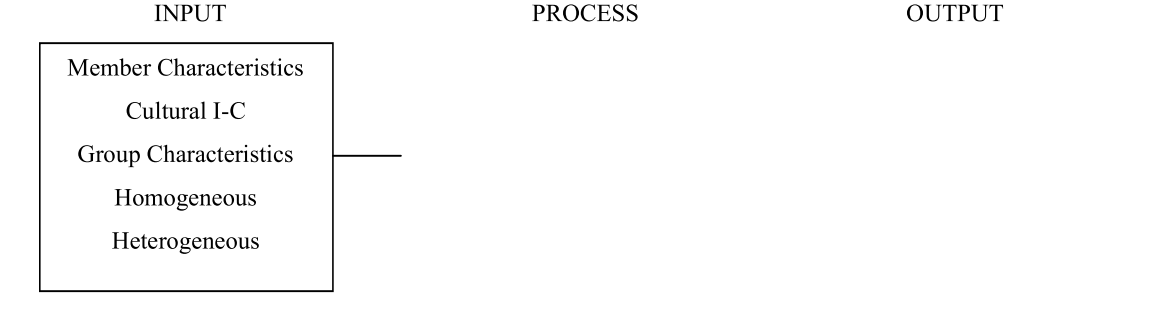
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Michaelson, 1993). As noted by Oetzel, (1998), "[a]lthough we know a lot about cross-cultural, interpersonal communication, we do not know much about intercultural, small-group communication" (p.203).

To operationalize small group behavior and communication, I adopted a model of effective decision-making theory (EDMT) developed by Oetzel (1995, 1998). The EDMT model uses cultural I-C and self-construal to predict communication behavior that occurs in culturally homogeneous and heterogeneous small groups. Specifically, the theory proposes that differences in the number of turns, the number of initiated conflicts, and conflict styles in a small group are likely to be influenced by cultural I-C, self-construal, and cultural group composition. Although self-construal is included as one of the input variables in Oetzel'sEDMT model, the current study examined only the cultural I-C variable. The reason for this restricted focus is that both cultural I-C and self-construal are predicators of not only turn-taking and conflict behaviors (Oetzel, 1998), but also communication behavior (Gudykunst et al., 1996). These two studies all show that cultural I-C is mediated by self-construal and that individual behavior is directly affected by cultural I-C. Given the inter-relationship between self-construal and cultural I-C and their effect on individual behavior, only cultural I-C was considered.

According to Oetzel (1998), a decision-making group can be seen as a system with inputs, processes, and outcomes where the input influences the processes and the processes influence the outcomes (see Figure 1). The input variables include the member characteristics (e.g., cultural I-C) and group characteristics (e.g., composition). The process refers to the interaction that occurs among members, such as turn-taking, decision-making, and conflict styles. The output of the group would include such outcomes as decision quality and cohesiveness. The EDMT model has two interdependent goals. First, the theory seeks to understand the influence of cultural I-C and group composition on communication processes (i.e. the influence of input on processes). Second, the theory seeks to predict the relationship between communication processes and group outcomes in culturally homogeneous and heterogeneous small groups (i.e., the influence of processes on outcomes). My current study focuses on the first goal; that is, the extent to which cultural I-C impacts turn-taking and speaking time distribution.

Figure 1: *Systems Model* (adapted from Oetzel, 1998)



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Input Variables

According to Oetzel (1998), input variables consist of member characteristics (individualistic-collectivistic or cultural I-C) and group characteristics (homogeneous and heterogeneous). For cultural I-C, the *dimensions of cultural variability* have been extensively used to measure and explain the similarities and differences among national cultures (see for example, Hofstede, 1991; Triandis, 1995; Trompenaars, 1993). Individualistic cultures emphasize the goal of the individual over group goals, whereas collectivistic cultures stress group goals over individual goals. In individualistic societies (such as the United States), when the personal and collective goals come into conflict, then members of such individualistic cultures typically choose to pursue personal goals at the expense of collective goals. In contrast, members of collectivistic cultures (such as Japan) consider it socially desirable to put group goals ahead of individual goals (Triandis, 1995). In this connection, members of collectivistic cultures draw on the "*we*" identity, whereas members of individualistic cultures draw on the "*I*" identity (Hofstede, 1991; Ting-Toomey, 1988). It follows then that individuals from collective cultural societies are more willing than those from individualistic cultural societies to comply with the group norms.

Group composition is the second input variable of the EDMT model and has a direct influence on individual communication behavior. Scholars have argued that members of both individualistic and collectivistic cultures have difficulties when interacting in heterogeneous groups (Oetzel, 1995, 1998; Watson et.al., 1993). These difficulties and misunderstandings result because individuals tend to view the interaction from their own cultural perspectives (Nadler, Keeshan-Nadler, & Broome, 1985). As Oetzel (1998) noted, there are few studies that document the influence of group composition on small group communication. For example, one study found that homogeneous groups initially had higher quality processes than heterogeneous groups did, but that over time, heterogeneous groups adjust and have processes at or above the level of homogeneous groups (Watson et al., 1993). It would seem, therefore, that the differences in the cultural backgrounds of heterogeneous groups (a) lead to different communication processes than those adopted in homogeneous groups, and (b) create difficulties and misunderstandings, at least during initial meetings

Process Variables

The EDMT model focuses on two communication processes at the individual level: turn-taking and conflict behaviors. However, my current study examines the extent to which cultural dimensions and group composition influence small group communication behaviors, i.e., turn-taking and speaking time distribution. In the following, the construct of turn-taking behaviors is reviewed.

Turn-taking is the ordering of moves that involve any organized interplay of speech acts. A turn consists of all the speech interactant's utterances up to when another individual takes over the speaking role (Du-Babcock, 1999, pp.553-554). Many conversational

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researchers focus on turn-taking signals to identify turns (e.g., Ducan & Fiske, 1977). Consistent with this perspective, many small group researchers equate turns to speech acts. A speech act is defined as "an uninterrupted utterance of a single group member which is perceived to perform a specific function (or action) within the group interaction process" (Hirokawa, 1980, p. 63). Thus, to measure turn-taking, my current study focuses on the number of turns an individual takes and the distribution of the turns among group members.

The number of turns an individual takes during a business group meeting or in family conversations (see for example, Ng, Loong, He, Liu & Weatherall, 2000) appears to be influenced by cultural I-C across all groups. Yamada (1990) investigated the turn distribution strategies in business conversational topics between American and Japanese associates and found that American participants distribute their turns unequally, whereas the Japanese take short turns and distribute their turns evenly. Gudykunst and Nishida (1994) explain that this pattern of distribution can be linked to cultural differences. That is, members of individualistic cultures distribute turns unevenly, whereas members of collectivistic cultures distribute turns relatively equally because individuals from collectivistic cultures stress group sharing and harmony rather than individual gains.

Although cultural I-C is likely to be a factor that affects the distribution of the turn-taking and speaking time in intercultural groups, the use of language and the second-language proficiency of the interlocutors are also likely to be relevant factors that influence the number of turns taken and speaking time in group meetings. Du-Babcock's (1999) study investigated whether the number of turns an individual takes varies among Hong Kong bilinguals when using their native language (Cantonese) or English (second language) to make decisions. Results indicated that (a) the average number of turn-takings in Cantonese meetings was more than those in English meetings ($\underline{t} = 2.04$; $p < .05$), and that (2) there was a moderate relationship between high L2 proficiency and the amount of English used during meetings ($r=.37$, $P<0.5$). However, the respective speaking times were not significantly different between English and Cantonese meetings ($\underline{t} = .90$, $p > .05$). The results of the original findings only provide partial explanations as to how individuals from collectivistic cultures interact differently when using their first and second languages to make decisions in homogeneous groups.

Based on Du-Babcock's (1999) findings, the current study attempted to re-examine (a) whether group members from collectivistic cultures distribute turns and speaking time more evenly than group members from individualistic cultures, and (b) whether group members from collectivistic cultures distribute their turns and speaking time more evenly than those from individualistic cultures, who tend to distribute their turns and speaking time less evenly in homogeneous groups than in heterogeneous groups. The even or uneven turn-taking distribution was measured by the standard deviations (S.D.) of both collectivistic and individualistic cultures in terms of individuals' turn-taking and speaking time distribution. Smaller S.D. indicates that the turns are shared more evenly and that speaking time is more evenly distributed.

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Based on the related literature review, three research questions were identified. Research Question 1 addresses the issue of cultural I-C on turn-taking and speaking time distribution. Research Question 2 addresses the issue of the group composition (homogeneity and heterogeneity) effect on the distribution of turn taking and speaking time in group decision-making meetings. As for Research Question 3, it first examines the impact of cultures on the distribution of turn-takings and speaking time. Second, it examines whether individuals from individualistic and collectivistic cultures exhibit similar or different communication behaviors when participating in homogeneous group meetings as compared to heterogeneous group meetings. The three major research questions are listed as follows:

Research Question 1: Do individuals from collectivistic cultures and those from individualistic cultures exhibit different turn-taking behaviors and have different length of speaking time in small-group meetings?

Research Question 2A: Do individuals from collectivistic cultures exhibit different turn-taking behaviors and have different length of speaking time when they participate in homogeneous as compared to heterogeneous small-group meetings?

Research Question 2B: Do individuals from individualistic cultures exhibit different turn-taking behaviors and have different length of speaking time when they participate in homogeneous as compared to heterogeneous small-group meetings?

Research Question 3A: Do individuals from collectivistic cultures and those from individualistic cultures distribute their turns and speaking time differently in small-group meetings?

Research Question 3B: Do individuals from collectivistic cultures distribute their turns and speaking time differently when they participate in homogeneous as compared to heterogeneous small-group meetings?

Research Question 3C: Do individuals from individualistic cultures distribute their turns and speaking time differently when they participate in homogeneous as compared to heterogeneous small-group meetings?

Research Method

Research Participants

Two hundred and seventy-six individuals (N = 276) participated in this study. Ninety-nine of them came from an individualistic culture (e.g. the United States) while 177 were from collectivistic cultures (e.g. Taiwan, Thailand, Hong Kong, etc.). The 177 individuals from collectivistic cultures consisted of three groups: mid-level Chinese managers, Hong Kong students, and U.S. students from various collective cultures (e.g. Hong Kong,

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Taiwan, China, Japan, Indonesia and Singapore, etc).Of these, 82 were mid-level managers who enrolled in two sessions of an Organizational Behavior course from a long-distance MBA program; 40 were Hong Kong students studying in English for Professional Communication Program; and 55 were U.S. students who came from collectivistic cultures. Aside from small number of Hong Kong students who graduated from overseas (e.g. the United States, Canada and Hong Kong), the majority of this collectivisitc cultural group were educated in Hong Kong.

The work experience of the Chinese participants varied from students without formal organizational work experience to mid-level professional managers working in medium- to large-sized Hong Kong and Chinese private and public sector firms. As for the participants from the individualistic culture, they were native Americans or European Americans, ranging from undergraduates with limited work experience to MBA students with low-level managerial positions.

Although random assignments were not possible, all the participants possessed adequate second-language proficiency. For example, international students from the U.S. obtained at least 550 points in the TOEFL exam (minimal requirement for U.S. admission). As for Hong Kong students, all participants obtained C or above for the English subject in their A-Level Exam (a type of Hong Kong public exam which is equivalent to SAT in the U.S.). The C grade is equivalent to 550 to 600 points for the TOFEL exam.

For the group formation, each of the participants was randomly assigned to homogeneous or heterogeneous groups. For instance, Hong Kong students were either paired with participants in the U.S. to form heterogeneous groups or paired with their own peers to form homogeneous groups; while all the Chinese executives were formed in homogeneous groups. In total, 41 groups were formed.

Procedure

The participants took part in an experiential exercise (Mainiero & Tromley, 1989, pp. 202-209) where groups had to make decisions based on a 45-minute discussion. The experiential exercise in this study provided the setting for the development of realistic business decision-making dialogs. The simulation was constructed around a medical product considered by experts to be injurious to the health of consumers - even to the point of possibly causing death. These consequences had to be evaluated against the potential economic losses to the company, which would be substantial if sales of the drug were to be discontinued. The decision - not an easy one - brings to the surface the issue of dual responsibility in that participants must consider both corporate motivation to operate profitably and the overall interests of society.

The communication task represented in this study required all of the participants to engage in decision-making discussions. The interlocutors needed to share and present information from their respective viewpoints in order to reach optimal decisions. The group members

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had to interactively integrate inputs and make decisions that not only contributed to the profitability of the entire firm, but also took into consideration the well-being of society as a whole, rather than just made decisions that would improve results in their respective interests. In this connection, the focus of the discussions was on corporate strategy development in five topical areas that the company should adopt in its US domestic and foreign markets.

The video- and audio-taped discussions of the 41 group meetings were subjected to interaction analysis. English language decision-making meetings were transcribed verbatim and the Chinese language meetings were transcribed in Chinese. To conduct comparative analysis of 41 group meetings, similarities and differences were defined by (a) the length of speaking time by each group member and (b) the number of turns taken by individuals.

To assess turn-taking communication behavior, the turn-taking framework developed by Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson (1974) was used and the specific technique used in an earlier study (Du-Babcock, 1999). In other words, a turn was taken as consisting of all the speech interactant's utterances up to the point another individual takes over the speaking role. The number of turns taken by each participant was codified, counted, and compared. Speaking time was calculated by using a stopwatch to measure the exact length of each conversational turn. The length of speaking time for each turn was also coded according to the designated interlocutors and served as a cross check of meeting interaction.

Data Analysis

This current study seeks to examine the influence of a cultural dimension (individualism-collectivism) and group composition (culturally homogeneous-heterogeneous) on turn-takings, and speaking time distribution. The considerable variations in the meeting duration (ranging from 449 to 3540 seconds) and the number of meeting participants (ranging from 5 to 10) could have adversely affected the accuracy of the statistical test results on the variables being examined. In order to prevent these intervening factors from confusing or influencing the statistical tests and to obtain more accurate results, the researcher attempted to control and adjust the factors (that is, to treat them as covariates and keep them constant) by using analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) tests.

Mean scores and standard deviations for all the variables were calculated and compared. ANCOVA tests were performed to investigate (a) whether there were significant differences in the communication behaviors between collectivistic and individualistic cultures, and (b) whether individuals from collectivistic and individualistic cultures exhibit similar or different communication behaviors when participating in a homogeneous and a heterogeneous group with regard to the examined variables. These tests enabled me to address the research questions the study was set up to explore. Research Questions 1 and 2 focused on the influence of a culture's individualist or

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collectivist orientation and group composition on the number of turn-takings and amount of speaking time. Research Question 3 examined whether individuals from collectivistic cultures or individualistic cultures share turns and distribute speaking time more evenly when participating in homogeneous groups as compared to heterogeneous groups. Based on the three research questions, the related hypotheses are listed as follows:

Hypothesis 1: Individuals from collectivistic cultures are likely to take fewer turns than those from individualistic cultures in small-group decision-making meetings.

Hypothesis 2: Individuals from collectivistic cultures are likely to speak less than those from individualistic cultures in small-group decision-making meetings.

Hypothesis 3: Individuals from collectivistic cultures are likely to take more turns in homogeneous group meetings than in heterogeneous group meetings.

Hypothesis 4: Individuals from collectivistic cultures are likely to speak more in homogeneous group meetings than in heterogeneous group meetings.

Hypothesis 5: Individuals from individualistic cultures are likely to take less turns in homogeneous group meetings than in heterogeneous group meetings.

Hypothesis 6: Individuals from individualistic cultures are likely to speak less in homogeneous group meetings than in heterogeneous group meetings.

Hypothesis 7: Individuals from collectivistic cultures are likely to distribute their turns more evenly than those from individualistic cultures in small-group meetings.

Hypothesis 8: Individuals from collectivistic cultures are likely to distribute their speaking time more evenly than those from individualistic cultures in small-group meetings.

Hypothesis 9: Individuals from collectivistic cultures are likely to distribute their turns more evenly in homogeneous group meetings than in heterogeneous group meetings.

Hypothesis 10: Individuals from collectivistic cultures are likely to distribute their speaking time more evenly in homogeneous group meetings than in heterogeneous group meetings.

Hypothesis 11: Individuals from individualistic cultures are likely to distribute their turns less evenly in homogeneous group meetings than heterogeneous group meetings.

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Hypothesis 12: Individuals from individualistic cultures are likely to distribute their speaking time less evenly in homogeneous group meetings than in heterogeneous group meetings.

Findings

Research Question 1 asked whether individuals from individualistic and collectivistic cultures exhibit similar or different turn-taking and speech duration communication behaviors. To answer this question, analyses were performed to investigate whether there were significant differences between the two cultures with regard to two identified variables: (a) number of turns taken and (b) amount of speaking time.

An ANCOVA test was performed to discover whether there were any differences between individuals from individualistic and collectivistic cultures in their turn-taking behavior (see Table 1). With the meeting duration and the number of participants controlled as covariates, a significant result was obtained ($F = 13.790$; $p < .001$). Hypothesis 1 is supported. The results show that the I-C construct of culture is a significant contributing factor in influencing the number of turns taken by participants in small group decision-making ($F = 4.044$; $p < .05$) meetings, although individuals from collectivistic cultures (37.998) tend to take fewer turns than those from individualistic cultures (48.639).

Table 1

Mean scores of the Identified variables between Collectivistic and Individualistic Cultures

Variables	All	Collectivistic Cultures	Individualistic Cultures	Mean Difference	F
Turn taking (number)	43.319	37.998	48.639	-10.641	4.044*
Amount of speaking time (seconds)	351.404	300.782	402.027	-101.245	9.245**

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

The same statistical test was also used to examine whether individuals from collectivistic cultures are likely to speak less than those individuals from individualistic cultures. Again, the meeting duration and the number of participants were kept constant and the test result derived was statistically significant ($F = 31.289$; $p < .001$). The result indicates that the amount of speaking time for individuals from collectivistic cultures (300.782 seconds) was significantly less than that for individuals from individualistic cultures (402.027 seconds) at .05 significant level ($F = 9.245$). The finding reveals that the I-C

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cultural dimension is a determining factor that significantly affects the speaking time of the meeting participants. Hypothesis 2 is also supported.

In sum, the results of hypotheses 1 and 2 confirmed that individuals from different cultures adopt different communication behaviors in small-group decision-making meetings. Individuals from collectivistic cultures tend to take fewer turns and speak less than those from individualistic cultures.

Research Question 2 measures the influence of group composition on the number of turn-takings and the amount of speaking time among participants in group decision-making meetings. To answer Research Question 2, ANCOVA with two independent categorical variables were performed to investigate whether there are significant differences in turn-taking behavior and the distribution of speaking time (a) among the participants from collectivistic cultures and (b) among those from individualistic cultures. It was hypothesized that individuals from collectivist cultures are likely to take more turns (Hypothesis 3) and speak more (Hypothesis 4) in homogeneous group decision-making meetings than in heterogeneous group decision-making meetings while the reverse is held for individualistic cultures (Hypotheses 5 & 6).

The result of the ANCOVA test (see Table 2) shows that group composition exhibits significant effect on the amount of speaking time of individuals from collectivistic cultures ($F = 7.470$; $p < .01$) (Hypothesis 4). Collectivistic individuals spoke more in homogeneous group decision-making meetings (382.096) than in heterogeneous group decision-making meetings (268.714). For the turn-taking behaviors, collectivistic individuals still took more turns in homogeneous group meeting (45.328) than in heterogeneous group meetings (37.673) though the test did not derive a significant result.

Table 2
Mean Scores of Turn-takings and Speaking Time for Collectivistic Cultures in Homogeneous and Heterogeneous Group Meetings

Collectivistic Cultures

Variables	All	Homogeneous	Heterogeneous	Mean Difference	F
Turn taking (number)	41.500	45.328	37.673	7.655	1.082
Amount of speaking time (seconds)	325.405	382.096	268.714	113.383	7.470*

* $p < .01$

For Hypotheses 5 and 6, which address the communication behaviors of individuals from individualistic cultures participating in homogeneous and heterogeneous small-group meetings, the ANCOVA test results are not significant (See Table 3). Despite this, there

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was still a difference in the communication behaviors among individuals from individuals in meetings of different group compositions. They took more turns (41.574 vs. 36.521) and speak more (345.341 vs. 272.634) in heterogeneous group meetings than in homogeneous group meetings.

Table 3
Mean Scores of Turn-takings and Speaking Time for Individualistic Cultures in Homogeneous and Heterogeneous Group Meetings

Individualistic Cultures

Variables	All	Homogeneous	Heterogeneous	Mean Difference	F
Turn taking (number)	39.048	36.521	41.574	-5.053	.458
Amount of speaking time (seconds)	308.987	272.634	345.341	-72.707	1.648

The result that group composition exerts an influence on the turn-taking behaviors of individuals is consistent with the previous research findings of Oetzel (1998) where Japanese members took fewer turns in heterogeneous groups than in homogeneous groups, and where European Americans took more turns in heterogeneous than in homogeneous groups.

The reason for such a contrasting difference existing among collectivists participating in homogeneous and heterogeneous groups is likely to be attributed to their confidence in using a second language. Individuals from collectivistic cultures feel less confident and possibly exhibit communication apprehension, thereby taking fewer turns and speaking less when communicating in a heterogeneous group where their counterparts are native-English speakers.

Research Question 3 first examines whether individuals from collectivistic cultures distribute turns and speaking time more evenly than those from individualistic cultures (Research Question 3A). Second, this research question further examines whether individuals from collectivistic cultures distribute turns and speaking time more evenly (Research Question 3B), and whether those from individualistic cultures distribute turns and speaking time less evenly in homogeneous groups than in heterogeneous groups (Research Question 3C).

To answer Research Question 3, I attempted to make some interpretations from the distribution of turns and speaking time difference between two cultural groups by means of standard deviation (S.D.) (see table 4). The S.D. measures the degree of dispersion and thus can reflect the distribution of turns and speaking time among the participants in group decision-making meetings. A larger S.D. indicates a larger degree of dispersion and thus a wider distribution of turns or speaking time. It follows that in a meeting with a

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wide distribution, some of the participants are likely to take a very large number of turns or more speaking time, while some take very few turns or little speaking time.

To answer Research Question 3A, an ANCOVA test was performed and the results (see Table 4) show that individuals from collectivistic cultures, with a smaller S.D. (S.D. = 40.030) and a resultant narrower distribution, are seen to distribute their turns more evenly in a group decision meeting than those from individualistic cultures (S.D. = 43.076). Likewise, a smaller S.D. or a narrower distribution of speaking time for collectivistic individuals (S.D. = 255.277), as compared to a larger S.D. for individualistic participants (S.D. = 318.750), shows that these collectivistic individuals tend to distribute their speaking time more evenly than participants from individualistic cultures.

Consistent with the studies by Yamada (1990) and Gudykunst and Nishida (1994), the results of the current study show that individuals from collectivistic cultures, who stress group sharing rather than individual gains, shared turns and distributed speaking time more evenly than those from individualistic cultures in group meetings.

Table 4
Distributions (Standard Deviations) of Turn-takings and Speak Time between Two Cultural Groups

Group	**Standard Deviation**	
	No. of turn-taking	Amount of speaking time
Collectivistic	40.030	255.277
Homogeneous	36.723	250.717
Heterogeneous	45.444	202.135
Individualistic	43.076	318.750
Homogeneous	42.095	318.642
Heterogeneous	43.774	317.722

When taking group composition into account, the results show that members of collectivistic cultures share their turns more evenly in homogeneous groups (S.D. = 36.723) than in heterogeneous groups (S.D. = 45.444) (see Table 4). However, the reverse pattern was found in the distribution of speaking time. Individuals from collectivistic cultures distribute their speaking time more evenly in heterogeneous groups (S.D. = 202.135) than in homogeneous groups (S.D. = 250.717). Such an inconsistency between the distribution of turn-takings and speaking time could be due to the fact that second-language speakers may find it easier to communicate with individuals who are also non native-English speakers. Some of them may feel freer to speak, thus widening the distribution of speaking time in homogeneous group meetings.

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The same distribution patterns as observed within collectivistic cultures were also found among individuals from individualistic cultures, though the differences in the standard deviations are very slight. Individuals from individualistic cultures also share their turns more evenly in homogeneous group meetings (S.D. = 42.095) than in heterogeneous group meetings (S.D. = 43.774) but distribute their speaking time more evenly in heterogeneous group meetings (S.D. = 317.722) than in homogeneous group meetings (S.D. = 318.642). With such slight differences in the standard deviations, participants from the individualistic cultures in fact exhibit very consistent communication behaviors in the distribution of turn-takings and speaking time no matter whether they take part in homogeneous or heterogeneous group meetings.

In sum, the overall findings for Research Question 3 show that individuals from collectivistic cultures, which stress group sharing, tend to distribute their turns and speaking time more evenly than those from individualistic cultures. Also, individuals from collectivistic cultures are likely to share their turns more evenly in homogeneous group meetings but distribute their speaking time more evenly in heterogeneous group meetings. As for individualistic cultures, participants exhibit very consistent communication behaviors in the distribution of turn-taking and speaking time regardless the group composition of the meetings.

Conclusion

The objective of this study was to examine whether cultural I-C and group composition influence turn-taking, and speaking time distribution. The results of this study indicate that: (a) the cultural dimension of I-C is a predictor of the number of turn-takings and the speaking time duration, (b) group composition has a significant effect on the amount of speaking time among individuals from collectivistic cultures; that is, group members of collectivistic cultures have longer speaking time in homogeneous than in heterogeneous group meetings, (c) individuals from collectivistic cultures distribute their turns and speaking time more evenly than those from individualistic cultures, and (d) individuals from collectivistic cultures tend to share their turns more evenly in homogeneous groups but distribute their speaking time more evenly in heterogeneous groups. However, the results show very slight differences in the turn-takings behaviors or speaking time duration among individuals from individualistic cultures, whether they participated in homogeneous group meetings or heterogeneous group meetings.

Implications

The findings of the current study have important and pragmatic implications for intra- and cross-cultural communication. The results of the study illustrate the usefulness of cultural I-C and group composition to explain whether individuals exhibit similar or different communication behaviors (i.e., turn-taking and speaking time duration) in small-group decision-making meetings. The findings of the current study add value to a very extensive literature on cross-cultural communication in examining whether and how individuals communicate differently or similarly in intra- and cross-cultural situations.

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The results also confirm the previous findings that cultural I-C and group composition have an important effect on communication behaviors in small-group decision-making meetings. These findings suggest that it is important for native-English speakers to accommodate their counterparts who possess varying second-language proficiencies and diverse cultural backgrounds. It is suggested that additional research in this area should focus on examining how to improve the interaction among people with diverse backgrounds and varying second-language proficiency when they communicate in a cross-cultural environment.

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A Comparative Analysis of Individual Communication Processes in Small Group Behavior between Homogeneous and Heterogeneous Groups

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This study compares the communication behaviors (i.e., turn taking and speaking time distribution) of a cross-cultural small-group communication environment to further investigate the generalizability of Du-Babcock's (1999) findings. The study also adapted Oeztel's (1998) effective decision-making theoretical model (EDMT) to broaden the investigation to include cultural dimensions and group composition influences on communication behaviors in small group meetings. The findings suggest that although culture is a contributing factor, the influence of culture and group composition on the communication behaviors of individuals in a homogeneous or in a heterogeneous group decision-making meeting is mixed.

Introduction

The purpose of this study is twofold. Firstly, my overall objective is to study turn-taking behavior and further investigate the generalizability of the results of an earlier Hong Kong investigation (see Du-Babcock, 1999, pp.544-574) by extending the research to a different geographical location where English is the dominant medium of communication, but where participants came from diverse cultural backgrounds. The earlier study found that the length of speaking time among individuals was almost the same in the English and Cantonese meetings, but differences existed in the number and length of turn-takings: group members took more and shorter turns in the Cantonese meetings and fewer and longer turns in the English meetings. Secondly, the current study adapted Oetzel's (1998) effective decision-making theory (EDMT) to examine the extent that cultural dimension (individualism-collectivism or I-C) and group composition (homogeneous-heterogeneous) influence small group turn-taking behaviors.

The reason for undertaking this research arises from the results of my earlier published empirical study in turn-takings (see article in *Management Communication Quarterly*, 1999, 544-574) and a business pilot study on business ethics and communication that found a large majority of both individuals and groups make decisions emphasizing short-run gains (increased profits) and make unethical decisions at the expense of compromising both long-term gains and ethical standards. Taken together, the results from these studies (which focus on the Hong Kong environment) suggest the need for further and broader investigation of intercultural small group communication environments. The current study attempted to integrate the key issues derived from these two earlier studies and further investigate how

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cultural I-C and group composition impact small-group behavior in respect of turn-taking behaviour and speaking time distribution.

The key issues and problems addressed in this current research therefore revolve around the importance of small group communication behaviors in decision-making meetings among individuals who came from similar cultural backgrounds (homogeneous groups) and different cultural backgrounds (heterogeneous groups). It also seeks to identify the extent to which one dimension of national culture (individualism-collectivism according to Hofstede, 1991, and Trompenaars, 1993) influences the way people interact differently in homogeneous groups and in heterogeneous intercultural groups. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to re-examine whether culture and group homogeneity affect turn-taking and speaking time distribution. The objectives of this research were therefore to investigate whether:

1. Cultural I-C is a contributing factor in the number of turns taken and the distribution of speaking time; and
2. Individuals from collectivistic cultures (e.g., Hong Kong, China, Japan, Indonesia) and individualistic cultures (e.g., US) exhibit different communication behaviors when participating in homogeneous groups as compared to heterogeneous groups.

Review of Related Literature

Individualism-collectivism (I-C) is a theoretical dimension of a cultural construct that has been used to predict a variety of communication behaviors, such as low- and high-context communication styles (see for example, Gudykunst, Matsumoto, Ting-Toomey, Nishida, Kim, & Heyman, 1996) and conflict styles (Ting-Toomey, 1988). Individualism stands for a society in which the ties between individuals are loose, whereas collectivism refers to a society in which people from birth onwards are integrated into strong, cohesive groups, which throughout their lifetime continues to protect them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty (Hofstede, 1991, p.260). Although the contrast of cultural I-C has been used to explain and organize a wide variety of behaviors in a number of different cultures, the use of cultural I-C to explain turn-taking communication behavior remains limited and inconclusive (Oetzel, 1998).

A very extensive comparative study by Gudykunst and his colleagues (1996) shows that cultural I-C has a direct influence on behavior and that the individualistic and collectivistic tendencies influence how individuals perceive themselves, which in turn impacts on their communication behavior (e.g., communication styles). Although this research has contributed important insights about culture and behavior, Oetzel (1998) has argued that small-group contexts in many of the studies involved cross-cultural comparisons and that the studies did not focus on cross-cultural communication. These oversights are important, particularly since the world economy has become globalized and individuals are more likely to communicate in a culturally diverse business environment with people possessing differing levels of English-language proficiency (assuming English is a world business language). Working in culturally diverse groups differs from working in culturally homogeneous groups (Cox, 1994; Watson, Kumar, &

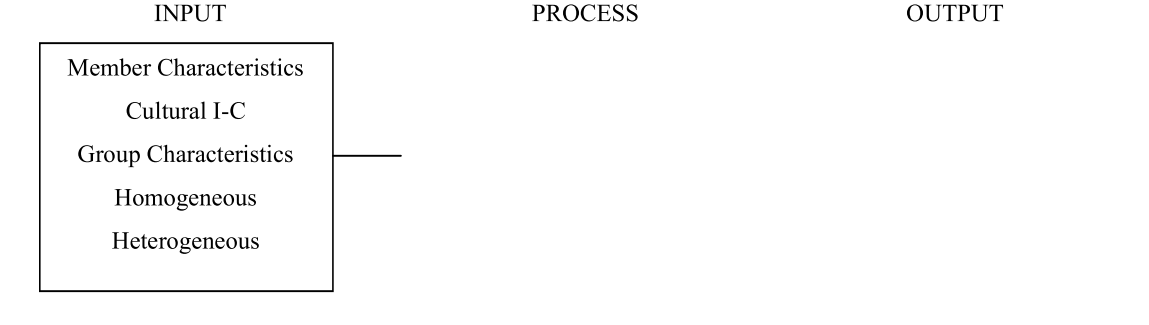
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Michaelson, 1993). As noted by Oetzel, (1998), "[a]lthough we know a lot about cross-cultural, interpersonal communication, we do not know much about intercultural, small-group communication" (p.203).

To operationalize small group behavior and communication, I adopted a model of effective decision-making theory (EDMT) developed by Oetzel (1995, 1998). The EDMT model uses cultural I-C and self-construal to predict communication behavior that occurs in culturally homogeneous and heterogeneous small groups. Specifically, the theory proposes that differences in the number of turns, the number of initiated conflicts, and conflict styles in a small group are likely to be influenced by cultural I-C, self-construal, and cultural group composition. Although self-construal is included as one of the input variables in Oetzel'sEDMT model, the current study examined only the cultural I-C variable. The reason for this restricted focus is that both cultural I-C and self-construal are predicators of not only turn-taking and conflict behaviors (Oetzel, 1998), but also communication behavior (Gudykunst et al., 1996). These two studies all show that cultural I-C is mediated by self-construal and that individual behavior is directly affected by cultural I-C. Given the inter-relationship between self-construal and cultural I-C and their effect on individual behavior, only cultural I-C was considered.

According to Oetzel (1998), a decision-making group can be seen as a system with inputs, processes, and outcomes where the input influences the processes and the processes influence the outcomes (see Figure 1). The input variables include the member characteristics (e.g., cultural I-C) and group characteristics (e.g., composition). The process refers to the interaction that occurs among members, such as turn-taking, decision-making, and conflict styles. The output of the group would include such outcomes as decision quality and cohesiveness. The EDMT model has two interdependent goals. First, the theory seeks to understand the influence of cultural I-C and group composition on communication processes (i.e. the influence of input on processes). Second, the theory seeks to predict the relationship between communication processes and group outcomes in culturally homogeneous and heterogeneous small groups (i.e., the influence of processes on outcomes). My current study focuses on the first goal; that is, the extent to which cultural I-C impacts turn-taking and speaking time distribution.

Figure 1: *Systems Model* (adapted from Oetzel, 1998)



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Input Variables

According to Oetzel (1998), input variables consist of member characteristics (individualistic-collectivistic or cultural I-C) and group characteristics (homogeneous and heterogeneous). For cultural I-C, the *dimensions of cultural variability* have been extensively used to measure and explain the similarities and differences among national cultures (see for example, Hofstede, 1991; Triandis, 1995; Trompenaars, 1993). Individualistic cultures emphasize the goal of the individual over group goals, whereas collectivistic cultures stress group goals over individual goals. In individualistic societies (such as the United States), when the personal and collective goals come into conflict, then members of such individualistic cultures typically choose to pursue personal goals at the expense of collective goals. In contrast, members of collectivistic cultures (such as Japan) consider it socially desirable to put group goals ahead of individual goals (Triandis, 1995). In this connection, members of collectivistic cultures draw on the "*we*" identity, whereas members of individualistic cultures draw on the "*I*" identity (Hofstede, 1991; Ting-Toomey, 1988). It follows then that individuals from collective cultural societies are more willing than those from individualistic cultural societies to comply with the group norms.

Group composition is the second input variable of the EDMT model and has a direct influence on individual communication behavior. Scholars have argued that members of both individualistic and collectivistic cultures have difficulties when interacting in heterogeneous groups (Oetzel, 1995, 1998; Watson et.al., 1993). These difficulties and misunderstandings result because individuals tend to view the interaction from their own cultural perspectives (Nadler, Keeshan-Nadler, & Broome, 1985). As Oetzel (1998) noted, there are few studies that document the influence of group composition on small group communication. For example, one study found that homogeneous groups initially had higher quality processes than heterogeneous groups did, but that over time, heterogeneous groups adjust and have processes at or above the level of homogeneous groups (Watson et al., 1993). It would seem, therefore, that the differences in the cultural backgrounds of heterogeneous groups (a) lead to different communication processes than those adopted in homogeneous groups, and (b) create difficulties and misunderstandings, at least during initial meetings

Process Variables

The EDMT model focuses on two communication processes at the individual level: turn-taking and conflict behaviors. However, my current study examines the extent to which cultural dimensions and group composition influence small group communication behaviors, i.e., turn-taking and speaking time distribution. In the following, the construct of turn-taking behaviors is reviewed.

Turn-taking is the ordering of moves that involve any organized interplay of speech acts. A turn consists of all the speech interactant's utterances up to when another individual takes over the speaking role (Du-Babcock, 1999, pp.553-554). Many conversational

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researchers focus on turn-taking signals to identify turns (e.g., Ducan & Fiske, 1977). Consistent with this perspective, many small group researchers equate turns to speech acts. A speech act is defined as "an uninterrupted utterance of a single group member which is perceived to perform a specific function (or action) within the group interaction process" (Hirokawa, 1980, p. 63). Thus, to measure turn-taking, my current study focuses on the number of turns an individual takes and the distribution of the turns among group members.

The number of turns an individual takes during a business group meeting or in family conversations (see for example, Ng, Loong, He, Liu & Weatherall, 2000) appears to be influenced by cultural I-C across all groups. Yamada (1990) investigated the turn distribution strategies in business conversational topics between American and Japanese associates and found that American participants distribute their turns unequally, whereas the Japanese take short turns and distribute their turns evenly. Gudykunst and Nishida (1994) explain that this pattern of distribution can be linked to cultural differences. That is, members of individualistic cultures distribute turns unevenly, whereas members of collectivistic cultures distribute turns relatively equally because individuals from collectivistic cultures stress group sharing and harmony rather than individual gains.

Although cultural I-C is likely to be a factor that affects the distribution of the turn-taking and speaking time in intercultural groups, the use of language and the second-language proficiency of the interlocutors are also likely to be relevant factors that influence the number of turns taken and speaking time in group meetings. Du-Babcock's (1999) study investigated whether the number of turns an individual takes varies among Hong Kong bilinguals when using their native language (Cantonese) or English (second language) to make decisions. Results indicated that (a) the average number of turn-takings in Cantonese meetings was more than those in English meetings ($\underline{t} = 2.04$; $p < .05$), and that (2) there was a moderate relationship between high L2 proficiency and the amount of English used during meetings ($r=.37$, $P<0.5$). However, the respective speaking times were not significantly different between English and Cantonese meetings ($\underline{t} = .90$, $p > .05$). The results of the original findings only provide partial explanations as to how individuals from collectivistic cultures interact differently when using their first and second languages to make decisions in homogeneous groups.

Based on Du-Babcock's (1999) findings, the current study attempted to re-examine (a) whether group members from collectivistic cultures distribute turns and speaking time more evenly than group members from individualistic cultures, and (b) whether group members from collectivistic cultures distribute their turns and speaking time more evenly than those from individualistic cultures, who tend to distribute their turns and speaking time less evenly in homogeneous groups than in heterogeneous groups. The even or uneven turn-taking distribution was measured by the standard deviations (S.D.) of both collectivistic and individualistic cultures in terms of individuals' turn-taking and speaking time distribution. Smaller S.D. indicates that the turns are shared more evenly and that speaking time is more evenly distributed.

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Based on the related literature review, three research questions were identified. Research Question 1 addresses the issue of cultural I-C on turn-taking and speaking time distribution. Research Question 2 addresses the issue of the group composition (homogeneity and heterogeneity) effect on the distribution of turn taking and speaking time in group decision-making meetings. As for Research Question 3, it first examines the impact of cultures on the distribution of turn-takings and speaking time. Second, it examines whether individuals from individualistic and collectivistic cultures exhibit similar or different communication behaviors when participating in homogeneous group meetings as compared to heterogeneous group meetings. The three major research questions are listed as follows:

Research Question 1: Do individuals from collectivistic cultures and those from individualistic cultures exhibit different turn-taking behaviors and have different length of speaking time in small-group meetings?

Research Question 2A: Do individuals from collectivistic cultures exhibit different turn-taking behaviors and have different length of speaking time when they participate in homogeneous as compared to heterogeneous small-group meetings?

Research Question 2B: Do individuals from individualistic cultures exhibit different turn-taking behaviors and have different length of speaking time when they participate in homogeneous as compared to heterogeneous small-group meetings?

Research Question 3A: Do individuals from collectivistic cultures and those from individualistic cultures distribute their turns and speaking time differently in small-group meetings?

Research Question 3B: Do individuals from collectivistic cultures distribute their turns and speaking time differently when they participate in homogeneous as compared to heterogeneous small-group meetings?

Research Question 3C: Do individuals from individualistic cultures distribute their turns and speaking time differently when they participate in homogeneous as compared to heterogeneous small-group meetings?

Research Method

Research Participants

Two hundred and seventy-six individuals (N = 276) participated in this study. Ninety-nine of them came from an individualistic culture (e.g. the United States) while 177 were from collectivistic cultures (e.g. Taiwan, Thailand, Hong Kong, etc.). The 177 individuals from collectivistic cultures consisted of three groups: mid-level Chinese managers, Hong Kong students, and U.S. students from various collective cultures (e.g. Hong Kong,

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Taiwan, China, Japan, Indonesia and Singapore, etc).Of these, 82 were mid-level managers who enrolled in two sessions of an Organizational Behavior course from a long-distance MBA program; 40 were Hong Kong students studying in English for Professional Communication Program; and 55 were U.S. students who came from collectivistic cultures. Aside from small number of Hong Kong students who graduated from overseas (e.g. the United States, Canada and Hong Kong), the majority of this collectivisitc cultural group were educated in Hong Kong.

The work experience of the Chinese participants varied from students without formal organizational work experience to mid-level professional managers working in medium- to large-sized Hong Kong and Chinese private and public sector firms. As for the participants from the individualistic culture, they were native Americans or European Americans, ranging from undergraduates with limited work experience to MBA students with low-level managerial positions.

Although random assignments were not possible, all the participants possessed adequate second-language proficiency. For example, international students from the U.S. obtained at least 550 points in the TOEFL exam (minimal requirement for U.S. admission). As for Hong Kong students, all participants obtained C or above for the English subject in their A-Level Exam (a type of Hong Kong public exam which is equivalent to SAT in the U.S.). The C grade is equivalent to 550 to 600 points for the TOFEL exam.

For the group formation, each of the participants was randomly assigned to homogeneous or heterogeneous groups. For instance, Hong Kong students were either paired with participants in the U.S. to form heterogeneous groups or paired with their own peers to form homogeneous groups; while all the Chinese executives were formed in homogeneous groups. In total, 41 groups were formed.

Procedure

The participants took part in an experiential exercise (Mainiero & Tromley, 1989, pp. 202-209) where groups had to make decisions based on a 45-minute discussion. The experiential exercise in this study provided the setting for the development of realistic business decision-making dialogs. The simulation was constructed around a medical product considered by experts to be injurious to the health of consumers - even to the point of possibly causing death. These consequences had to be evaluated against the potential economic losses to the company, which would be substantial if sales of the drug were to be discontinued. The decision - not an easy one - brings to the surface the issue of dual responsibility in that participants must consider both corporate motivation to operate profitably and the overall interests of society.

The communication task represented in this study required all of the participants to engage in decision-making discussions. The interlocutors needed to share and present information from their respective viewpoints in order to reach optimal decisions. The group members

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had to interactively integrate inputs and make decisions that not only contributed to the profitability of the entire firm, but also took into consideration the well-being of society as a whole, rather than just made decisions that would improve results in their respective interests. In this connection, the focus of the discussions was on corporate strategy development in five topical areas that the company should adopt in its US domestic and foreign markets.

The video- and audio-taped discussions of the 41 group meetings were subjected to interaction analysis. English language decision-making meetings were transcribed verbatim and the Chinese language meetings were transcribed in Chinese. To conduct comparative analysis of 41 group meetings, similarities and differences were defined by (a) the length of speaking time by each group member and (b) the number of turns taken by individuals.

To assess turn-taking communication behavior, the turn-taking framework developed by Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson (1974) was used and the specific technique used in an earlier study (Du-Babcock, 1999). In other words, a turn was taken as consisting of all the speech interactant's utterances up to the point another individual takes over the speaking role. The number of turns taken by each participant was codified, counted, and compared. Speaking time was calculated by using a stopwatch to measure the exact length of each conversational turn. The length of speaking time for each turn was also coded according to the designated interlocutors and served as a cross check of meeting interaction.

Data Analysis

This current study seeks to examine the influence of a cultural dimension (individualism-collectivism) and group composition (culturally homogeneous-heterogeneous) on turn-takings, and speaking time distribution. The considerable variations in the meeting duration (ranging from 449 to 3540 seconds) and the number of meeting participants (ranging from 5 to 10) could have adversely affected the accuracy of the statistical test results on the variables being examined. In order to prevent these intervening factors from confusing or influencing the statistical tests and to obtain more accurate results, the researcher attempted to control and adjust the factors (that is, to treat them as covariates and keep them constant) by using analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) tests.

Mean scores and standard deviations for all the variables were calculated and compared. ANCOVA tests were performed to investigate (a) whether there were significant differences in the communication behaviors between collectivistic and individualistic cultures, and (b) whether individuals from collectivistic and individualistic cultures exhibit similar or different communication behaviors when participating in a homogeneous and a heterogeneous group with regard to the examined variables. These tests enabled me to address the research questions the study was set up to explore. Research Questions 1 and 2 focused on the influence of a culture's individualist or

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collectivist orientation and group composition on the number of turn-takings and amount of speaking time. Research Question 3 examined whether individuals from collectivistic cultures or individualistic cultures share turns and distribute speaking time more evenly when participating in homogeneous groups as compared to heterogeneous groups. Based on the three research questions, the related hypotheses are listed as follows:

Hypothesis 1: Individuals from collectivistic cultures are likely to take fewer turns than those from individualistic cultures in small-group decision-making meetings.

Hypothesis 2: Individuals from collectivistic cultures are likely to speak less than those from individualistic cultures in small-group decision-making meetings.

Hypothesis 3: Individuals from collectivistic cultures are likely to take more turns in homogeneous group meetings than in heterogeneous group meetings.

Hypothesis 4: Individuals from collectivistic cultures are likely to speak more in homogeneous group meetings than in heterogeneous group meetings.

Hypothesis 5: Individuals from individualistic cultures are likely to take less turns in homogeneous group meetings than in heterogeneous group meetings.

Hypothesis 6: Individuals from individualistic cultures are likely to speak less in homogeneous group meetings than in heterogeneous group meetings.

Hypothesis 7: Individuals from collectivistic cultures are likely to distribute their turns more evenly than those from individualistic cultures in small-group meetings.

Hypothesis 8: Individuals from collectivistic cultures are likely to distribute their speaking time more evenly than those from individualistic cultures in small-group meetings.

Hypothesis 9: Individuals from collectivistic cultures are likely to distribute their turns more evenly in homogeneous group meetings than in heterogeneous group meetings.

Hypothesis 10: Individuals from collectivistic cultures are likely to distribute their speaking time more evenly in homogeneous group meetings than in heterogeneous group meetings.

Hypothesis 11: Individuals from individualistic cultures are likely to distribute their turns less evenly in homogeneous group meetings than heterogeneous group meetings.

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Hypothesis 12: Individuals from individualistic cultures are likely to distribute their speaking time less evenly in homogeneous group meetings than in heterogeneous group meetings.

Findings

Research Question 1 asked whether individuals from individualistic and collectivistic cultures exhibit similar or different turn-taking and speech duration communication behaviors. To answer this question, analyses were performed to investigate whether there were significant differences between the two cultures with regard to two identified variables: (a) number of turns taken and (b) amount of speaking time.

An ANCOVA test was performed to discover whether there were any differences between individuals from individualistic and collectivistic cultures in their turn-taking behavior (see Table 1). With the meeting duration and the number of participants controlled as covariates, a significant result was obtained ($F = 13.790$; $p < .001$). Hypothesis 1 is supported. The results show that the I-C construct of culture is a significant contributing factor in influencing the number of turns taken by participants in small group decision-making ($F = 4.044$; $p < .05$) meetings, although individuals from collectivistic cultures (37.998) tend to take fewer turns than those from individualistic cultures (48.639).

Table 1

Mean scores of the Identified variables between Collectivistic and Individualistic Cultures

Variables	All	Collectivistic Cultures	Individualistic Cultures	Mean Difference	F
Turn taking (number)	43.319	37.998	48.639	-10.641	4.044*
Amount of speaking time (seconds)	351.404	300.782	402.027	-101.245	9.245**

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

The same statistical test was also used to examine whether individuals from collectivistic cultures are likely to speak less than those individuals from individualistic cultures. Again, the meeting duration and the number of participants were kept constant and the test result derived was statistically significant ($F = 31.289$; $p < .001$). The result indicates that the amount of speaking time for individuals from collectivistic cultures (300.782 seconds) was significantly less than that for individuals from individualistic cultures (402.027 seconds) at .05 significant level ($F = 9.245$). The finding reveals that the I-C

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cultural dimension is a determining factor that significantly affects the speaking time of the meeting participants. Hypothesis 2 is also supported.

In sum, the results of hypotheses 1 and 2 confirmed that individuals from different cultures adopt different communication behaviors in small-group decision-making meetings. Individuals from collectivistic cultures tend to take fewer turns and speak less than those from individualistic cultures.

Research Question 2 measures the influence of group composition on the number of turn-takings and the amount of speaking time among participants in group decision-making meetings. To answer Research Question 2, ANCOVA with two independent categorical variables were performed to investigate whether there are significant differences in turn-taking behavior and the distribution of speaking time (a) among the participants from collectivistic cultures and (b) among those from individualistic cultures. It was hypothesized that individuals from collectivist cultures are likely to take more turns (Hypothesis 3) and speak more (Hypothesis 4) in homogeneous group decision-making meetings than in heterogeneous group decision-making meetings while the reverse is held for individualistic cultures (Hypotheses 5 & 6).

The result of the ANCOVA test (see Table 2) shows that group composition exhibits significant effect on the amount of speaking time of individuals from collectivistic cultures ($F = 7.470$; $p < .01$) (Hypothesis 4). Collectivistic individuals spoke more in homogeneous group decision-making meetings (382.096) than in heterogeneous group decision-making meetings (268.714). For the turn-taking behaviors, collectivistic individuals still took more turns in homogeneous group meeting (45.328) than in heterogeneous group meetings (37.673) though the test did not derive a significant result.

Table 2
Mean Scores of Turn-takings and Speaking Time for Collectivistic Cultures in Homogeneous and Heterogeneous Group Meetings

Collectivistic Cultures

Variables	All	Homogeneous	Heterogeneous	Mean Difference	F
Turn taking (number)	41.500	45.328	37.673	7.655	1.082
Amount of speaking time (seconds)	325.405	382.096	268.714	113.383	7.470*

* $p < .01$

For Hypotheses 5 and 6, which address the communication behaviors of individuals from individualistic cultures participating in homogeneous and heterogeneous small-group meetings, the ANCOVA test results are not significant (See Table 3). Despite this, there

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was still a difference in the communication behaviors among individuals from individuals in meetings of different group compositions. They took more turns (41.574 vs. 36.521) and speak more (345.341 vs. 272.634) in heterogeneous group meetings than in homogeneous group meetings.

Table 3
Mean Scores of Turn-takings and Speaking Time for Individualistic Cultures in Homogeneous and Heterogeneous Group Meetings

Individualistic Cultures

Variables	All	Homogeneous	Heterogeneous	Mean Difference	F
Turn taking (number)	39.048	36.521	41.574	-5.053	.458
Amount of speaking time (seconds)	308.987	272.634	345.341	-72.707	1.648

The result that group composition exerts an influence on the turn-taking behaviors of individuals is consistent with the previous research findings of Oetzel (1998) where Japanese members took fewer turns in heterogeneous groups than in homogeneous groups, and where European Americans took more turns in heterogeneous than in homogeneous groups.

The reason for such a contrasting difference existing among collectivists participating in homogeneous and heterogeneous groups is likely to be attributed to their confidence in using a second language. Individuals from collectivistic cultures feel less confident and possibly exhibit communication apprehension, thereby taking fewer turns and speaking less when communicating in a heterogeneous group where their counterparts are native-English speakers.

Research Question 3 first examines whether individuals from collectivistic cultures distribute turns and speaking time more evenly than those from individualistic cultures (Research Question 3A). Second, this research question further examines whether individuals from collectivistic cultures distribute turns and speaking time more evenly (Research Question 3B), and whether those from individualistic cultures distribute turns and speaking time less evenly in homogeneous groups than in heterogeneous groups (Research Question 3C).

To answer Research Question 3, I attempted to make some interpretations from the distribution of turns and speaking time difference between two cultural groups by means of standard deviation (S.D.) (see table 4). The S.D. measures the degree of dispersion and thus can reflect the distribution of turns and speaking time among the participants in group decision-making meetings. A larger S.D. indicates a larger degree of dispersion and thus a wider distribution of turns or speaking time. It follows that in a meeting with a

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wide distribution, some of the participants are likely to take a very large number of turns or more speaking time, while some take very few turns or little speaking time.

To answer Research Question 3A, an ANCOVA test was performed and the results (see Table 4) show that individuals from collectivistic cultures, with a smaller S.D. (S.D. = 40.030) and a resultant narrower distribution, are seen to distribute their turns more evenly in a group decision meeting than those from individualistic cultures (S.D. = 43.076). Likewise, a smaller S.D. or a narrower distribution of speaking time for collectivistic individuals (S.D. = 255.277), as compared to a larger S.D. for individualistic participants (S.D. = 318.750), shows that these collectivistic individuals tend to distribute their speaking time more evenly than participants from individualistic cultures.

Consistent with the studies by Yamada (1990) and Gudykunst and Nishida (1994), the results of the current study show that individuals from collectivistic cultures, who stress group sharing rather than individual gains, shared turns and distributed speaking time more evenly than those from individualistic cultures in group meetings.

Table 4
Distributions (Standard Deviations) of Turn-takings and Speak Time between Two Cultural Groups

Group	**Standard Deviation**	
	No. of turn-taking	Amount of speaking time
Collectivistic	40.030	255.277
Homogeneous	36.723	250.717
Heterogeneous	45.444	202.135
Individualistic	43.076	318.750
Homogeneous	42.095	318.642
Heterogeneous	43.774	317.722

When taking group composition into account, the results show that members of collectivistic cultures share their turns more evenly in homogeneous groups (S.D. = 36.723) than in heterogeneous groups (S.D. = 45.444) (see Table 4). However, the reverse pattern was found in the distribution of speaking time. Individuals from collectivistic cultures distribute their speaking time more evenly in heterogeneous groups (S.D. = 202.135) than in homogeneous groups (S.D. = 250.717). Such an inconsistency between the distribution of turn-takings and speaking time could be due to the fact that second-language speakers may find it easier to communicate with individuals who are also non native-English speakers. Some of them may feel freer to speak, thus widening the distribution of speaking time in homogeneous group meetings.

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The same distribution patterns as observed within collectivistic cultures were also found among individuals from individualistic cultures, though the differences in the standard deviations are very slight. Individuals from individualistic cultures also share their turns more evenly in homogeneous group meetings (S.D. = 42.095) than in heterogeneous group meetings (S.D. = 43.774) but distribute their speaking time more evenly in heterogeneous group meetings (S.D. = 317.722) than in homogeneous group meetings (S.D. = 318.642). With such slight differences in the standard deviations, participants from the individualistic cultures in fact exhibit very consistent communication behaviors in the distribution of turn-takings and speaking time no matter whether they take part in homogeneous or heterogeneous group meetings.

In sum, the overall findings for Research Question 3 show that individuals from collectivistic cultures, which stress group sharing, tend to distribute their turns and speaking time more evenly than those from individualistic cultures. Also, individuals from collectivistic cultures are likely to share their turns more evenly in homogeneous group meetings but distribute their speaking time more evenly in heterogeneous group meetings. As for individualistic cultures, participants exhibit very consistent communication behaviors in the distribution of turn-taking and speaking time regardless the group composition of the meetings.

Conclusion

The objective of this study was to examine whether cultural I-C and group composition influence turn-taking, and speaking time distribution. The results of this study indicate that: (a) the cultural dimension of I-C is a predictor of the number of turn-takings and the speaking time duration, (b) group composition has a significant effect on the amount of speaking time among individuals from collectivistic cultures; that is, group members of collectivistic cultures have longer speaking time in homogeneous than in heterogeneous group meetings, (c) individuals from collectivistic cultures distribute their turns and speaking time more evenly than those from individualistic cultures, and (d) individuals from collectivistic cultures tend to share their turns more evenly in homogeneous groups but distribute their speaking time more evenly in heterogeneous groups. However, the results show very slight differences in the turn-takings behaviors or speaking time duration among individuals from individualistic cultures, whether they participated in homogeneous group meetings or heterogeneous group meetings.

Implications

The findings of the current study have important and pragmatic implications for intra- and cross-cultural communication. The results of the study illustrate the usefulness of cultural I-C and group composition to explain whether individuals exhibit similar or different communication behaviors (i.e., turn-taking and speaking time duration) in small-group decision-making meetings. The findings of the current study add value to a very extensive literature on cross-cultural communication in examining whether and how individuals communicate differently or similarly in intra- and cross-cultural situations.

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The results also confirm the previous findings that cultural I-C and group composition have an important effect on communication behaviors in small-group decision-making meetings. These findings suggest that it is important for native-English speakers to accommodate their counterparts who possess varying second-language proficiencies and diverse cultural backgrounds. It is suggested that additional research in this area should focus on examining how to improve the interaction among people with diverse backgrounds and varying second-language proficiency when they communicate in a cross-cultural environment.

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Building and Sharing Electronic Portfolios: Teaching Professional Writing

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Electronic portfolios, or what many are now calling ePortfolios, are becoming a topic of interest at many colleges and universities (Batson, 2002). Fueled by a desire to create flexible venues for displaying, reflecting upon, and sharing their work, students, faculty, and institutions are beginning to investigate and experiment with ways to build and display portfolios online. The potential advantages of ePortfolios, particularly for assessment and reflection, are significant, and early evidence indicates that there are sound reasons for pursuing this updated version of a strategy that has worked well in the past (Lankes, 1995; Pullman, 2002).

While portfolios have existed for some time, primarily as means to collect and display one's work, they didn't begin to gain a foothold in the academy until the early to mid-1980s, when composition teachers such as Peter Elbow and Pat Belanoff (1997) adopted them as an alternative assessment strategy, one that could show students' development (in terms of writing ability) over time and permit students to have a say in the ways in which their work was organized and presented. Since then, according to Vavrus (1990), teachers have continued to use portfolios in systematic ways "to monitor growth of the students' knowledge, skills and attitudes" (qtd. in Cole et al., 1995, p. 9).

In the early 1990s, faculty also discovered the value of creating portfolios to document their classroom practice and demonstrate knowledge and skills (Seldin, 1991; Doolittle, 1994). Teaching portfolios became useful for both formative and summative evaluation (Tompkins, 2001). In addition, faculty have adopted them to record their goals, growth, achievement, and professional attributes developed over time and in collaboration with others. In this manner, faculty create *professional portfolios*: thoughtfully organized collections of artifacts that "illustrate professional status, pedagogical expertise, subject matter knowledge, knowledge of learning processes, and professional and personal attributes that contribute to teaching" (Winsor, 1998).

Portfolios have evolved to serve other uses as well. In a symposium at Virginia Tech entitled "The Evaluation of Instruction," Margaret Miller, a past president of the American Association for Higher Education and the keynote speaker, called for "more flexibility in the ways in which the university supports and assesses teaching." She highlighted a need she had described earlier (1998): to "treat teaching as a scholarly activity that can be shared, documented, studied, reviewed, rewarded, and continuously improved" (p. v).

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One of the most promising ways to assess teaching and address the need Miller (1998) mentions is the course portfolio, which, for some teachers, like William Cerbin, has become the equivalent of a "scholarly manuscript" (Cerbin, qtd. in Miller, p. v). Course portfolios, a concept Cerbin (1996) proposed and developed, have become valuable as a means for teachers to record information about and reflect on their teaching practices. In addition, if teachers open up their portfolios for review by putting them online, they make teaching a rich, collaborative enterprise by meeting the three goals of the scholarship of teaching: it becomes public, is subject to critical evaluation, and is usable by others in the community (Shulman, 1998, p. 6).

In this paper, I will provide a brief overview of the concept of course portfolios, describe how I am using one along with student ePortfolios as part of an introductory course in professional writing, and highlight the potential value of this strategy for assessment. My reasons for using portfolios are straightforward: 1) a desire to elevate teaching from a mechanical, practical act or "knack" to what it is, an art; 2) a belief in the transformative power of relationships and the value of mentoring;[1] and 3) a sense that we need to focus more explicitly on outcomes—student learning—and reflect on how those outcomes are achieved.

Brief Overview

Two important issues in our field of professional writing are the link between theory and practice and the need to prepare teachers to understand the intimate connections between what they know and how they teach. Recently I (Dubinsky, 2002a) argued for the centrality of reflective practice as well as the need to prepare teachers at the graduate student level for what Dunne (1993) calls the "rough ground" of their classrooms. If teaching is going to be seen as a form of scholarship, then the practice of teaching must be seen as giving rise to new forms of knowledge.

As Hutchings (1998b) indicates, one of the central problems teachers face is "how to generate, exchange, and build on knowledge in order to improve practice" (p. 1). One means for doing so is to gather materials for a course portfolio and share them with colleagues who teach similar courses. The act of gathering and sharing one's course materials in several successive iterations of a course enacts a vision of teaching as "an extended process that unfolds over time," one that "embodies at least five elements: *vision, design, interactions, outcomes, and analysis*" (Shulman, 1998, p. 5). These five elements turn what, for many, is drudgery or repetitive work into a journey of discovery. More importantly, the acts of selecting and reflecting help teachers recognize that their work can actually be represented as scholarship, and as such, as part of their field's intellectual property.

[1] Rymer (2002) highlighted for all of us how mentoring contributes to our development as teachers, scholars, and members of our profession (p. 343); course portfolios help build relationships among faculty based on the work all of us do.

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What is a Course Portfolio?

As I indicated earlier, a *course portfolio* is an attempt to document one's teaching practices in a particular course over a period of time. Different from a *teaching portfolio*, where the emphasis is primarily on the teacher, or a *student portfolio*, where the emphasis is on the product (and often on reflection about the learning that has occurred), a course portfolio is about *process*, about evidence relating to teaching, learning, and development. And because it looks to the future (in terms of revisions of the course) as well as to the present and past, it may also be about what "*might be"* (Hutchings, 1998a, p. 15). As such, each course becomes a sort of "laboratory—not as a truly controlled experiment . . . but as a setting in which [teachers] start out with goals for student learning . . . and collect evidence about effects and impact" (Cerbin 1996, pp. 52-53).

One simple reason for gathering this data about teaching, the "evidence about effects and impact" that Cerbin (1996) mentions, is to offer a treatment for what Shulman (1996) has called "pedagogical amnesia" (qtd. in Hutchings, 1998a, p. 17). Shulman's point is that when we teach, we often make a note of issues, some small and others not so small, that we recognize as needing to be considered and perhaps changed. However, for a number of reasons, most often lack of time or the inability to recall or find key pieces of information, these issues aren't addressed. According to William Cutler (1998), this strategy of using course portfolios can help to put faculty on a journey with the explicit goal of creating a record of what happened in order to facilitate assessment and change, if necessary. Course portfolios can lead to the creation of a very different environment, one in which faculty "think more carefully about what their students are learning and how that learning relates to the content and methods of instruction" (p. 23).

Electronic course portfolios, even though the genre is less than a decade old, are gaining prominence as an effective means of recording and sharing work. Members of American Association for Higher Education's (AAHE) Course Portfolio Working Group have created and shared examples in a variety of disciplines, including biology, English, and nursing (Hutchings, 1998a). These examples have provided the teachers and their colleagues with opportunities to discuss scholarly and pedagogical dimensions of their teaching. They have provided evidence of the thinking that goes on behind the teaching, and offered what Parker Palmer (1993) calls opportunities for "good talk about good teaching" (p.8). Finally, they have helped to demonstrate the kinds of learning occurring in the classes in question, which, in most instances, created a culture of teaching and learning, both within and across departments and institutions.

How Do You Create a Course Portfolio?

While there are many variants of course portfolios, most have certain key elements. According to Samford University's Center for Problem-Based Learning (2003), these elements include

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I. Introductory Information
II. Course Design
    A. Rationale
    B. Reflective essay on course content
    C. Reflective essay on instructional practice
    D. Problem-Based learning: context and application
III. Student Understanding
IV. Reflective Summary of the Course

While many course portfolios include all of these components, teachers should consider this list as a guide only. The goal is to gather and select the appropriate materials that document what happens in terms of student learning in their particular class, which may mean that some of these items are not necessary. For example, a teacher may choose not to include an essay on instructional practice, including a daily journal instead. Some teachers have even begun including video clips and digital photos to capture some event in class or even just to document the classroom's physical space, which may—and probably does—have a bearing on the actual day-to-day interactions in that space.

The act of gathering materials is just the first of four key steps, which are often outlined as *collect, select, reflect, and connect* (Yancey, 2001). Once gathered, these materials need to be culled and organized in some manner and then reflected upon. Through the acts of reflection (on what has happened, is happening, and might happen), teachers can create knowledge and change. According to Posner (1985), "Reflective teaching will allow [teachers] to act in deliberate and intentional ways, to devise new ways of teaching . . . and to interpret new experiences from a fresh perspective" (p. 20).

Finally, these materials need to be accessible and available for review. To meet the conditions for research and scholarship, they need to be available for public scrutiny. To make them more usable and help to alleviate what Barkley (2001) calls "the messy complexity" of teaching and learning, the materials must be organized to enable other members of one's scholarly community to offer critical review, evaluation, and elaboration (Kelly, 2001). Some teachers (myself included) have opened up their portfolios to comment through the use of online discussion forums. Once available, we begin a dialogue that can lead to growth, reform, and education (not only for our students but also for ourselves and our discipline).

My Course Portfolio

In his groundbreaking work, *Scholarship Reconsidered,* Ernest Boyer (1990) offered some suggestions to change the way scholarship is defined and rewarded. For example, citing Artistotle's belief that "Teaching is the highest form of understanding" (qtd. on p. 23), he argued for teaching to be seen as a "scholarly enterprise" (p. 23). However, he recognized that such a redefinition would require clear standards. Thus, according to Boyer, for teaching to be

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considered "consequential" (p. 23) and thus a form of scholarship, "pedagogical procedures must be carefully planned, continuously examined, and relate directly to the subject taught" (pp. 23-24).

Boyer's work laid the foundation for much of the work in the area of the scholarship of teaching, which others, such as Shulman (1998), whose criteria for that scholarship I mentioned earlier, have built upon. To meet the standards and criteria for the scholarship of teaching that Boyer (1990) and Shulman (1998) have outlined, I have begun an electronic course portfolio. The course—English 3104: Introduction to Professional Writing—lays the foundations for the entire professional writing program. In it, students learn both fundamental rhetorical principles and have an opportunity to apply them across a spectrum of genres. To accomplish these goals, I rely on pedagogy built around service-learning, which is ideal in that it focuses on experiential learning and requires a strong focus on reflection (Dubinsky, 2002b).

In the portfolio, I include the following items:

- a reflective statement
- documentation to illustrate how course goals are put into practice, such as student assignments and results
- information gathered from assessment techniques
- a course journal focusing on reflections
- appendices that include forms used for assessment/self-assessment and feedback from students.

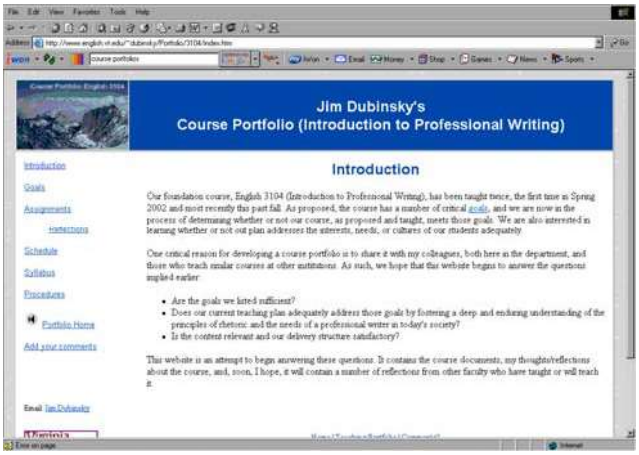
To document learning, I gather data, ranging from weekly one-minute mini-assessments (using 3x5 cards, in which I ask students to tell me both what questions remain after the week's lessons and what new information they have learned) to an electronic discussion forum that students can use to share their assignment drafts with other students. I, of course, keep copies of student work, and, if they revise it, request that they provide short memos explaining what they revised and why. During the semester, I also keep a daily journal, in which I present both a record of what happened and a reflection, in which I compare my intentions and the results.

In terms of selection and reflection, I include my course materials: syllabus, schedule, and assignments. In addition, I offer an introduction in which I discuss the course goals and my intentions. I add my journal, which includes reflections on a day-to-day or weekly basis; a series of reflections on the various assignments, which also include sample student papers; and a brief summary essay about the course.

To display and share these materials, I developed a template that mirrors my course website in that it includes the essential course documents such as the syllabus and schedule (see figure 1).

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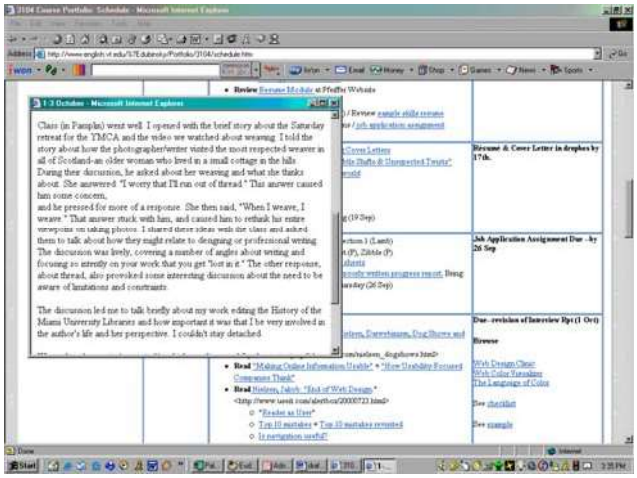
Figure 1: *Home Page of Course Portfolio*



http://www.english.vt.edu/~dubinsky/Portfolio/3104/index.htm

However, unlike the regular course website, the online course portfolio site is enhanced with reflective comments and artifacts that document student performance and learning. The course portfolio consists of an introduction; a section in which I outline and discuss my teaching goals; a list of assignments, with examples of student achievement and reflection about both the assignment and the results; a schedule, to which I added pop-up links (see figure 2) highlighting my thoughts on those days; and a discussion board, which I made available to my colleagues.

Figure 2: *Schedule with Pop-Up Reflection*



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What I Learned and Where I'm Heading Next

My first semester teaching the course (Fall 2002) was also my first attempt to gather data for my electronic course portfolio. Truly it was an introduction to this method of learning about teaching. In the process, I faced some issues about my course design, particularly the fact that I included too much work, and I didn't have enough time to help the students acquire a sense of the culture of the local organization they were serving.[2] In essence, this method of teaching kept me focused on my teaching—no "pedagogical amnesia" for me, which made me all the more aware of the differences between what I espoused and what this particular group of students and I were enacting, between what I had planned and was able to execute.

I learned a lot about the course and about the process of assessment from the act of reflecting on both my own work and that of my students and from the act of sharing it (even though I haven't had too much feedback yet—at least in terms of colleagues' comments online). As a writing teacher, I am well aware of the ways in which writing enables learning. Choosing to create this portfolio verified for me the value of writing and reflection. An important lesson that I "relearned" is the need for more writing workshop time in class, for getting the students more invested in editing and commenting on their peers' papers (we did a lot of this activity out of class). To help build teams (another course goal), I need to designate more class time in which the activities of writing and editing collaboratively can be highlighted.

Finally, I learned that this process of building a portfolio requires sufficient prior planning. Having the template in place before the semester would have helped, as would publicizing the site so that it may actually get some feedback from other teachers who teach similar courses.

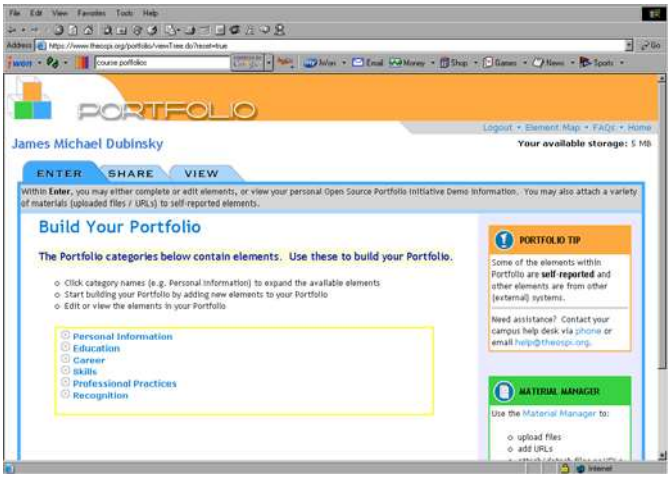
ePortfolios

As I approach the second round of teaching this course (Fall 2003), I am aware of a need to do a better job finding public methods of reflecting on student work and of recording the students' reflections on their own work and that of their classmates'. To accomplish this objective, I am asking my students to create their own portfolios as the semester progresses. As a member of the ePortfolio Working Group at Virginia Tech, I am fortunate to have access to a software package designed at the University of Minnesota called the Open Source Portfolio Initiative (OSPI). While this software is quite flexible in terms of how one represents oneself, it is designed primarily as a vehicle to display products. For example, the categories of personal identification, education, career information, and skills (see figure 3) center on the kinds of information that potential employers and tenure review/promotion committees might want to see.

[2] One of my course goals is to ensure that students learn "the culture of a local community-based organization and the population it serves."

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Figure 3: *OSPI Portfolio Categories*



That said, when used in combination with Blackboard and the synchronous/asynchronous features designed for reflection and discussion, I believe that this software will help me obtain a more accurate picture of both the learning that occurs during the course and student impressions about that learning.

I also believe that students will use this software willingly. Students are motivated to represent themselves in a positive light to potential employers.[3] This software asks students to represent themselves by collecting the kinds of information that potential employers would be interested in seeing and enables them to create specialized "views" of that information, tailoring it to specific audiences. For example, a student who is an engineering major and professional writing minor may have uploaded an engineering design, using *Autocad*. Should she apply to an engineering or design firm, she may want to display it; should she choose to apply to a nonprofit organization as a technical writer, she may choose to highlight the grant project she writes for my class instead.

Most importantly, in terms of my purpose of evaluating the learning that occurs in English 3104, by asking students to create a portfolio and thus engage in a process similar to mine, I believe I will see much more of an explicit emphasis on their learning and on how the products they produce address or meet the course goals. They will be "writing themselves" all term, and as I ask them to step back and share a variety of "views" of themselves with their peers (and perhaps with our service-learning partner), they will have to step back and reflect upon what they decide to share and why, considering how those choices create a personality, complete with documented

[3] In my experience, students find the job application assignment one of the most relevant, primarily because it has immediate application, and they can see the advantages of learning how to present or market themselves effectively.

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skills and talents. As we talk more in class about the explicit goals, we will begin to understand how to think rhetorically, to evaluate our work, and to become more accountable to each other.

Conclusion

This paper is about a process in which I am engaged and will remain engaged in for some time: the process of learning about how to represent what happens in a classroom and document what students learn. I expect that the process will not end, regardless of how many times I teach the course or record my results in a course portfolio. That said, I am convinced that I have made some significant gains in my understanding of what an introductory course in professional writing can do for students, and I am going to continue working to make the process of learning, what usually is a tacit process, an explicit one. My conclusions are tentative, primarily because the research I am engaged in is young, and I have quite a distance to travel along the road to discovery yet. My hope, however, is that by beginning to make my teaching community property, I have begun the most difficult process of all: opening the door of my classroom to review and conversation, which I believe will shed light on the activities within, and lead to better practice and more learning. With the electronic course portfolio, I enhance or accelerate the process by permitting more interactivity. With ePortfolios, I hope to create a reflective environment for students, giving them greater responsibility for managing their own learning and preparing for aspects of work-based and lifelong learning. Finally, I hope that I am creating a "laboratory" that will teach me and others about what it means to teach professional writing, about what goes into a program, and about how to integrate assessment into everything we do. In essence, my goal is to develop strategies to facilitate assessment of curriculum outcomes that are not easily evaluated by traditional instruments of assessment.

Ours is a pedagogical discipline. We focus on ways language can be used to create meaning and effect change. I believe that strategies such as course and student portfolios can help us to become graceful teachers who reflect on / think about our work, which will lead to the teaching of writing being refigured as an "art." Refigured in this way, we can shift from an instrumental approach to teaching, focusing on forms and genres, and toward an approach that explores how these forms and genres are adapted and appropriated by specific discourse communities to fit specific situations. By so doing, we may recognize not only the complexity of our discipline but also the knowledge-generating element of teaching and the fact that because what teachers do is so intimately tied up with how they do it, they benefit from studying and reflecting on their teaching.

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Business and the Holocaust

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Oregon Institute of Technology

Recent corporate scandals involving the fiscal and ethical bankruptcy of such firms as Arthur Andersen, Enron, and WorldCom have revealed the dark underbelly of capitalism: an emphasis on profit-making, regardless of the cost to employees and society at large. As a nation, we were stunned by news of management raiding employee pension funds, lying to the media, and avoiding responsibility for obvious unethical behavior.

Paul Volcker, former chair of the Federal Reserve Bank, has characterized the tenor of the times: "Traditional norms didn't exist. You have this whole culture where the only sign of worth was how much money you had" (Cassidy, 2002, p. 64). While workers' retirement funds were quietly plundered, corporate executives, exercising their stock options, wallowed in wealth. Table 1, below, offers examples of the egregious personal profits attained by a handful of corporate executives (Cassidy, 2002).

Table 1
Executive avarice

Corporate Executive	Affiliation	Profit (in millions)
Gary Winnick	Global Crossing	512.4
Kenneth Lay	Enron	246.7
Scott Sullivan	WorldCom	49.4
Clark McLeod	McLeodUSA	99
Richard Lumpkin	McLeodUSA	116

Perhaps the most flagrant example of greed is Tyco CEO L. Dennis Kozlowski, who, despite an annual salary of $137 million, squandered millions of company dollars on both serious art–a Monet for $3.95 million, a Renoir for $5.5 million–and frivolous kitsch: $6,000 for a shower curtain, $15,000 for an umbrella stand (Stewart, 2003). All told, more than $3.3 billion vanished into very deep executive pockets (Cassidy, 2002).

But avarice is hardly new to the corporate scene; it has firm roots in the past. Indeed, an examination of how American businesses operated in Germany during World War II reveals that Enron et al. were following well-established precedent. CEOs such as Henry Ford and Thomas Watson played very prominent roles in the Holocaust, technologically enabling the German government to implement its plans for the extermination of European Jewry. In History 307,

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Engineering, Business, and the Holocaust, 24 students and I embarked on a journey into the netherworld of the Third Reich.

Course Background

The 10-week course was organized around three questions: what happened? (5 weeks); who was responsible? (4 weeks); and what happened to those responsible? (1 week). Readings included Robert Wistrich's *Hitler and the Holocaust*, a condensed history of the Third Reich; Primo Levi's *Survival in Auschwitz*, a survivor narrative; Tadeusz Borowski's *This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen*, a literary response; and Edwin Black's *IBM and the Holocaust*, an encyclopedic examination of IBM's technological role. Students also read 14 Internet articles detailing the activities of businesses and engineering firms, and we watched several videos, for a visual perspective. These were graphic, as I made a decision not to sanitize horrific events and to focus on the human toll: students need to see the mountains of bodies, the tons of hair, the piles of eyeglasses and teeth.

Knowledge of Holocaust chronology and events provides a context for examining the participation of business. While major German businesses such as Bayer/I.G. Farben, producers of Zyklon-B; Topf und Söhne, a crematorium oven manufacturer; and Krupp, an armaments manufacturer, were deeply involved in the Holocaust (see Friedman, 1999, and ABCNews.com, 1999), the role of American businesses has only been documented relatively recently, within the last two decades. Investigating the complicity of two American business giants, Ford Motor Company and IBM, proved to be an enlightening and disturbing experience for students.

The Ford Motor Company

Ford was but one American business operating profitably within the Third Reich; others included Standard Oil, General Motors, General Electric, and several banks (see Sutton, 2000). What sets Ford apart from the rest, however, is the owner's ideological compatibility with Nazi philosophy and his willingness to consciously ignore moral dictates in favor of profiteering.

Setting the Stage: Henry Ford and Anti-Semitism

In high school, my students said, they learned that Henry Ford was a great inventor and a brilliant businessman. He was. But he was also a vicious anti-Semite. The first documented evidence dates to 1915, when Ford sailed to Europe on the "Peace Ship," with a delegation of pacifists hoping to stop the war. "I know who caused the war," he commented to Rosika Schwimmer, organizer of the venture, "the German-Jewish bankers" (Logsdon I, 1999).

By 1920, his beliefs were sufficiently formulated to publish a series of articles in the weekly *Dearborn Independent*, a Ford-owned newspaper. Loosely organized under the title *The International Jew*, the 91 articles were based on *The Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion*, an acknowledged forgery that details the Jews' plans for world domination. A glance at Ford's

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chapter titles reveals his anti-Jewish sentiments: “The Scope of the Jewish Dictatorship in the U.S.,” “Jewish Power and American Money Famine,” “Jewish Degradation of American Baseball,” “Will Jewish Zionism Bring Armageddon?” (Logsdon II, 1999).

To ensure initial readership, Ford employees tucked copies of the newspaper in the glove box of each new vehicle as it rolled off the production line (Guardado, Gutterman, & Moché, 2000). Ford also required dealerships across the country to sell subscriptions to the *Dearborn Independent*. By 1924, the paper had a subscription base of 700,000, far surpassing that of the nation’s largest newspaper, the *New York Daily News*, with 50,000 subscribers (Logsdon II, 1999).

Eventually, the articles were anthologized as a four-volume collection, *The International Jew*, allowing roughly two million readers (Baldwin, 2001) a glimpse of Ford’s peculiar view of history as driven by fanatical Zionists: “Christopher Columbus was actually financed and later betrayed by ‘secret Jews’ from the Spanish court. . . . The World War and the Bolshevik Revolution have both been precipitated and directed by Jews” (Logsdon II, 1999).

In 1927 and again in 1942, in the face of public outrage, Ford formally apologized in the worldwide press for basing his views on a known forgery, urging “all my fellow-citizens to give no aid to any movement whose purpose it is to arouse hatred against any group” (Baldwin, 2001, p. 316). Despite these public apologies and the 1927 removal of the material from the market (Patterson, 2002), *The International Jew* is readily accessible on the Internet: a simple Google search yields 8,580 websites, published in 10 languages.

Ford’s anti-Semitic musings made their way to Germany in the early 1920s, translated as *The Eternal Jew*, and captured the attention of the fledgling Nazi hierarchy: Heinrich Himmler, who would later head the SS, stated that “Ford’s book had opened his eyes to the Jewish danger” (Logsdon IV, 1999), and Hitler Youth leader Baldur von Schirach noted, “You have no idea what a great influence this book had on the thinking of German youth . . . if [Henry Ford] said the Jews were to blame, why naturally we believed him” (Patterson, 2002).

Adolf Hitler praised Ford in *Mein Kampf* as the lone individual who could fend off the Jewish financiers controlling Wall Street (Hitler, 1939) and actually had a life-sized portrait of Ford by his desk in his Munich office. “I regard Henry Ford as my inspiration,” Hitler commented to a *Detroit News* reporter in 1931 (Patterson, 2002). In fact, Hitler was so taken with Ford’s writings that he unabashedly copied portions and incorporated them in Chapter 14 of *Mein Kampf*, vol. 2 (see Hitler, 1939, p. 929, note 21).

In 1938, on his 75th birthday, Ford received the ultimate honor in a Detroit ceremony: the Grand Service Cross of the Supreme Order of the German Eagle, accompanied by a parchment citation praising Ford’s accomplishments and signed by Hitler. This award was reserved for “distinguished foreigners” (Baldwin, 2001). Another US business giant received the award in a Berlin ceremony a year earlier: Thomas Watson of IBM (Black, 2001).

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Sleeping with the Enemy: Fordwerke

With ideology in harmony with that of the National Socialist movement, Ford's initial venture was to begin business operations, opening an office in Berlin in 1925 and a factory in Cologne in 1931 (Guardado, Gutterman, & Moché, 2000), two years prior to Hitler's coronation as Chancellor of Germany. A Berlin plant was added in 1935 (Dobbs, 1998). Christened *Fordwerke*, "Ford works," the factories produced "vehicles of a strictly military nature for the Reich before the war began" as well as the passenger vehicles required by the SS, police, and members of the Nazi hierarchy. By 1941, *Fordwerke* **only** produced military trucks, essential to the blitzkrieg war strategy, and was one of the Wehrmacht's "largest suppliers," manufacturing about one-third of the trucks required by the German Army (Silverstein, 2000, pp. 12-14).

Despite its foreign location, *Fordwerke* remained an American corporation, with 52% of its stock held by Dearborn (Guardado, Gutterman, & Moché, 2000). By 1943, about half of the plant's "employees" consisted of slave or forced labor, captured Jews, Belgians, Russians, French, and Ukrainians, who slaved for 12 hours a day and were fed starvation diets consisting of "200 grams of bread for breakfast, no lunch and a supper of spinach and three potatoes or soup made of turnip leaves" (Silverstein, 2000, p. 14). This was consistent with the operations of German labor camps, which allowed each inmate about 184 calories a day (History Channel, 1996). The average life of a worker was about 3 _ months after entering a camp (Friedman, 1999). They were literally worked to death. According to Elsa Iwanowa, who at age 16 was taken from her Russian village and installed as a slave worker in the Cologne plant, "The conditions were terrible. They put us in barracks, on three tier bunks. It was very cold; they did not pay us at all and scarcely fed us. The only reason that we survived was that we were young and fit" (Logsdon VI, 1999).

Although there is some disagreement among historians (see Reich, 1999), the Ford Motor Company was apparently profiting from both sides during the war: by producing vehicles for the Axis in its European facilities, and by producing bombers for the Allies at its Dearborn plant (Guardado, Gutterman, & Moché, 2000). Moreover, after the war, the company received nearly $1 million in reparations for damages incurred during the bombing of the Cologne plant (Logsdon VI, 1999).

Henry Ford died in 1947 of cerebral hemorrhage (Baldwin, 2001), an anti-Semite to the end: he declared on his deathbed to a reporter, "I'll take my factory down brick by brick before I'll let any of the Jew speculators get stock in the company" (Logsdon VI, 1999). The company, however, maintained control of the Cologne plant after the war, and grandson Henry II was there in 1948 to see the 10,000th truck roll off the assembly line (Patterson, 2002).

Aiding and Abetting: Technological Contributions

The most important technological contribution of the Ford Motor Company to the Holocaust was providing the concept of the assembly line process. According to Ford's memoirs, the idea first occurred to him in a Chicago slaughterhouse: "The idea came in a general way from the overhead trolley that the Chicago packers use in dressing beef" (Ford, 1922, p. 81). While this

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process revolutionized industrial manufacturing, it also proved efficient for dealing with the huge number of corpses in the death camps. As Charles Patterson observes, Henry Ford's "impact on the twentieth century began, metaphorically speaking, at an American slaughterhouse and ended at Auschwitz" (Patterson, 2002).

Prior to the formulation of the "Final Solution" in 1942, Nazi killing attempts were clumsy and unwieldy, primarily because the idea of genocide was slow in coming to fruition (see Roseman, 2002, for a discussion of the progression of Nazi thinking regarding genocide). *Einsatzgruppen* in the Baltic states individually shot people and buried them in mass graves; mobile gassing trucks in Germany were slowly ridding the state of the physically and mentally infirm. But these early efforts were inefficient; ammunition was expensive, and the mass burial sites posed a health risk to nearby communities. If the11 million European Jews were to be annihilated, the Nazis needed a system that was quick and cost-efficient.

Ford's assembly line process was an ideal solution: similar to the system for processing beef that had so entranced Ford in the Chicago slaughterhouse, those selected for extermination were separated by gender, lined up, disrobed, and led into a shower facility. Zyklon-B canisters were dropped through vents in the ceiling, and the gas was activated by human body heat. Afterwards, the bodies were processed: their hair was shorn and used to stuff mattresses and helmet pads or braided for rugs, gold teeth extracted and deposited in the Reichsbank. Unusual tattoos were removed at some camps (such as Buchenwald) and made into decorative lampshades. Jewish inmates then carted the bodies to the crematoria, transferred them to gurneys, and fed them to the ovens. Incineration was very quick, about 30 minutes, and the ovens required little or no fuel, as they burned constantly and the heat from the bodies precluded the need for additional fuel. At Auschwitz-Birkenau, Topf und Söhne ovens, operating at peak capacity, could process about 12,000 bodies a day (Muller).

In late 1942, Topf engineer Fritz Sander submitted a patent application for a conveyor belt that would expedite the process further. "The conveyor-belt principle," common in American factories, would allow the corpses to be "brought to the incineration furnaces without interruption." In a chilling post-war interrogation, Sander noted that he was using his "specialist knowledge to help Germany win the war, just as an aircraft-construction engineer builds airplanes in wartime, which are also connected to the destruction of human beings" (Hogan, 2000, p. 462; see also Fleming, 1993).

Ethical Breaches

The Ford Motor Company, despite the vigorous protests of current management (Reich, 1999), clearly overstepped ethical boundaries in its business relations with Germany:

< Abusing the labor force by using forced and slave labor
< Profiting from both Allied and Axis governments
< Disseminating anti-Semitic literature
< Coercing others to distribute anti-Semitic literature

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< Providing technology that expedited genocide

While other US businesses also profited from ventures with the Third Reich, the Ford Motor Company is noteworthy for the founder's "energetic cooperation" (Patterson, 2002) with a morally bankrupt totalitarian regime and for providing the concept of the assembly line process in the death camps, enabling a culture of death to flourish.

IBM

The role of IBM in the Holocaust differs dramatically from that of Ford. Ford's initial involvement was based on an ideology compatible with Nazi philosophy, whereas IBM's motives were crassly commercial. Ford produced tangible goods to support the war effort; IBM dealt in a more ethereal substance: information. In examining IBM's effect, however, the collection and processing of information proved more influential to accelerating Holocaust events than did Ford's war machinery.

Genesis: The Hollerith System
It began as a contest: in 1890, Herman Hollerith, a brilliant young engineer working as an assistant at the US Census Bureau, won a bureau-sponsored competition by inventing an automated counting machine capable of processing large amounts of information in a relatively short period of time. Hollerith's machine saved US taxpayers over $5 million in the 1890 census and reduced the process from ten years to a mere three months (da Cruz, 2001-2). Working with columned cards, operators could punch holes to represent different traits; the cards were then fed into a reader that tabulated the information. Hollerith's data processing machine was truly revolutionary, "a steel, spindle, and rudder-wheeled key to the Pandora's box of unlimited information" (Black, 2001, p. 26).

Realizing the significance of his invention, Hollerith incorporated in 1896 as the Tabulating Machine Company, renting his machines to the US government as well as overseas, and engaging in considerable price-gouging activities. In 1911, TMC merged with two others to become Computing-Tabulating-Recording Company, and, in 1924, emerged as International Business Machines Corporation, to reflect the company's new character. IBM's first major international foray was in Germany, where its subsidiary was known as Dahomag (Black, 2001).

In 1914, Hollerith withdrew as general manager of the firm and appointed Thomas J. Watson, a very energetic and aggressive National Cash Register employee, as general manager. Unlike Henry Ford, Watson made no public pronouncements of his anti-Semitic leanings, although he was "clearly a friend to Hitler" (Urekew, 2001). Watson was a formidable personality and a ruthless salesman, requiring "absolute loyalty and ceaseless devotion from everyone" (Black, 2001, p. 40). He regularly held revival-style meetings, with employees chanting the IBM anthem; his own son even commented on the "cult-like atmosphere," and IBM had its version of a youth movement, the IBM Club. Children were eligible for enrollment at age three, starting their indoctrination in the IBM way as early as possible. But despite the autocratic trappings,

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Watson, like Ford, treated his US employees well, offering generous salaries and benefits and sponsoring numerous family-oriented social activities (Black, 2001).

Under Watson's leadership, IBM became the dominant international force in data processing, eventually placing its machines in more than 78 countries and controlling 90% of the world market (Black, 2001). Watson continued Hollerith's policy of renting machines, thereby maintaining control. Dahomag, limping along since its affiliation with IBM, suddenly soared under Watson's sharp eye. By the time the National Socialist Party rose to power in 1933, its performance was deemed "spectacular" (Black, 2001, p. 44).

Implementation: Statistics Mania

"Statisticians," notes Edwin Black, were "the vanguard of Hitler's intellectual shock troops" (Black, 2001, p. 47). Purveyors of numbers in the Third Reich quickly realized the potential of the Hollerith tabulators to identify Jews and other political undesirables. Will Heidinger, manager of Dahomag operations and a fervent Nazi, characterized the quest for information as "almost a sacred action" (Black, 2001, p. 50). Entranced by the possibilities, Nazi ministers of various agencies envisioned a shrine to statistics, a 25-story circular tower to complement the Reich's other architectural monuments: "Each of the twenty-five floors . . . would be comprised of 12 circular rooms representing one birth year. Every circular room would contain 31 cabinets, one for each day of the month. Each cabinet would in turn contain 7,000 names. Registrations and updates would feed in from census bureaus. All 60 million Germans could then be organized and cross-indexed in a single location . . ." (Black, 2001, p. 92).

In short, the Nazis went statistics crazy. They started counting everything: people, religions, businesses, occupations, diseases, war material dispersal–even cows in the field. They used millions of punch cards a week, further enriching IBM's coffers, since all Hollerith users were required to buy their cards from the mother company. Germany was IBM's best customer, after the US. Hollerith machines were placed in government offices and concentration camps, where they kept track of the population as well as deaths. Between 1933 and 1939, the Third Reich installed over 2,000 IBM tabulators, sorters, and printers in statistical centers throughout Germany, with 24 alone in the Dachau concentration camp (Samber & Wall, 2001). By 1943, Reich statisticians were using approximately 1.5 billion punch cards annually to track the population of Europe (Black, 2001).

As an example of how Hollerith technology was used for tabulating slave labor, Edwin Black examines the processing system at Auschwitz in 1943. An inmate arriving at Auschwitz, destined for labor rather than extermination, underwent a four-step process:

1. Doctors checked the inmate for fitness and completed information for the camp hospital index.
2. The inmate was registered with all personal information noted.
3. Political indices were checked to see if the inmate was destined for "special cruelty."
4. The inmate was assigned a five-digit Hollerith identification number.

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Later, the Hollerith number would be tattooed on the inmate's forearm. Although the tattooing system in Auschwitz was eventually divorced from its Hollerith connection (Black, 2001), the fact that it was originally intended for data processing certainly testifies to German exactitude regarding record-keeping.

When Germany invaded Poland in 1939, IBM established a new subsidiary, Watson Business Machines, in Kraków to coordinate deportations to Treblinka and Auschwitz. "Its sole purpose," suggests Black, "was to service the Nazi occupation during the rape of Poland" (Black, 2002). In addition to overseeing all railway traffic in Poland, Hollerith technology was used to generate statistics for the Population and Administration Office, headed by Fritz Arlt. Enamored of numbers, Arlt edited a publication, *Political Information Service of the General Government*, which "featured such detailed data as Jewish population per square meter with sliding projections of decrease resulting from such imposed conditions as forced labor and starvation" (Black, 2002).

IBM remained heavily involved even after the US officially entered the war and instituted business sanctions against the Third Reich. Rather than reporting to New York, European subsidiaries reported to IBM in Geneva, which forwarded information to the New York headquarters (Black, 2002).

Enabling: Technological Contributions

IBM's contribution of the immensely valuable and indispensable punch card technology had the affect of accelerating Holocaust events. Although the Holocaust surely would have happened without IBM's complicity, it would have been inefficient and taken longer. For example, in France, which had no punch card technology, about 23% of Jews were eliminated. But 73% were killed in Holland, which had "the most sophisticated technology outside of Germany" (Samber and Wall, 2001). The Hollerith tabulators allowed the Nazis to document virtually everything. From information on the cards, they were able to generate lists of Jews in almost any location, ghettoize them, schedule deportations, route trains to deliver Jews to the death camps in Poland as well as distribute war materials, track freight, plan air raids, organize troop transports, and transfer slave labor.

IBM's collaboration was so complete that the Reich actually became dependent on the Hollerith tabulators. As Michael Hausfeld, litigator in a 2001 class action suit filed against IBM, has noted, "Hitler could not have quickly and efficiently identified and rounded up Jews and other minorities, and used them as slave laborers and ultimately exterminated them, without IBM's assistance" (Delio, 2001; see also Hausfeld, 2001).

Most disconcerting is the fact that Thomas Watson, architect of the IBM empire, apparently had no moral qualms about dealing with the Third Reich. There is little question, since the recent release of IBM World War II documents, that Watson was aware of how his company's equipment was being used; he visited Germany more than a dozen times and had close contact

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with Nazi officials, including meetings with Adolf Hitler. In fact, upon returning from one trip, he lectured his employees: "You know, you can cooperate with a man without believing in everything he says and does. If you do not agree with everything he does, cooperate with him in the things you do believe in. Others will cooperate with him in the things they believe in" (Black, 2001, p. 146). Thomas Watson, Jr., who succeeded his father at the IBM helm, rationalized his father's involvement by stating, "Dad's optimism blinded him to what was going on in Germany" (Rhodes, 2001).

Watson's chief concerns were the expansion of his corporate empire and personal bank account. As Black wryly notes, "It was always about the money. As far as IBM was concerned, 'business' was its middle name" (Black, 2002).

Curiously, IBM Internet archives, searchable by decade, include no information about Watson's Third Reich connections nor indeed any information about IBM's international ventures during the 1930s and 1940s. For the 1930s, the webpage simply says that IBM "managed to grow while the rest of the country floundered" (IBM 1930) and details a huge government contract in relation to the Social Security Act of 1935. In the 1940s, the information is similarly vague: "all IBM facilities were placed at the disposal of the U.S. government" (IBM 1940). An archives search using "Holocaust" as the descriptor yields only four articles, three of them dealing with cataloging the oral histories of Holocaust survivors.

Ethical Breaches

Like the Ford Motor Company, IBM was guilty of patently unethical conduct in Europe during World War II:

< Knowingly entering into business relations with a totalitarian regime
< Providing a technology which accelerated the implementation of the Final Solution
< Circumventing US business sanctions
< Actively suppressing information regarding involvement

An examination of IBM's role in the Holocaust shows the tremendous power of a technology that allows governmental profiling of populations. Many of my students commented on the similarities between statistics collection then and now, specifically noting how the Patriot Act has allowed for more governmental intervention, ethnic profiling, and subsequent loss of civil liberties.

Student Responses

My students, quite frankly, were truly alarmed by this information. They were already upset to discover that the US government had consciously turned a blind eye to the wholesale murder of

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millions by turning away refugee ships and making US visa acquisition by European Jews all but impossible (see pbs.org, "America and the Holocaust," for more information regarding American non-intervention). But to learn that two of America's biggest corporations were complicit in the most heinous event of the 20th century was almost too much. Their comments at the end of the term were revealing and emotional:

- "I learned a number of historical facts that I was never exposed to in school, nor had ever heard of otherwise. I saw our country played a dastardly role of willful ignorance."

- "One of the biggest shocks for me was that America was involved, but denied it. That disgusted me. My favorite [book] was 'IBM and the Holocaust' because it shocked me the most about America!"

- "Not only did we learn the history of the Holocaust, but also how damaging racism and bigotry can be. This class also brought out a lot of ethical concerns of business and our own moral beliefs."

- "One of the most shocking things . . . was America's involvement with the Holocaust. This was very scary, especially reading about Ford and IBM."

- "The role of the United States and some of its large, powerful corporations was pretty shocking. It showed me that we really are all responsible for the atrocities of the Holocaust. If we have ever indulged in hatred we are, to some degree, guilty of the results that come from all hatred. That's hard to face up to, but it is important to learn . . . what we don't want to know."

These comments, from students in a generation characterized by the media as callow and apathetic, show great sensitivity and a depth of emotion for an event that occurred decades before their birth. As an instructor, I was surprised and touched by their reactions; our academic journey was, in many ways, terribly sad.

Conclusions

Our brief glimpse into the workings of the Third Reich was a deeply moving experience that taught us much–about the Holocaust, about ourselves. We learned, as one student explained, "the frailty and strength of human character . . . [and] the horrible depths to which human cruelty can descend." We learned old lessons in regards to American business involvement, reinforced by recent corporate scandals: that profit-making is irresistibly seductive, that power and greed can corrupt. We learned that capitalism thrives on avarice and that those in authority positions can abandon ethics and human

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compassion in pursuit of profit, that inherently good people can do exceedingly bad things.

We learned that technology is not neutral but value-laden and shaped by social contexts. In the words of ethicist Deborah Johnson, "technologies are social policies" that reflect and support the social milieu in which they occur (Johnson, 2001). In the case of Ford and IBM, corporate executives ignored ethical imperatives, entering into highly profitable ventures with a morally corrupt political regime that resulted in the perpetration of unconscionable evils against their fellow humans.

If there is one prime directive in ethics, it is "do no harm": physically, psychologically, fiscally. Financial reparations for Holocaust survivors might be forthcoming from lawsuits filed against Ford and IBM, but, ethically speaking, these corporations are still tainted despite a self-flagellating IBM press release declaring, "IBM and its employees around the world find the atrocities committed by the Nazi regime abhorrent and categorically condemn any actions which aided their unspeakable acts" (Kinsley, 2001). Adam Smith's "invisible hand" guiding economics still has blood under the fingernails.

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Teaching Diversity and Cross-Cultural Differences: Does it Work?

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Teaching students the importance of diversity and cross-cultural differences in business communication demands critical attention. Developing their understanding of individuals who appear unlike themselves requires a specific awareness and sensitivity. The complexities that arise in business transactions require an understanding of various verbal and nonverbal communication styles, which vary from region to region and culture to culture – according to ethnicity, race, gender, age, religion, and nationality. As academia and business mirror a multicultural workforce worldwide, the need for teaching diversity and cross-cultural differences becomes increasingly clear. This presentation will address how teaching diversity and cross-cultural differences can positively influence student learning. In turn, it will address various aspects of effective communication from an intercultural perspective.

Introduction

Diversity has become a conventional term that most commonly refers to differences between cultural groups. The term *diversity* also describes differences *within* cultural groups. For the purpose of this paper, we have adapted the general definitions of diversity by Vaughn (1998), where *diversity* refers to the many ways in which [different] groups express their worldviews – concerning differences such as definitions of gender, religion, workplace, maturity level, struggles of power, and education; *cross-cultural* diversity emphasizes how different worldviews represent cultural differences as such race, ethnicity, psychographic, and demographic dimensions.

This paper will examine if diversity training at the college level will have an affect on skills needed to succeed in working with diverse groups, namely cultural adaptibility, conflict management, communication accommodation, and the sense of self and social identity (Arai, Wanca-Thibault, & Shockley-Zalabak, 2001; Barker, et al., 2000; Elbert, Perez, & Gereis, 2003; Orbe, 1998).

Background

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2003), ethnic and racial minorities are increasing in the workforce. African Americans make up approximately 13 percent, Hispanics account for approximately 13.3 percent, while Asians account for approximately 4 percent. More than 20 million workers, or 14% of the total workforce, were foreign born, double the amount from 1980-1989 (US Census Bureau, 2002).

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This has many implications for businesses and educators. In reviewing the literature on diversity training, there are many issues and approaches in addressing conflicts due to intercultural and communication differences. These issues can be catagorized into three basic types: organizational, group, and individual.

At the organizational level, diversity creates issues that surround impression management (Montagliani & Giacalone, 1998), social justice (Glastra, Meerman, Schedler, & De Vries, 2000), and productivity (Ayoko, Hartel, & Callan, 2002; Orbe, 1998). Organizations that are able to tap into a diverse workforces' increased creativity and critical thinking will profit. However, without a clear understanding of the context within which communication and cultural problems arise, diversity training will be useless, resulting in loss of productivity and a negative image (Arai, Wance-Thbault, & Shockley-Zalabak, 2001).

With the advent of the internet and globalization, more work is being done by heterogenous groups, often with members communicating at a distance. Researchers have identified behaviors and attibutes that improve the productivity of these groups. Inclusion of all subgroups in the communication process, as set out in the communication accommodation theory, is one factor that is important to a heterogenous group's productivity (Ayoko, Hartel, & Callen, 2002; Barker, et al., 2000; Orbe, 1998). Ayoko, Hartel, and Callan further identified positive strategies groups used to handle conflict caused by differences in cultural values and work practices. They found that conflicts can be task related (based on work practices) or relationship related (based on miscommunication, differences in values, and misinterpreting actions based on experience and ability to interpret actions). Positive conflict management strategies included empathy, identifying differences, and ability to focus on the problem rather than the person.

Cultural confict can be exaggerated in vitual teams due to the longer time it takes to develop trust and social relationships through technology (Barker, et al., 2000). Therefore, cultural adaptation skills will be even more important for long distance teams.

Much of the literature dealing with the individual in a diverse workplace addresses the issue of an individual's sense of identity in the organization. This often leads to the role of power, identifying with social or cultural groups, and communication strategies (Bush, Rose, Gilbert, & Ingram, 2001; Erbert, Perez & Gareis, 2003; Orbe, 1998). The results of these studies imply that an individual must have a sense of his or her own cultural identity in order to be successful in the diverse workplace. Brown (2001) suggests that many workers, particularly white males, fear that courses in diversity will create more problems in the workplace, causing them to lose out.

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Orbe's (1998) model of "An Outsider Within Orientation" is based on traditionally under-represented groups (co-cultural groups) being able to change communication and adapt to cultural cues, depending on the situation, cost/benefit analysis, experience, and abilities. The more flexible a worker is, the more successful he/she is at being a part of the organization, thus having some control over his or her work environment.

How are American universities and colleges preparing students for their place in a diverse workforce? Many American colleges and universities have instituted a wide range of initiatives and curriculum changes to equip all students for this challenge (Smith, 1997), including diversity training. Diversity education can help build both a strong society and a strong, effective economy. People who have recently graduated from college and those who have taken diversity courses tend to be even more supportive of diversity education than the general public (Ponterotto & Pedersen, 1994).

The challenge to colleges and universities is to deliver graduates who are competent not only to function professionally and in culturally diverse environments but also to make personal and public-policy decisions as citizens of an international society (Anderson, 1988, Glastra, Meerman, Schedler, & De Vries, 2000). Diversity training in the US has its history in peace negotiations, US racial desegregation, and race relations training. The rise of diversity training became necessary when the United States tried to desegregate American racial groups. With armed forces taking the lead, troops across different military organizations received intensive race relations training (Vaughn, 1998).

Aguilar & Woo (2000) suggest that a knowledgeable and culturally diverse team—teaching diversity in an open and safe climate—is the key to addressing the emotions and attitudes of participants and instructors in cultural diversity. A nationwide survey of 65 institutions (academic, undergraduate, private) involved in a transformation project to increase diversity sensitivity showed that almost 60 percent of those institutions require students to take at least one course addressing either diversity or cross-cultural communication (Humphreys, 1997). This number is probably higher today. In fact, since 1991 AACSB has required diversity issues as part of its curriculum standards for business schools seeking accreditation (AACSB, 2003).

Muller and Parham (1998) identified three approaches to teaching workforce diversity: legal, anthropological with focus on cultural differences, and sociopsychological with stress on personal values and behavior. In some cases, the topic of diversity is integrated throughout the curriculum. In many cases, diversity is taught as a standalone course, lasting one semester (Tomlinson-Clarke, 2000).

Research indicates that diversity courses challenge students to think in more complex ways about identity and history in an effort to avoid cultural stereotypes. Further studies (Astin, 1993; Adams & Zhou-McGovern, 1994; Tanaka, 1996; Villalpando, 1994)

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indicate that diversity courses have a positive impact on critical thinking and learning. In a study conducted at Shippensburg University in Pennsylvania, Nelson (1994) found that a diversity program—designed to facilitate effective communication among college students from different backgrounds—was very effective toward increasing intergroup understanding and racial awareness. However, student learning may be affected by maturity and intercultural awareness (Muller & Parham, 1998).

Despite studies of the success of diversity training, other studies suggest that the teaching and learning of diversity can be challenging (Berlak, 1999; Brown, 2001; Hanover & Cellar 1998; Humphreys, 1996). Many white students participating in diversity training experienced hurt feelings and argumentative, violent, and angry behavior (Berlak, 1999). Many minority students, including gays and lesbians, white women, and disabled students, indicated that even college campuses that support diversity are indifferent to their needs (AAC&U, 1996).

Case Study

In order to determine if diversity training could develop the cross-cultural adaptation skills needed to be successful in today's work place, a study was conducted comparing students in a Cultural Diversity course to those in a Marketing course.

In this study, the sample population included nontraditional students from Business and Intensive Human Services of the College of Notre Dame (CND), a private nonprofit college in the San Francisco Bay Area. Of its 1,600 students, about 300 are nontraditional students: most are employed men and women seeking career advancement and/or completion of their degree. Students' ages range from 25 to 62. Seventy percent are midlevel supervisors, ten percent are top executives, and twenty percent are entry level. These nontraditional students typically have some college in their background. While forty percent have started or completed an associate degree, sixty percent have begun work toward their bachelor's degree but have not yet completed their programs. Eighty nontraditional students who participated in this study were from four sections of Managing Cultural Diversity (MCD) while forty were from two Marketing classes.

The MCD (Managing Cultural Diversity) students received seven weeks of intensive training on cultural diversity, interracial differences, race relations, ethnicity and attitude, psychographics, prejudice and discrimination, and white privilege. During this training, students were expected to participate in role-playing activities by confronting inequalities and emotions that were experienced by some students in the training. Teaching methodologies including lectures, tests, group analyses, presentations, breakout groups, self-assessments, dyad/triad exercises, fieldtrips, and research projects, and discussions with special interest group leaders were also part of the training. While the MCD group

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received four hours of weekly intense training, the control Marketing classes group received no diversity training during the same period.

The Cross-Cultural Adaptability Inventory (CCAI) was administered as both pre/post test to all 120 students. The CCAI addresses one's ability to adapt to any cultural differences and is designed to respond to several needs or practical concerns expressed both by culturally diverse and cross-culturally oriented populations and by the trainers and professionals who work with them (Kelley & Meyers, 2000). In conjunction with training, it is also used to enhance cross-cultural effectiveness, to build self-awareness, improve intra/inter personal relations, and enhance workplace communication skills. Tomilinon-Clarke (2000) suggested that this instrument be used as a measure of a student's openness to developing multi-cultural competence, an area she identified as being inadequately researched.

Background data on the CCAI indicate that it has both content and construct validity. In addition, construct validity of the CCAI was determined by rigorous statistical analyses. From these analyses, four factors emerged on four interpretable scales: Emotional Resilience (ER), Flexibility/Openness (FO), Perceptual Acuity (PAC), and Personal Autonomy (PA). Discriminant validity of this instrument seems promising. The results of one study showed that school principals with higher CCAI scores had more cross-cultural training, were more ethnically different, and spoke several foreign languages. With an overall reliability of .90, the CCAI has adequate reliability and validity as a diversity-training instrument. The attributes that the instrument measures correlate with those factors researchers have identified as being necessary for effective intercultural communication in diverse situations (Ayoko, Hartel, & Callen, 2002; Bush, Rose, Gilbert, & Ingram, 2001; Erbert & Perez, 2003; Montagliani & Giacalone, 1998; Orbe, 1998).

Analysis

Using descriptive statistics and repeated measure**,** ANOVA (Analyses of Variance) data analysis indicated, results of the CCAI were interpreted for the 120 students in the survey. Contrary to the researcher's initial hypothesis, that there was in fact *no significant difference* between the test/survey scores of the two groups, the Managing Cultural Diversity and the Marketing classes. That is to say, the diversity training appeared to have made no difference in altering attitudes or behaviors in the target group Managing Cultural Diversity.

Discussion

What would produce these results? Several possibilities come to mind**:** First, the scores for the pre-test of the CCAI for the students in both groups were in the upper percentile

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ranges, thus leaving little room for improved scores in the post-test. Looking more closely at the sample population, one might assume that college students living in a metropolitan area, attending a private institution where these courses were offered, might be fairly sophisticated with respect to the subscales as measured by the CCAI. One might also accordingly presume that the training might have elicited a greater change in attitudes had it been administered, for example, at a community college in a less ethnically or racially diverse geographical area.

Another factor to consider is that the CCAI is a "deep structure" instrument, one that assesses long-held personality traits and belief systems. Hence, the instrument is possibly more appropriate for a longitudinal study with intervention that requires individual counseling**,** rather than a brief academic intervention. This is supported by research that finds short courses (one semester or less) are not affective in developing cross-cultural competency (Muller & Parham, 1998; Tomlinson-Clarke, 2000).

Additionally, this instrument is a self-report survey (in contrast to an objective, behavior-based assessment of cultural adaptability or sensitivity), which might tend to skew test results. The fact that the items used in the instruments have a high degree of face validity might preclude honest responses. The students in these courses are graded, and they might have responded as they were "supposed" to respond to the items, in which case the high scores may have been due, in part, to the students' second-guessing the "right" answer.

Implications

The results obtained in this study should not imply that diversity training is a waste of time. Rather, they do tell us that there is a need for further study into the question of the effectiveness of diversity training. A careful needs assessment of the specific target populations (whether students, business employees, or manager/supervisors) may indicate how appropriate such training might be.

In addition, an examination of the trainee profiles would help indicate which training would be most effective. Certain questions come to mind, including: Is the training more effective if it is obligatory? Should the training be administered by an outside source? Or does it need context to be affective? Should it be during or outside of work/classroom hours? What is the most affective time frame (frequency, duration) for training? Does the instrument truly assess what the training teaches? Does the instrument measure certain approaches (legal, anthropological, sociopsychological) more accurately? Does worker/student behavior match self-reported beliefs? How can that be assessed?

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Beyond this study, even if the post-instrument aligns accurately with the training and produces significantly higher scores, will those scores result in higher worker/student productivity? These are some of the important questions elicited by this study that may serve as a basis for further research into the question of the effectiveness of diversity training in the classroom and the workplace.

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NASA and the Columbia Disaster: Decision-making by Groupthink?

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On Saturday February 1, 2003, the space shuttle Columbia exploded over Texas upon re-entering Earth's atmosphere. All seven members of the crew died. The accident forced many people to recall the Challenger space shuttle disaster over fifteen years earlier. On the morning of January 28, 1986, the space shuttle Challenger blasted off from the Kennedy Space Center in Florida only to explode 73 seconds later. The death of the seven members of the crew, and particularly teacher Christa McAuliffe, shocked the nation. Unfortunately, the nation learned in the succeeding months that the tragedy could have been avoided.

As information began to emerge directly after the February 1, 2003 Columbia space shuttle explosion, attention pointed to the possibility that faulty decision-making was endemic in the culture of NASA. In a New York Times article, John Schwartz and Matthew Wald (March 9, 2003) suggest that the groupthink that pervaded the decision-making at NASA in 1986 may still be present in 2003 with similarly disastrous consequences.

This paper is an examination of the information as reported during the investigation of the Columbia disaster. We address the question: Does the evidence demonstrate decision-making by groupthink? To begin, we describe the method for our examination and provide an overview of the characteristics of Irving Janis' (1972) groupthink hypothesis.

Method

Based on an interpretive perspective, textual analysis is utilized to examine the reported information made publicly available during the investigation of the explosion of NASA's Columbia shuttle. Textual analysis is a method communication researchers use to describe and interpret the characteristics of a recorded message.

The communication texts examined are articles reported and published by the *New York Times* from February 5, 2003 – August 8, 2003. As the newspaper of public record, the quality and relative objectivity of the reporting during the investigation is reliable. The reported information is disclosed under the Freedom of Information Act. Various other publications are used to validate information and are referenced.

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Our method involved examining the reports emerging from the investigation of the Columbia shuttle explosion and organizing the reports in categories consistent with the characteristics of groupthink as outlined by Irving Janis (1972). Specifically, we examined evidence of antecedent conditions, groupthink symptoms, and decision-making defects. Following is an overview of the characteristics of groupthink developed by Janis and utilized in this study.

Groupthink characteristics

Irving L. Janis, pioneer in the study of social dynamics, coined the term "groupthink" and proposed the hypothesis after investigating the problems that conformity pressure brought to major American political and military decisions. He stated that groupthink is the triumph of concurrence over good sense, and authority over expertise. Groupthink, Janis said, can be found whenever institutions make difficult decisions. For instance, Janis (1972, 1977) cites the escalation of the Vietnam War and the 1961 American invasion of Cuba (the Bay of Pigs). In his 1982 volume, Janis adds an analysis of the Watergate cover-up decision.

Groupthink, Janis (1982) writes, is "a quick and easy way to refer to a mode of thinking that people engage in when they are deeply involved in a cohesive in-group, when the members' strivings for unanimity override their motivation to realistically appraise alternative courses of action" (p.9). He supports the groupthink hypothesis by analysis of the occurrence or non-occurrence of antecedent conditions, groupthink symptoms, and decision-making defects.

Antecedent conditions
To begin, Janis outlines three primary antecedent conditions for the development of groupthink to emerge: (1) a highly cohesive group, (2) leader preference for a certain decision, and (3) insulation of the group from qualified outside opinions.

Groupthink symptoms
Janis discovered that groupthink tends to occur when several factors are operating at the same time. These factors he called the symptoms of groupthink. Janis (1982) developed three categories (types) with eight specific symptoms.

Type I: Overestimation of the group—its power and morality
1. An illusion of invulnerability, shared by most or all of the members, which creates excessive optimism and encourages taking extreme risk.
2. An unquestioned belief in the group's inherent morality, inclining the members to ignore the ethical or moral consequences of their decisions.

Type II: Closed-mindedness
3. Collective efforts to rationalize in order to discount warnings or other information that might lead the members to reconsider their assumptions before they recommit themselves to their past policy decisions.

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4. Stereotyped views of enemy leaders as too evil to warrant genuine attempts to negotiate, or as too weak and stupid to counter whatever risky attempts are made to defeat their purposes.

Type III: Pressures toward uniformity

5. Self-censorship of deviations from the apparent group consensus, reflecting each member's inclination to minimize the importance of doubts and counterarguments.
6. A shared illusion of unanimity concerning judgments conforming to the majority view (partly resulting from self-censorship of deviations, augmented by the false assumption that silence means consent).
7. Direct pressure on any member who expresses strong arguments against any of the group's stereotypes, illusions, or commitments, making clear that this type of dissent is contrary to what is expected of all loyal members.
8. The emergence of self-appointed mindguards—members who protect the group from adverse information that might shatter their shared complacency about the effectiveness and morality of their decisions (pp. 174-175).

Decision-making defects

The result of the antecedent conditions and the symptoms of groupthink is a defective decision-making process. Janis outlines several types of defects in decision making that can result. For instance:

1. Few alternatives: The group considers only a few alternatives, often only two.
2. No re-examination of alternatives: The group fails to re-examine alternatives that may have been initially discarded based on early unfavorable information.
3. Rejecting expert opinion: Members make little or no attempt to seek outside experts opinions.
4. Rejecting negative information: Members tend to focus on supportive information and ignore any data or information that might cast a negative light on their preferred alternative.
5. No contingency plan: Members spend little time discussing the possible consequences of the decision and, therefore, fail to develop contingency plans.

Findings: NASA and the Columbia Shuttle investigation

NASA administration exists at the discretion of presidential appointment with the inherent problems that come with leadership change and political party agendas. In order to keep the space program funded NASA needs to keep the public interested. Shuttle flights and risks are weighed against political and economic risks to keep the program visible. In order to meet deadlines and keep the shuttle launches frequent enough to hold the public interest, NASA provides bonuses to independent contractors for on time delivery. This reward system adds to the complex communication issues that arise and are evident in the way NASA communicates during decision-making. As a result, there is an unwillingness to discuss a problem and people

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are reluctant to raise flags that might slow a project and therefore carry political or economic consequences.

Antecedent conditions in the Columbia Shuttle incident

Analysis of the reports of the decision-making by the management team shows the team underestimated the damage during the launch of the Columbia shuttle. The characteristics of the NASA culture appeared to set the precedents for disaster. The NASA Columbia mission management team, chaired by Linda Ham, demonstrated an unwillingness to discuss anything other than an optimistic analysis of the shuttle mission. The team did not investigate seriously any suggestions that the foam insulation (proving to be the physical cause of the accident) could cause serious damage to the spacecraft. The transcripts from the ongoing investigation show a team that was both isolated and isolating.

For instance, Linda Ham, despite being head of the mission management team, reported that she was never officially notified of requests coming from other agencies, while Columbia was still in flight, to obtain satellite images of the shuttle. These satellite images (or images from powerful ground-based telescopes) could have helped identify the extent of damage to the shuttle wing made from the foam debris during the mission launch. Linda Ham reported that she had heard informally about a request for images, but she spent a day asking within NASA and the United Space Alliance (the chief shuttle contractor) and could not find out who had made the requests (Wald & Schwartz, July 23, 2003, p. 2). In fact, NASA administrators had cancelled requests that had come from independent contractors for the satellite images.

Transcript reports also show NASA middle managers in the Mission Evaluation Room, where engineering issues during flight are resolved, reluctant to raise certain issues of importance. For instance, the chief engineer of the shuttle's structural engineering division, in an interview broadcast on ABC, said that he regretted not having brought the issue of the foam debris up at the mission management team meeting at which Ham presided. The engineer said, "part of the problem is that everybody assumed that someone else would do it, and the old axiom of business is no one ever wanted to be first"; in fact, the engineer said, "The NASA culture does not accept being wrong… the humiliation factor always runs high" (Wald & Schwartz, August 4, 2003, p. 4).

During a briefing, Linda Ham had praise for the team and argued that top managers had to rely on the assessments of others. Ham shifted blame though by saying, "I don't have the engineering expertise, nor do I have the tools, to do that kind of analysis" (Wald, & Schwartz, July 23, p. 4). A NASA engineer who worked closely with the mission management team refuted this defense. He said, "It's your job to know the people to ask the questions. Part of it is recognizing your limitations and to push hard for detailed answers to critical questions" (Wald & Schwartz, July 23, 2003, p. 4).

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When questioned about the effects of the Columbia disaster, Linda Ham who is married to an astronaut, said that the members of the Columbia crew "are our friends. They're our neighbors. We run with them, work out in the gym with them" (Wald & Schwartz, July 23, 2003, p. 4). Yet, transcripts show a management team that was not attentive to the needs of the shuttle crew. Despite NASA rules that the management team met daily during the mission, this team only held five meetings during the 16-day mission and even took off a long weekend for the Martin Luther King Jr. holiday (Wald & Schwartz, July 23, 2003, p. 2).

This is evidence of a highly cohesive "in-group" where dissenting opinions are not welcomed and information does not flow coherently within or from the outside of the group. The antecedent conditions including a highly cohesive group, leader preference for a specific decision, and isolation from outside opinions, appears to exist.

Groupthink symptoms

Unfortunately, the combination of an aging shuttle fleet, evidence of accident-prone aspects of the technology of the shuttle, a pressure to overestimate the success of the shuttles, and a culture of management that rationalized risks weighed against political and economic measures, suggest that the disaster could have been prevented. Each of the three categories (and eight symptoms), as identified by Janis (1982), is examined in the record of the mission management team's decision-making.

Overestimation of the group's power and sense of invulnerability:

During the investigation by the independent Columbia investigation board (board), a significant shift occurred in weighing the importance of factors that led to the Columbia disaster. Initially the board thought that there was a hierarchy of factors to investigate with the foam debris at the top. Over time a new approach surfaced, as the board chair Admiral Harold W. Gehman Jr. states, "We have what we're now calling either the physical or mechanical failure, and then we have the systemic failures. And we're now putting them at equal weight" (Wald & Schwartz, July 12, 2003, p. 1). Gehman's statement suggests that NASA knew in advance that it had an engineering problem but did not appreciate its significance. According to the board, NASA management had a mindset that "this was an operational vehicle, on an operational mission, and you don't have to worry about it" (p. 2). Admiral Gehman argued that NASA must stop treating the shuttles as "operational" and start considering them as "developmental" (p. 2) This means that each launch should be treated as a first launch, each orbit as a first orbit, and each re-entry as the first re-entry. NASA, Gehman states, has become less interested in details and has allowed its capability to take photographs of shuttles on launching to "gracefully atrophy over the years" (p. 3). This clearly suggests an attitude of invulnerability, where specific safety precautions are allowed to atrophy.

Other management factors reported by the board support this overestimation by NASA's management—a perception of invulnerability. For instance, NASA had sufficient evidence that the shuttle was vulnerable to debris strikes. The flight in 2000 of the shuttle Atlantis went into

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orbit with a quarter-inch breach in the wing's leading edge, allowing hot plasma into the wing on re-entry. Engineers knew that the shuttle was being hit by foam debris on nearly every flight, but chose to leave the concern unresolved.

Another management factor is that during the 16-day flight of the Columbia, although scientists realized that foam had struck the shuttle on liftoff and several NASA engineers suggested that the agency should get spy satellite photographs of the shuttle to look for damage, the NASA managers decided against it, even canceling requests. The shuttle launch and flight appear to have been perceived as a routine operation with mission managers not holding the daily meetings required by NASA and skipping days during the long weekend. NASA management was denying existing problems (Wald & Schwartz, July 12, 2003).

Closed-mindedness, rationalization, and stereotypes:
Documents released by NASA on July 8, 2003, provided evidence that the space shuttle Columbia was not the first to have superheated gas invade its left wing on re-entering Earth's atmosphere. The documents show that the shuttle Atlantis also went into orbit with a breach in the wing's leading edge, allowing hot plasma into the wing on re-entry. Responding to the documents, Paul A. Czysz, a longtime consultant to NASA, stated that the Atlantis incident should have put NASA on alert about wing damage (Schwartz & Wald, July 9, 2003). He argued that NASA management should have said, "If that opened up a crack any bigger than the one on Atlantis, we're in deep trouble" (Schwartz & Wald, July 9, 2003, p.1). Yet, an astronaut on the May 2000 mission, Mary Ellen Weber, demonstrated the collective rationalization of the agency and disagreed with Czysz. She argued, "Absolutely, people knew if you have a breach in the wing, bad things can happen. That isn't news. . . Knowing what I know now about gas entering the shuttle's wing, do I believe the mission I was on was any more risky than I thought it was when I took off? No" (p.2). Further, she states, every astronaut knows the risks of space flight, "we may fix this particular problem – but I guarantee the next time astronauts get on that shuttle there will be a thousand other things that can happen" (p. 2). This is an example of the collective rationalization towards the risks of space flight and the way in which problems are overlooked in the race for space.

According to reports coming from independent investigations, NASA's expectations for the shuttle fleet are unrealistic and lack in-depth understanding of the physical conditions of the shuttle (Wald, July 15, 2003). For instance, a study by the RAND corporation states that "given uncertainties about the full set of causes for the loss of Columbia and given unforeseen and unplanned aging issues, it is not obvious that the shuttle system will reach even a 30-year life of useful service" (Wald, July 15, 2003, p.1) Yet, NASA plans to fly the shuttle for 40 years. The study suggests that NASA needs to get a better grip on some of the potential age-related problems. In addition, reports also say that NASA has deferred inspections for corrosion, even though standing water had occasionally been found inside the Atlantis and the Columbia after rainstorms. Corrosion had been found in both the Columbia and Discovery in spots hard to inspect and even harder to repair. At one time, the report states, NASA has a "corrosion control

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board," but it no longer exists (Wald, July 15, 2003, p. 2). A spokesperson for NASA replied that the corrosion inspections and repairs had been deferred, but only after engineers investigated the corrosion. The engineers determined that the corrosion was minor and not a safety issue for continuing shuttle flight (Wald, July 15, 2003, p.2). This dialogue demonstrates a pattern at NASA where problems are deferred and then collectively rationalized.

As the Columbia investigation board is discovering and reporting, NASA still does not understand the operation of the shuttle fleet well enough to ensure that future flights would be safe. Yet, Sean O'Keefe, NASA administrator (and a political appointee), said that he hoped the three surviving shuttles could resume flying by December 2003 (Wald & Schwartz, June 13, 2003, p. 2).

Another question, rationalized at NASA, is the cost of risks to human lives. Matthew Koss, a scientist whose experiments were carried out on three missions of the Columbia, wrote in a New York Times article, "In-orbit experiments like mine have been used to justify manned space projects like the shuttle for decades . . . .The truth is that the vast majority of scientific experiments conducted in orbit – including my own – do not require astronauts. . .in fact, experiments like these are often more efficient and yield more fruitful results when done without the involvement of astronauts" (Koss, June 29, 2003, p.1). Koss states that the public image of astronauts as laboratory scientists working on their own experiments is misleading. The astronaut corps, he argues, has served one overriding political and public relations purpose – to sell the space program. In fact, he writes, the International Space Station has been aggressively marketed as a science lab, but the station is seriously flawed in that too much crew time needs to be committed to station maintenance. Further, Koss writes, because of cost overruns and budget problems, the station's crew was cut back to three from the planned seven. Originally, 120 astronaut-hours per week were to be devoted to science; this has been cut to 20 hours per week. Koss argues that scientific experimentation in space can be safer and more cost effective using long-duration remote controlled orbital spacecraft. The overall cost would be significantly reduced because NASA would not need to provide a safe and sustaining environment for astronauts. The point of Koss's article is to argue for the separation of the goal of scientific experimentation from the desire for space explorations. He states, "Astronauts do not risk their lives to perform scientific experiments in space. They fly to fulfill a much more basic and human desire – to experience the vastness of space" (p.3). Koss makes a convincing argument when he writes, "If NASA is not able to convince the public of the importance of science in orbit without astronaut involvement, then so be it. At least America's refusal to support science would be honest, would not needlessly endanger human lives or compromise the integrity of science and scientists" (p. 3). In many respects, this may be one of the prime sources of problems within NASA administration. When is the cost too much in the aggressive effort to sell the space program to the American public? This is a question that NASA does not address publicly.

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Pressures toward uniformity - self-censorship, unanimity, discouragement of dissent, and mind-guards: The report by Rodney Rocha, a structural engineer at NASA, is a good example of self-censorship. Rocha tells his story during an ABC *'Primetime' Special Edition* interview on July 7th (Schwartz, July 7, 2003). Rocha states that on the second day of Columbia's mission he saw a grainy video that showed a chunk of insulating foam hitting the left wing of the shuttle 80 seconds after launch. After watching it intensively for days he voiced urgent concerns to colleagues about the need to examine the wing using spy satellites. As this paper has previously stated, Shuttle managers decided against asking for the pictures. Rocha wrote messages urging NASA to "beg" for photographic assistance. Yet, during the meeting presided over by Linda Ham, where management dismissed the problem of the foam, Rocha did not speak up and express his concerns (Schwartz, July 7, 2003, p.2). When questioned about his reluctance to speak at the meeting he responded that he was frightened for his job (p.2). Flight director, LeRoy Cain refutes this statement, "You are duty bound as a member of this team to voice your concerns . . . in particular as they relate to safety of flight" (Schwartz, July 7, 2003, p.2). Supporting Rocha's statement, though, is Adm. Harold W. Gehman Jr., who is leading the independent investigation into the Columbia disaster. Gehman argues that NASA's ability to ensure safety is "very, very shallow" and adds that the system for engineers to express safety concerns is "broke" (Schwartz, July 7, 2003, p. 2). Other members of the investigation board also support this claim and report that by the time of the Columbia mission NASA managers had become complacent about safety and lower-level engineers were reluctant to raise issues that might interfere with a mission.

Decision-making defects

Evidence of both the antecedent conditions and groupthink symptoms help to identify the defects in decision-making. Emphasizing the defective decision-making by NASA management is the statement from Walter Cantrell, a retired rear admiral recently named by NASA to a task force to review the agency's return to flight preparations. Cantrell had worked with NASA before when he helped to conduct a study of the nuclear Navy and compared its processes with NASA's. Cantrell, at that time of the Navy study, identified significant problems with NASA's structure and reported that at NASA, having no independent review of problems allows the possibility of a program manager "tailoring safety technical requirements to meet schedule and cost requirements" (Wald, July 21, 2003, p. 2). Further, Cantrell reported that the nature of NASA's management structure "contaminated the goal of safety with the desire to fly its missions . . . They executed their processes conscientiously, and professionally, but their processes may not be as good as the confidence they placed in them" (Wald, June 29, 2003, p. 3).

In the report to NASA, comparing the nuclear Navy system and NASA's, the importance of an independent technical authority (or review) was emphasized. Cantrell states as an example, "One could reasonably expect that if this problem (the foam) had been given to an independent technical authority, they might not have proceeded until they solved that technical problem" (Wald, July 21, 2003, p. 2). An independent review, Cantrell argues (p. 2), could have found that pieces of foam big enough to damage tiles could do serious damage. Cantrell states that it is

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important to be able to separate safety issues from other issues. In this matter, Cantrell suggests that the problem at NASA is that the risk of safety for the shuttles is weighed against the political and economical requirements. This is a significant decision-making factor contributing to a defect within NASA, the lack of outside experts called in as resource persons and encouraged to disagree with the group's assumptions.

In response to the recommendation for an independent review, NASA reports that it will establish an additional safety organization within NASA. Cantrell argues that this solution is not as good as the "closed loop" system of the nuclear Navy program, in which any time a problem is identified corrective action must be found and taken (Wald, July 21, 2003, p.2). NASA's solution might mean another layer of administration without the accountability of each person and without the encouragement to dissent.

The freedom to dissent is another primary element that is missing in the decision-making culture of NASA. As the investigative board study has found, "NASA's flight readiness review system can be an intimidating venue in which to raise a technical issue not fully supported with data" (Wald, July 21, 2003, p. 2). Also, a major obstacle for NASA is the lack of involvement of top management in day-to-day decisions. The Navy, to contrast NASA, conducts most communications by letter and copies of each letter go the admiral in charge of the program. That officer has a tenure of eight years. At NASA the top administrator has a typical length of tenure of four or five years. The NASA administrator serves at the pleasure of the president and so the job often changes when the White House does. For example, the current administrator, Mr. O'Keefe, has shown himself in congressional testimony to be unaware of details of the shuttle program (Wald, July 21,2003, p. 3). In addition, NASA offers bonuses for on-time launches to its independent contractors, a factor that is criticized for raising the possibility of conflict of interest for contractors who must decide which potential problems to bring to NASA's attention. In contrast, the Naval Reactors program has not such provisions for contractors (Wald, July 21, 2003).

Another defect in the decision-making process is reported in the "benchmarking study" (Wald, July 21, 2003, p. 2). This study pointed out that, "knowledge and operational skill degrade when not periodically recalled or used" (p. 2). NASA technicians reported to investigators that there were tasks that they performed only a few times a year and that they were concerned about becoming rusty. Maintaining knowledgeable technicians, outside review, an experienced staff that can question administrators adds to the list of requirements needed to counteract defect decision-making.

Conclusion: Is it groupthink?

As the Columbia accident investigation board continued to collect data, analyze, evaluate, and report its findings, information now in the public record disclosed under the Freedom of Information Act reveals a critical breakdown in communication in the Columbia mission

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management team and NASA administration. Information made available through media reports include meeting transcripts, interviews with NASA engineers, and interviews with engineers and administrative personnel from agency contractors. The reports describe a NASA culture that does not accept being wrong and suggests a dysfunctional flow of information within NASA. The reports also describe NASA's approach to peer review and accountability where no one wants to be the first to ask the difficult questions and where upper management does not want to look beneath the optimistic surface of reports of their subordinates.

The evidence in reports of the NASA administration decision-making during the Columbia flight indicate significant defects in the process of communication due to the nature of the management culture and the resulting decisions. Does the faulty decision-making demonstrate the characteristics of groupthink as evident in the investigation of the accident? The first issue to address is whether there is sufficient evidence that the antecedent conditions exist for groupthink to occur.

The public reports clearly suggest that all the antecedent conditions for groupthink are evident. The Columbia mission management team is described as a group deeply involved in a cohesive in-group. This high level of cohesiveness is evident in the group's adherence to the political pressure. No one in the group would raise issues that would question the status quo. The leadership had a preference (and pressure) for a certain decision. The pressure to keep the mission on time/track appeared to weigh more than the cost of asking the hard questions that might result in a delay in the launch. The political and economic risks outweighed the hazards for the shuttle. The members of the management team appeared to be isolated from information coming from outside NASA or from different sections of NASA. The team also made it almost impossible for information that did not adhere to the preferred decision to be discussed. The team lacked a system of checks and balances, isolated from experts who might question the preferred decision. The management team, also, created a climate that made it nearly impossible for staff engineers to raise questions regarding safety issues.

The second issue to address is the evidence of groupthink symptoms specifically overestimation of the group's power, closed mindedness, and pressure towards uniformity. There is sufficient evident that the mission management team overestimated the shuttle successes and assumed a position of invulnerability. Managers knew foam had struck the shuttle's wing, but refused to get satellite images of the shuttle for further investigation. The shuttle launch and flight appear to have been perceived as a routine operation. These examples provide evidence of closed mindedness and rationalization in the investigation reports. In addition, sufficient evidence exists to suggest that the management team created pressure towards uniformity and discouraged dissent among the staff engineers.

The third issue, is the evidence of defective decision-making. The decision-making defects during the Columbia flight become apparent after reviewing the antecedent conditions and the symptoms. For instance, there is no evidence of a survey of all possible alternatives to consider

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after the launch of Columbia. There was no re-examination of alternatives after the shuttle sustained damage during the launch. Instead, there was an acceptance of the flight as a routine operation. There was a rejection of expert opinions with NASA actually canceling requests for satellite photographs to view the damage to the shuttle after the launch. There was a rejection of negative information and a rationalization that accepted the damage as routine. Most important, there was no documented evidence from the investigation of any discussion of the possible consequences or for contingency plans.

In conclusion, based on the reports to date, there is sufficient evidence to describe the faulty decision-making during the tragic and final flight of NASA's Columbia shuttle to be groupthink. Richard Covey, a retired Air Force colonel, astronaut, and co-chairman of the independent panel monitoring the resumption of the space shuttle program argues that NASA's management issues are "barriers to good decision-making " (Wald, August 8, 2003, p.2).

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Like Pulling Teeth or Pain-Free?: Complexities in Collaboration in a Business Communication Course

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Abstract

This paper examines the complexities involved in a collaborative assignment in a graduate-level business communication course. Drawing from examples from four project teams, I will discuss the social, intellectual, and procedural complexities my students experienced and managed. This paper concludes with practical suggestions to support collaborative writing processes in the workplace or the classroom.

Introduction

Collaborative writing practices, defined as the actual production of a shared document (Bosley, 1991) and the shared decision-making practices that occur when groups take responsibility for documents (Allen et al., 1987), continue to be widespread across industry. With the amount of documentation in various industries on the rise, due to process-based management and total quality management practices which stress teamwork, single authorship is no longer a reality (Cross, 2001). As classroom projects and assignments are designed to prepare students for workplace tasks and encourage students to pool varied experiences and skills, collaborative writing assignments often make their way to business communication syllabi. However, accompanying collaborative writing assignments are a host of challenges faced by both students and teachers.

Just as collaborative writing tasks carried out by industry professionals are riddled with challenges, students working to create a joint document may also experience several different complexities. These complexities are defined by Kraut, Galegher, Fish, and Chalfonte (1992) as social, intellectual, and procedural. Teachers who assign collaborative writing projects may be very familiar with these complexities. Many of us have watched as groups struggled due to contrasting personalities and lack of defined roles, different interpretations of the assignment, and difficulties meeting deadlines and managing multiple drafts of a document. In turn, we have had to figure out when these complexities result in positive outcomes that promote learning and when they act as a detriment to students' course experiences.

Relying on my own observations and students' reflection of their collaborative processes, I will discuss the ways in which the students in a graduate-level business communication course

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experienced and managed these different kinds of complexities while working on a substantial course assignment. Following my observations are suggested ways for supporting collaborative writing processes so that social, intellectual, and procedural complexities are negotiated and effectively managed.

Research Question

The thirteen individuals in the course studied brought with them various professional, educational, and life experiences. These experiences both enriched their collaborative processes and complicated them. An interest in the complexities the students faced prompted me to ask the following question: What social, intellectual, and procedural complexities were part of each group's collaborative process, and how did each group manage these complexities?

Method

Setting and participants

The course studied was a graduate-level business communication course required for an M.A. in Communication at the University of Dubuque, a small, private Midwestern university. The focus of the course was written communication in professional settings, and the content consisted of research studies of writing in various industries. Students were expected to read and then discuss in class several studies during the course of the semester. During the latter half of the semester, students began working on a pilot study assignment. This assignment was worth 50 percent of their grade, and it required students to work in teams to design and conduct a small-scale study examining some facet of communication in an organizational setting. Outcomes for this assignment included a final paper describing the study as well as a final oral presentation to the class. Students were encouraged to form their own groups based on shared interests, and the only stipulation set by the professor was that no group could have more than four members.

During time in class devoted to brainstorming and interest sharing, the students formed groups. One group, which I will refer to as Group 1, comprised two students: a middle-aged woman with extensive work experience and a young woman who had just finished her undergraduate degree. Both of these women work as technology facilitators in the distance education field. They often collaborate as part of their jobs. Earlier in the semester these women had worked on a project together.

The next group, Group 2, comprised four young men, all of whom are football coaches by day and pursuing M.A. degrees in Communication by night. These men had all finished their Bachelor degrees (in various fields) within the last year or two. The men share offices and work closely together; and two of them live together.

Group 3 comprised four individuals who have achieved high success in various industries. One male member of the group has had over 25 years' experience in the newspaper industry and is currently the Chief Officer of Operations for the company that runs the local daily newspaper.

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Another male member had a background in advertising and sales and had worked for over 15 years for numerous companies playing various different roles. One female member, though young, had already worked her way up to director of public relations for the local greyhound race park. Another female member already had her MBA and had several years of experience in marketing, training, and writing and editing.

Finally, Group 4 comprised three individuals with very different backgrounds. The group members included an outspoken retired military officer who held an administrative position on campus. Another member was a self-proclaimed feminist who was coming back to school for an advanced degree after several years of being a stay-at-home mother. The third member was a young man who had just completed his undergraduate degree in computer graphics and who works as a computer technician.

Methods of observation

I spent class time observing each group as they planned, designed, and conducted their pilot study. In addition to a final paper due at the end of the semester, each group also was responsible for giving written and oral progress reports. Included in their progress reports were a mission statement, goals, a timeline, stated concerns about their collaborative effort, and expected constraints. In addition to my own observations and the progress reports, the final presentations each group gave on the last night of class included reflections of their collaborative process and the complexities they faced. When turning in their final project, one group, Group 3, shared with me an email transcript of over 100 emails sent back and forth during the work on the pilot study.

Observations

While all four of the groups described their collaborative process as "pain-free" initially, as deadlines loomed and pressures to produce a finished product increased, I observed a shift in group dynamics, focus of the project, and abilities to coordinate the paper and presentation. As one member from Group 3 commented at the end of the semester, the last two weeks of working together with her group members were "like pulling teeth."

To organize my observations of the complexities my students faced throughout their collaborative processes, I have categorized them according to Kraut, Galegher, Fish, and Chalfonte's (1992) distinction of social, intellectual, and procedural complexities.

Social complexities

Social complexities refer to the challenges multiple authors face as they must decide on a hierarchy within the group, establish roles within that hierarchy, and decide on common goals (Kraut, Galegher, Fish, & Chalfonte, 1992). Such an undertaking requires leadership skills, organization, and clear communication.

The groups exhibited varying degrees of role definition, organization, and agreement on common goals. Group 1, the only group with two members, reported that there was clearly a hierarchy

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existing in their group. They defined this hierarchy as "falling into natural roles," with the middle-aged woman with more work experience being the leader and the young woman being the follower. The group mentioned that at first the hierarchy worked well for them, but a few weeks into the project the roles they had defined for themselves at the beginning became blurred. They blamed this blurring of roles on their different levels of commitment to the project; the older woman, a perfectionist, was still searching for appropriate research the week before the project was due, while the younger woman was driven by the assignment deadline and "just wanted to get the project done." Finally, the perfectionist gave up control to the realist, and they narrowed the scope of their study so that it included only the most recent and most relevant research.

Group 2 never appointed a member as leader, and their distribution of roles changed over the course of the project. While their first progress report explained that each of the group members would conduct research and write in designated areas, lack of participation on behalf of two of the members forced the other two men to pick up the slack. When accounting for this shift of roles in their final oral presentation, the group mentioned that despite sharing offices and professional responsibilities they each had very different schedules. Even though their final presentation slide stated "This collaborative project was challenging yet rewarding given the efforts put forth by all four members of our group," it was clear in their final description of roles played that the burden of the project fell on the shoulders of two members.

Group 3, whose members had all displayed excellent work that went the extra mile in previous individual assignments, claimed (in their progress reports and final presentation) to have experienced few social complexities. Early on they defined distinct roles for each member, using each member's strengths to dictate the role they would play. Although no member assumed the title of leader, the one member who acted as "group scribe" and coordinator of meetings took responsibility for making sure the members were all on the same page and that deadlines were met. Another member, the woman with an MBA who was familiar with graduate-level research, acted as group researcher. She took on the large task of finding previous research studies that would help to inform and support the group's own pilot study. The task of editing and formatting the text fell on the shoulders of a third group member, while the fourth group member described his duties during the final presentation as "the jester who provided comic relief." In an email message written to the rest of his group a few days before the deadline, this fourth group member wrote, "one can only see that our collaborative effort would be a success…Each of us knows the importance of responsibility; we live it." However, my observations of this group suggested that while three of the group members viewed the collaborative effort as a success, the woman who played the role of researcher felt and resented the uneven distribution of tasks. Because previous research was so crucial in informing the group's current study, this group member experienced a larger burden in planning their own study. This was the same individual who likened the final leg of the collaborative process to pulling teeth. At the conclusion of the final class meeting she shared with me that she felt an urge to burn the paper!

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Surprisingly, Group 4, whose members had the most diverse backgrounds, did not appear to experience social complexities. They cast themselves into the roles of the computer technician as the designer, the feminist as the writer, and the retired military officer as the manager. They assumed these roles very quickly and easily, stating that their backgrounds and interests made each of these roles a natural fit. The members of this group maintained these roles throughout the entire project, and none of my observations or their reflections suggested that these roles were problematic or complicated their process in any way.

Intellectual complexities

When individuals with different experiences, skills, and viewpoints collaborate, achieving consensus may be very difficult. However, collaboration should not be viewed as a monologic movement towards reaching consensus. Instead, it should be seen as a "dialogic movement in which difference and struggle are inherently part of the bridge-building of understanding" (Weiss, 1991). Such disagreement about content and rhetorical elements is termed substantive conflict. Several researchers have studied substantive conflict (Burnett, 1991; Putnam, 1986; Johnson & Johnson, 1987), arguing that "final documents and the processes leading to them may be significantly improved if they defer consensus, which gives them the opportunity to engage in substantive conflict" (Burnett, 1991). As Burnett maintains, through substantive conflict, the likelihood of "groupthink" is reduced and groups can consider alternatives and voice disagreements and explore alternatives about both content and audience, purpose, organization, and design.

Thus, groups who experience intellectual complexities may end up with a better final product, provided that they can engage in brainstorming and discussions that enable them to make decisions that help to clarify their purpose and organize and design content in ways that all members agree are most appropriate for the needs of their audience.

Of the four groups observed, intellectual complexities were most obvious in Group 4's process. For their study, this group chose to examine the mission statement and documents from a local nonprofit organization established to provide emergency or transitional housing to women. They performed a rhetorical analysis of the documents, and often the group members struggled to agree on this analysis. The conservative retired military officer interpreted the language of the documents much differently than the self-proclaimed liberal feminist. These two individuals had several debates over the documents' purposes, both as they were stated and as they thought they *should be* stated. With help from the third group member, the computer technician who assumed a new role of mediator, these individuals developed a shared view that accommodated the perspectives of both the retired military officer and the feminist. The group's final product was very thorough and well written.

The two members of Group 1 had very different perceptions of the assignment. They described their first few meetings as frustrating, claiming that they were "talking in circles around each other." Without the benefit of additional group members to verify that one of them had the "correct" understanding of the assignment, this group turned to me for help. Once I clarified the

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purpose and specifics of the project to this group, they claimed to understand the assignment, and they began to plan their pilot study and gather research. However, during their final presentation, this group named several more intellectual complexities that they faced. Among these complexities were disagreements about the best way to create survey forms for their study and the most appropriate methods to analyze their data. To resolve these issues, the leader of the group turned to research studies that had already been conducted and decided that they should model their own methods on prior research. While this approach resulted in methods that were appropriate and ensured the study's validity, the leader made this decision alone. Consequentially, the younger woman in this group felt less invested in the project from that point onward. Although their final product was well written, it was evident during their presentation that these women did not have the same level of commitment to the project.

Group 2, who turned in a final product that did not meet all of the requirements of the assignment, spent very little time on the planning stage of their project. As was made evident by their progress reports, they changed the focus of their research more than once, switching from patient education communication, to hospital marketing strategies, to hospital advertising techniques. Talking individually with the members convinced me that they did not all share the same understanding of their project's goals. When reflecting in their final presentation on the intellectual complexities they faced, this group stated that they did not experience any intellectual complexities, claiming they "were all on the same page."

Two of the members of Group 3 had an idea for the project prior to the first brainstorming and idea sharing session in class. The other two members who joined them later did not initially question the scope and purpose of the study, and they agreed with the project goals already established by the original members of the group. However, during the mid-point in the project, the group reported that they were having different views of how different pieces of the data for their study should be collected and analyzed. They planned a meeting specifically to resolve data collection and analysis strategies, and during this meeting they discussed and then came to an agreement on the most appropriate methods. Of the four final products turned in, this group undertook the most ambitious study and reported the most conclusive results.

Procedural complexities

When multiple authors are contributing to a document, often from different physical locations with different hardware and software capabilities, it is imperative that they establish procedures to help them compose, circulate, and review and comment on drafts in as efficient a way as possible. Without such procedures groups run the risk of duplicating efforts, may have difficulty maintaining the document's integrity, and experience inconsistencies in formatting (Tammaro, Mosier, Goodwin, & Spitz, 1997).

The groups observed experienced and managed procedural complexities in different ways. Because all of the students were working professionals, finding time to meet outside of class was difficult. However, I noticed that each group worked hard to coordinate schedules. All of the groups planned meetings several weeks in advance, and Group 3 and Group 4 emailed group

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members meeting agendas in advance. One of the members of Group 3 was committed enough to his group's project to participate in a group meeting via conference call when he was traveling out of the state.

Group 2 and Group 3 divided their document into sections, assigning parts to each member of the group. Both of these groups took advantage of email technology and shared parts of their drafts with each other as email attachments. These groups also relied on the person in the group playing the role of "editor and synthesizer" to write the introduction, conclusion, and make sure the paper had a consistent voice. The other two groups described their drafting process as entirely collaborative, with all group members composing jointly while sitting at the same computer.

While the groups who divided up the document and worked alone on individual sections appreciated the convenience of working from their own computer during the time that worked best for them, they also reported that this method of collaboration was not without flaws. Group 3 got so bogged down in emailing each other parts of drafts or questions about their sections that it began interfering with their professional lives. Both Group 2 and Group 3 reported being overwhelmed by all of the email attachments sent back and forth. Neither group had planned ahead of time on a system for keeping track of the most current versions of documents and for accepting or rejecting each other's proposed changes.

During their final presentation, Group 1 described their joint composing sessions. They claimed that composing this way reduced formatting inconsistencies and prevented noticeable shifts in voice, and in fact their final product was consistent in both design and voice. However, this group also shared that they put in several long nights the week the project was due, and they felt that they wasted a lot of time sitting together in front of the computer.

In their final presentation, Group 4 also described their joint composing sessions. While these sessions were marathon-length and included more coffee than is healthy, the group members felt that by composing together they were able to work through the intellectual complexities that remained. Included in their presentation slides were examples of language choices upon which they had reached a compromise over much debate.

Suggestions for supporting collaborative writing processes

Observing these student groups affirmed my belief that complexities are inherent in the collaborative writing process. Even the groups with the most successful final outcomes experienced conflicts and stumbled over roadblocks during their process. While intellectual complexities early on in a project can be productive and lead to positive outcomes, social and procedural complexities can lead to inefficient practices, leaving members of groups confused, frustrated, and pressed for time to finish the project.

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The following suggestions, based on previous research as well as my own conclusions from watching student groups in my classroom, can help groups to manage, and in some cases prevent, social and procedural complexities while benefiting from intellectual complexities. These suggestions can be implemented in collaborative writing processes in the workplace or the classroom.

- Discuss and decide upon leadership and roles prior to beginning the project. It is important for group members to decide on a system of leadership that will work best for the project and understand the roles that each member will play. Group members should also have a clear understanding of the tasks that are a part of their roles, and they should be able to see how these tasks are a part of the group's overall goals.
- Discuss and decide on the ways in which the team will resolve disputes. It is also important to project the kinds of constraints that the group expects to face and plan ways to handle these constraints.
- Allow enough time for collaborative planning. As Burnett (1991) argues, collaborative planning helps group members to elaborate key ideas, consider alternatives, and voice disagreements, all strategies that help to stimulate substantive conflict.
- Make sure each member of the group has a clear understanding of the document's audience and purpose. The scope of the project should be well defined and realistic, given the abilities of the group members and the economic and time constraints.
- Decide which technological tools will be used to support the project. With the large number of groupware tools available, groups should choose technology that is accessible to all members, will benefit all members, and ultimately make the collaborative process easier, not more difficult.
- Establish a review system for drafts. Such a system should account for the ways in which the group will read and comment on members' drafts, accept or reject proposed changes, and keep track of the most current versions of documents.
- Establish style guidelines in advance to prevent formatting inconsistencies.

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BUSINESS COMMUNICATION: HIGH TOUCH (ON-CAMPUS) VS. HIGH TECH (ONLINE) LEARNING IN SILICON VALLEY

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Introduction

This study explores differences in student perceptions of learning and customer satisfaction between online (high tech) and classroom (high touch) environments at San José State University (SJSU), located in the heart of the Silicon Valley.

This study is important because it focuses on the perceptions of students who live in Silicon Valley, a techno-centric environment. The Silicon Valley is located on the San Francisco peninsula, which is enclosed by the Santa Cruz Mountains to the west and the San Francisco bay to the east. It became a technology hotbed as a result of careful planning by growing post-war Stanford University experiencing financial problems. Stanford owned over 8,000 acres of land and selectively leased the industrial park to technology companies. They achieved their ultimate goal to create a center of high technology close to a cooperative university (Tajnai, 1985). Because of the technology-rich environment, the students at San Jose State may be more likely than the average student to feel comfortable in a high tech learning environment.

Study Domain and Research Hypotheses

The purpose of this study was to identify differences in Perceived Learning and Customer Satisfaction between those students taking a business communication course in a traditional classroom environment (high touch), and those taking the course online (high tech).

Both courses offer the same subject matter yet are instructed in two very different ways. One class is taught on-campus, in the classroom, while the other one is instructed online, using highly technical Internet tools. These courses both provide complex and comprehensive learning modules that focus on effective communication orally, in writing, and over the Internet. Before students can take Business Communication, 100W, they must pass a basic written standards test (WST) offered through the university. This course is required for every business major to graduate and is a prerequisite to many upper division business courses.

The concept of online versus on-campus learning is something that has come to fruition only in the last few years. Several studies have sought to distinguish the differences between on-campus and online courses (see, for example, Prater & Rhee, 2003, p.57). This is an important area of

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study because the perceptions of the online and on-campus student populations are vital to producing quality academic experiences.

Perceived Learning

For the purpose of this study, Perceived Learning is defined as any additional skills or knowledge students recognize they have developed or acquired from the course. Previous research has examined differences in terms of learner-content interaction, concluding that there are no significant differences between web and classroom-based sections (Halsne & Gatta, 2002). Consequently, we hypothesize that there will be no differences in the perception of learning between online and on-campus teaching modalities. Stated more formally:

> H_1: There will be no differences in perceived learning between students enrolled in online courses and those enrolled in on-campus courses.

Customer Satisfaction

Customer Satisfaction is defined as a students' level of fulfillment from taking the course. The construct of student satisfaction has also been the subject of recent study by researchers (e.g., White, 2000), who have found no significant differences between online and on-campus teaching modalities. Thus:

> H_2: There will be no differences in Customer Satisfaction between students enrolled in online courses and those enrolled in on-campus courses.

Methodology

Survey research methodology was employed so that queries could determine the extent to which respondents hold a particular attitude or perspective (Babbie, 1990). A five-point Likert scale was employed for all items. The model survey that was developed included items designed to measure the Perceived Learning and Customer Satisfaction of students enrolled in both the online and on-campus business communication courses.

Instrument Development

During the Spring 2002 semester, the author collected and reviewed preliminary qualitative data. The data was obtained from students enrolled in two on-campus classes (50 students) and one online class (25 students). All students in these classes were asked to respond to two open-ended fundamental questions regarding skill improvement and satisfaction (What was it like taking this class online/on-campus? Did your overall communication skills get any better?) This information was presented at the Association for Business Communication (ABC) Conference in Cincinnati, Ohio, during the Fall of 2002, and was used to guide the development of the "High Touch vs. High Tech" (HTHT) survey questionnaire.

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Subsequently, the HTHT survey questionnaire instrument was created and reviewed by five business professionals selected from the academic and business community. This procedure is recommended by Churchill (1979) in his seminal work on scale development. The survey instrument was administered concurrently to two business communication courses during the early Spring of 2003 semester.

Several changes were made following review of responses obtained from the students and business professionals, also in accordance with Churchill's (1979) recommended procedure. These changes included rewording several questions and modifying the format so that the researchers would collect additional feedback from the respondents.

The HTHT survey questionnaire was organized into six parts: demographic information; learning environment; face-to-face communication; technical skills (email, WebCT, Internet, Computers); amount of time/course content; and course requirements/other. The survey comprised a total of 50 questions, divided into 5 categories (learning environment, face-to-face, technical skills, amount of time/course content, and course requirements). A Likert scale was used to allow participants the opportunity to respond to each scale item with one of the following: strongly agree (5), agree (4), neutral-N/A (3), disagree (2), and strongly disagree (1). From these sections, six items pertaining to Perceived Learning and four items related to Customer Satisfaction were drawn for this study. Demographic information included: GPA; enrollment status (i.e., Junior or Senior); major; section enrolled (on-campus or online); gender; work status; computer proficiency; amount of time spent on homework; and amount of time spent preparing for the class.

Sample Frame

The sample for this study comprised students enrolled in four on-campus and four online versions of the same business communication course during the Spring and Summer 2003 semesters.

Two hundred HTHT survey questionnaires were distributed to eight class sections of 25 students per section. A total of 90 survey questionnaires were collected from the online student population (90% response rate) and 98 survey questionnaires were collected from the on-campus group (98% response rate).

Data Analysis

Data collected for this study were analyzed using descriptive statistical procedures for calculating frequencies and percentages, along with crosstabulation tables, and an analysis of variance (ANOVA) to test for significant differences in Perceived Learning and Customer Satisfaction.

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Demographic information was summarized using frequency distribution tables for categorical data such as section enrolled, gender, major, GPA, technical skill, and measures of central tendencies and variability for continuous data (age, number of hours of work/studying).

Scale items related to Perceived Learning were:

1) My interpersonal skills have improved.
2) My technical skills have improved.
3) My writing skills are better as a result of taking this course.
4) My writing skills have improved.
5) My oral communication skills are better.

I feel 100W has improved my group and team skills.

The four-item Customer Satisfaction scale was comprised of:

1) I am glad I am enrolled in Business Communication, 100W.
2) The learning environment contributed to customer satisfaction.
3) Face-to-face communication would improve my ability to learn.
4) The instruction was interesting, valuable and meaningful.

The data was summarized using frequency distribution tables separately for each group. Responses to the six Perceived Learning items were combined to produce a score for each participant. Responses to the four Customer Satisfaction items were combined to produce a satisfaction score for each participant. For both groups (online and on-campus), a mean and standard deviation were obtained for the Perceived Learning and Customer Satisfaction measures.

Study Results and Discussion

Perceived Learning

Research hypothesis number one posits that there will be no differences in students' perception of learning between online and on-campus teaching modalities; specifically:

> H_1: There will be no differences in perceived learning between students enrolled in online courses and those enrolled in on-campus courses.

As discussed in the previous section, a six-item scale was utilized to determine a composite value for students' perceived learning both in online courses and in on-campus courses. The online group value for Perceived Learning was 4.78, while the on-campus group value was 4.92 (see Table 1, next page).

The ANOVA conducted to examine the mean differences of the two groups was not significant at the .05 level (p=.185). Consequently, we may conclude that H_1 was supported.

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Customer Satisfaction

Research hypothesis number two posits that there will be no difference between in students' satisfaction between online and on-campus teaching modalities:

> H_2: There will be no differences in Customer Satisfaction between students enrolled in online courses and those enrolled in on-campus courses.

As discussed in the previous section, a four-item scale was utilized to determine a composite score for students' satisfaction both in online and on-campus courses. The online group value for Customer Satisfaction was 4.02, while the on-campus group value was 4.41 (see Table 1, next page). The ANOVA conducted to examine the mean differences of the two groups was significant at the .05 level (p=.001). Therefore, we must conclude that H_2 is not supported.

Table 1

Study Results for Perceived Learning and Customer Satisfaction by Teaching Modality

Construct	Online Group	On-Campus Group	Significant at .05 Level?	p-value
Perceived Learning (H_1)	4.78	4.92	No	.185
Customer Satisfaction (H_2)	4.02	4.41	Yes	.001

While this finding was somewhat surprising, an examination of the individual scale items might prove illuminating. Differences were observed between the online and on-campus groups with respect to the instruction being interesting, valuable and meaningful (on-campus 69.4% indicating strong agreement, online 30.6%), and with the statement that face-to-face communication improved their ability to learn (on-campus 77.1% indicating strong agreement, online 23.9%). Also, the proportion of those indicating very strongly that they were glad that they enrolled in business communication was higher in the on-campus group (56.8%) than the online group (43.1%). Similarly, a higher proportion of the on-campus group agreed that learning environment contributed to their satisfaction (59.7%,) compared to the online group (56.9%).

One possible explanation for these results can be found in studies such as that of Greenlaw and Deloach (2003), which argued that student comments should be closely monitored so that instructors can adapt their courses and technology accordingly. The online environment may not allow instructors to pay close attention to customer satisfaction during the course. Alternatively, it is possible that an optimum delivery system has not been achieved because the high-tech environment does not produce stimulating personal, face-to-face interactions. Furthermore, for independent learners who self-select into an online course, face-to-face communication is not as high a priority as it is for on-campus students (Diaz & Cartnal, 1999). Interestingly, the qualitative data collected during the Spring of 2002 and 2003 does not reflect this perception of

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greater satisfaction via the on-campus modality. To the contrary, students enrolled in both of these different modalities thoroughly enjoyed their experience (see Appendices A and B)

Implications and Future Research

This study explores differences in student perception of learning and customer satisfaction between those students taking the course in the traditional classroom environment (high touch) and those taking the course online (high tech). Additionally, the authors wanted to provide real-life, hands-on learning information that would provide ABC members another perspective to consider when incorporating online pedagogies into their curriculum.

Two research hypotheses regarding the different teaching modalities were presented; one was supported. The data indicated, contrary to our hypothesis (H_2), that there was a statistically significant difference in Customer Satisfaction between the online and on-campus teaching modalities, and that the difference favored the on-campus group. If this is true in a technology-centered environment like the Silicon Valley, where students live in an area that is the center of new technology and concepts, results elsewhere could be even more strongly skewed toward the traditional on-campus environment.

A primary direction for future research should be to follow up on the counter-intuitive finding relative to Customer Satisfaction—and whether this difference is meaningful in the real-life educational environment or is simply a statistical artifact. Other fruitful areas for future research could include developing studies that explore student expectations online and on-campus, which were not addressed in this study. It has also been suggested that social interaction and the number of classes being studied should be further investigated (Tucker, 2002).

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Appendix A: Online comments, Spring 2002

"I loved the class on-line. I loved having the freedom of doing my assignments and reading when it fit into my schedule. I work 40+ hours a week and having this class on-line made it much more possible for me to take the course. Yes, I believe my overall communication skills improved. I e-mail to my clients all day long, I prepare oral presentations, proposals, and business letters. This class was a great resource and so were the books."

"An online class is a totally different experience than a ground one. Some people say that online classes are a breeze, but I would say not true! Our weekly assignments and self-motivation were enough to keep up with. I must say that my communication skills have grown during the course of the semester. I hope I have learned from past mistakes and therefore, a more effective communicator. I think that taking this online class forces you to acquire better communication skills because there is no oral interaction on a regular basis."

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Appendix B: On-campus comments, Spring 2002

"I enjoyed taking this class on-campus because it requires personal interaction with other classmates. This helps you prepare for the real world where you have to be able to communicate well with others. The group work was also something that I feel will be beneficial in the workplace. I feel that this class has helped me improve my communication skills drastically, both written and oral. I want to thank you for the help in this important aspect of business and I had a fun time in this class. Thanks again."

"I enjoyed taking this class on-campus rather than taking it over the Internet. I looked forward to coming to class and interacting with the students. I think that you did a great job teaching this class. You made it seem like a family. I liked the fact that you were funny and down to earth. It would not have been the same if I took your class over the Internet."

"Overall, I believe that my communication skills got better. I was able to learn the different ways of writing letters, memos, resumes, and messages. I believe that I have walked away with more knowledge than before. Thank you!!!"

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Denials, Excuses, Justifications, and Apologies: Restoring Tarnished Reputations after the Year of Corporate Malfeasance. What Worked and What Didn't

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Abstract

The years 2001 and 2002 were marked by a wave of corporate scandals—from Enron, Arthur Anderson, and Imclone to WorldCom—that shook public confidence in America's corporations. CEOs of the affected companies, along with their boards, resigned or were forced out of office. Prior to the forced resignations, some of the CEOs' responses to their organizational crises ranged from denial, excuses, and justification of their actions, to subsequent admission and apologies. Some were indicted or awaiting trial. Others are yet to be indicted. A survey on CEO credibility indicates that only 12 percent of respondents believe that CEOs/presidents are perceived as credible. Another survey indicates that 83 percent of CEOs believe that CEOs are responsible for restoring trust and credibility in their corporations. In light of the damning information and sharp reduction in share prices, and in the case of Andersen and Enron, total collapse of the companies, the scandal tainted companies adopted strategies to restore their tarnished reputation. Some strategies were effective; others were not. We analyze the companies' responses to the scandal and offer time-tested reputation management strategies. In this paper, we use image restoration theory to analyze the reactions and rhetoric of Andersen and Enron to the alleged scandals, especially their image restoration strategies. These include denials, excuses, evasion of responsibility, justifications of their actions, and apologies. How did their response at the height of the scandal affect their perceived reputation? What worked and what did not? We provide suggestions for effective corporate reputation management.

Introduction

The years 2001 and 2002 were marked by a wave of corporate scandals--from Enron, Arthur Anderson, Imclone to WorldCom-- that shook public confidence in America's corporations. For instance, in November 2001, the Enron Corporation, one of the world's largest electricity and natural gas traders, announced a $618 million third-quarter loss. In the midst of a formal US Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) investigation, Enron admitted to overstating its earnings by over $500 million since 1997. Enron's auditing and consulting firm, Arthur Andersen allegedly used suspicious accounting methods to conceal Enron's losses. Enron filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection in December 2001 and laid off thousands of employees. Following the biggest bankruptcy in U.S. history was the shocking almost $80 billion loss in investor funds

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(*Business Week,* 24 December 2001, p. 30). Thousands of working middle class Americans lost much of their retirement funds while executives were guaranteed retirement security. Investors lost millions of dollars as executives reaped their millions from exorbitant salaries, compensation packages, and the sale of stocks before the financial mess was exposed (*Business Week,* 17 December 2001).

As a result of these corporate scandals, public worries and media scrutiny have been devoted to corporate fraud, investor security, and public disclosure of critical company information. CEOs of the affected companies, along with their boards, resigned or were forced out of office. Prior to the forced resignations, some of the CEOs' responses to their organizational crises ranged from denial, excuses, and justification of their actions, to subsequent admission and apologies. Some, like Sam Waskal of Imclone, were prosecuted and jailed. Others are awaiting trial; yet others are still to be indicted. The waning trust in corporations has been heightened by other possible fraudulent practices and investigations involving Adelphia Communications, AOL Time Warner, Quest, Credit Suisse, and Tyco among the growing list.

This has many asking why corporate watchdogs, bankers, lawyers, regulators, politicians, and accountants could not have stopped the scandals (*Business Week*, 15 July 2002, pp. 32-35; Nussbaum, 2002). It is no surprise then that a survey on CEO credibility indicates that only 12 percent of respondents believe that CEOs/presidents are perceived as credible (McLaughlin, 2003). Not surprisingly, a 2002 Harris Poll (Alsop, 2003) on corporate reputation reveals that the scandal-plagued companies, including Enron, Global Crossing, WorldCom, Andersen and Adelphia ranked at the bottom compared to Johnson and Johnson, Harley Davidson, Coca Cola, UPS and General Mills which round up the top five. The poll also indicates that Enron and its cohorts ranked lowest on "corporate sincerity" (Alsop, 2003, B1). The 2002 Fortune/Roper Corp. Reputation Index, reported in *Brandweek,* revealed that the average rating for energy companies was 6.1 on a scale of 0-10. This is a decline from a low rating of 6.7 in 2001 (Hein, 2002).

In addition to the diminished reputation, news reports indicated sharp drops in share prices of some of the affected companies. For instance, in March 2002, Adelphia suffered a 46 percent drop in its stock price from $20.39 to $11.04 (Pulliam and Solomon, 2002). Imclone suffered an even more devastating fate; its shares fell 72 percent as the company faced Federal investigation (Houston, 2002). In June 2002, WorldCom shares that had been worth more than $60 in 1999 fell to an abysmal 20 cents (BBC News, 2002). The company was promptly de-listed from the stock exchange. Enron's share price fell from a high of $90 in August 2000 to a staggering low of $1.01 in December 2001 (*Business Week*, 17 Dec. 2001, p. 31). It was equally de-listed

In light of the damning information, low public confidence in corporations, sharp reduction in share prices of some of the affected companies, and in the case of Andersen and Enron, total collapse, the scandal tainted companies adopted strategies to restore their tarnished reputation, because image is as critical to organizations as it is to individuals. Even if we move away from a

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notion of image as a single impression shared by an audience (Moffit, 1994), image is still key to the field of corporate communication. Organizations may take preventive (Crable & Vibbert, 1983) and restorative approaches to image problems. We argue that image restoration discourse is a viable approach in crafting and examining messages that respond to corporate image crises caused by corporate scandals.

In this paper, we analyze the organizations' image restoration strategies in response to the alleged scandals. We use the image restoration theory and discourse to frame our analyses of the actions and rhetoric of the CEOs of the organizations. Some of the strategies adopted by the corporations embroiled in these scandals were effective; others were not.

Although we list a number of corporations embroiled in the scandal, we focus our analysis on Enron and Arthur Andersen because of the significance of these corporations in their respective industries, and their symbiotic business relationship. Secondly, the collapse of both companies is the most important corporate disintegration since the savings and loans debacle of the 1980s, and thirdly, the scandal highlights the need for disclosure for corporations in crisis. Additionally, the crises reveal the need for corporate governance and accounting reforms if society is to trust corporations again.

Background of scandals

Before its devastating implosion, Texas-based Enron catapulted itself from obscurity to become in 15 years, America's seventh largest company and a world-renowned energy-trading giant. Fortune Magazine lauded Enron as “America’s most innovative company,” because it introduced market trading in energy, a previously unknown idea. Created from a merger of Houston Natural Gas and InterNorth in 1985, Enron employed over 21,000 people in more than 40 countries, and had an estimated revenue of more than $100 billion in 2000 (BBC News Online, 22 August 2002).

Arthur Andersen LLP on the other hand, was one of the oldest and best-known accounting firms in the world. A leader in the auditing industry for nearly 90 years, Arthur Andersen was one of the "Big Five," the five largest accounting firms in the world. It was also a member firm of Andersen Worldwide, the umbrella body for member firms all over the world. Andersen employed 85,000 people with 1500 senior partners in 84 countries (Gaffney, 2002).

Both Andersen and Enron had a mutually beneficial business relationship until Enron's slide into bankruptcy, considered by many to be the largest in U. S. history. Andersen was both the auditing firm for Enron, and at the same time had its top officers on Enron's executive board. On the surface, the relationship between Enron and Andersen seemed no different from that of auditing firms and their biggest clients, but underneath the veneer of a successful business partnership lay a crumbling web of deceit and cover-ups.

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Problems for both companies began as information filtered out through news reports that Enron lied about its profits, concealed debts of more than one billion dollars by using off -balance-sheet partnerships, and influenced the California and Texas energy markets. The company was also accused of bribing foreign governments in exchange for lucrative contracts (Patsuris, 2002). News reports also indicate that just before Enron declared bankruptcy, top executives sold off their stocks, raking in millions in the process (Markkula Center for Applied Ethics, 2002). Meanwhile Jeffrey Skilling who was named president and Chief Operating Officer (COO) of Enron in 1997 abruptly resigned citing "personal reasons" (*Business Week*, 17 December 2001, p. 33). Kenneth Lay, the former Chairman and CEO returned to Enron. As the scandal unfolded, Enron reported losses it attributed to some of its business partnerships. Shortly thereafter, Enron announced that the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) had launched an investigation of those partnerships spearheaded by Andrew Fastow, Enron's Chief Financial Officer and alleged mastermind of the misleading accounting practices (*Business Week*, 17 December 2001, p. 33).

The crisis deepened as Enron's creditors and investors such as Dynegy retreated, forcing Enron to declare the largest Chapter 11 bankruptcy in U.S. history. Kenneth Lay resigned, and Stephen Cooper, a "restructuring expert," was appointed interim chief executive. Cooper admitted, "Enron may face $100 billion in claims and liabilities" (Patsuris, 2002).

As the crisis continued and SEC's investigation of Enron's books unfolded, Andersen's David Duncan, the lead auditor of Enron, allegedly ordered the shredding of documents pertaining to the scandal in order to conceal the true nature of Enron's financial status. When the news of the shredding became public, Andersen fired Duncan, claiming that he acted without the authorization of Andersen's headquarters in Chicago. Additionally, Andersen either replaced or suspended its senior management staff in the Houston office (Mason, 2002). Enron then severed its long-term business relationship with Andersen. Andersen was subsequently convicted for obstruction of justice in June 2002, and forbidden to audit public firms effective August 31, 2002 (Patsuris, 2002). The effect of the conviction on Andersen was fast and devastating. Andersen's clients defected to the big four accounting firms: Ernst and Young, Deloitte and Touche, KPMG and Price Waterhouse, taking with them millions of dollars worth of accounts. (Patsuris, 2002) Both Enron and Andersen knew they had to act quickly to salvage their companies and restore their image. They used some image restoration strategies in their attempt to do so.

Theoretical framework: Image restoration

Image is a mental conception held in common by members of a group and symbolic of a basic attitude and orientation. Argenti (1998) defines image as a “reflection of the organization’s reality; the corporation as seen through the eyes of constituencies.” (p. 56). One can infer from the foregoing definitions of image that it is a concept based largely on perception.

The theory of image restoration assumes that communication is a goal-directed activity. It also assumes that maintaining a good reputation is a key goal of communication. Thus when an

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organization's reputation is attacked, the company seeks ways to restore its image, and to communicate the repaired image to stakeholders.

Benoit (1995) posits that the link between communication as a goal-directed activity and maintaining a positive reputation provides the basis for understanding image restoration theory (p. 63). Benoit defines image as "the perception of a person (or group or organization) held by the audience, shaped by the words and actions of that person, as well as by the discourse and behaviors of relevant actors" (Benoit, 1997, p. 251).

Maintaining a good reputation or image is important to everyone, and threats to that image force people to take necessary steps to restore their reputation or image (Goffman, 1967; Brown & Levinson, 1978; Benoit, 1995, 1997). Thus, when one is suspected or charged with any repugnant offense, and the public perceives the individual as having committed the offense, the natural reaction of the alleged suspect is to defend his/her good name. Benoit (1995) contends that image restoration rhetoric implies that when our image is jeopardized, we are more likely to take persuasive actions that include denial of the alleged action, justification, explanation, rationalization, excuses, and apologies for the actions.

Among the many works on image restoration (Burke, 1970; Ware & Linkugel, 1973, Scott & Lyman, 1968; Rosenfield, 1968), Benoit & Brinson (1994) and Benoit (1995) present the most comprehensive discourse on the subject. The image restoration strategies that Benoit proposes help to explain the defensive acts taken by individuals whose images have been tarnished. Benoit places image restoration strategies in five broad categories. The first two, denial and evasion of responsibility, address the first component of persuasive attack, rejecting or reducing the accused's responsibility for the act in question. Reducing offensiveness and corrective action, the third and fourth broad categories of the image restoration, concern the second component of persuasive attack: reducing offensiveness of the act attributed to the accused. The last general strategy, mortification, tries to restore an image by asking for forgiveness. To some degree or another, all the corporations touched by the latest corporate scandals utilize one version or another of these message strategies.

Denial

As an approach to image repair, denial has two variants. A company may deny that the act occurred, that the firm performed the act, or that the act was harmful to anyone. A second form of denial is shifting the blame, arguing that another person or organization is actually responsible for the offensive act (Benoit, 1997).

Evasion of responsibility

This general image repair strategy has four versions. A firm can say its act was merely a response to another's offensive act, and that the behavior can be seen as a reasonable reaction to that provocation. Another specific form of evading responsibility is defeasibility. A third option is to claim the offensive action occurred by accident. If the company can convince the audience

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that the act in question happened accidentally, it should be held less accountable, and the damage to that business' image should be reduced. Fourth, the business can suggest that the offensive behavior was performed with good intentions (Benoit, 1997).

Reduction of Offensiveness
A company that is accused of wrongful actions can also try to reduce the perceived offensiveness of that act. This general image repair strategy has six versions. First, a corporation may use bolstering to strengthen the audience's positive feelings toward itself, in order to offset the negative feelings connected with the wrongful act. Businesses may describe positive characteristics they have or positive acts they have done in the past.

A second possibility is to try to minimize the negative feelings associated with the wrongful act. Third, a company can employ differentiation, in which the act is distinguished from other similar but more offensive actions. A fourth way of reducing offensiveness is transcendence, which attempts to place the act in a more favorable context. Fifth, those accused of wrongdoing may decide to attack their accusers. The final form of reducing offensiveness is *compensation***.** If it is acceptable to the victim, the firm's image should be improved.
Corrective Action
Another general image restoration strategy is corrective action, in which the company promises to correct the problem. This action can take the form of restoring the state of affairs existing before the offensive action, and/or promising to prevent the recurrences of the offensive act (Benoit, 1997).

Mortification
The final general strategy for image restoration is to confess and beg for forgiveness. A potential drawback to this strategy is that it might invite lawsuits from victims. Several studies illustrate the potential of this theory.

Enron and Andersen's image restoration strategies

Enron became embroiled in the scandal because it overstated its profits and concealed debts from its accounts. When the information became public, Enron's initial reaction to the allegations of shady dealings was denial. Jeffrey Skilling, Enron's CEO in early 2001, denied knowledge of any impropriety by the firm. Enron claimed the rumors were unfounded. Instead the company claimed that it agreed with analysts that Enron would earn an additional 35 cents a share in the fourth quarter and a $1.65 a share in 2001 (*WSJ*, 27 November 2000). Enron's denial exemplifies what Benoit (1997) describes as the first attempt to restore one's image. By denying its role in the scandal, Enron assumed that the public will believe its assertion.

However, Enron did more than deny its role in the scandal. While reassuring investors and employees about the company's viability, Enron executives sold off huge sums of shares in June 2001, one month after California began investigating allegations of price inflations by Enron and other energy marketers. CEO Jeffrey Skilling resigned in August 2001 citing "personal reasons."

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Enron filed a third quarter loss of $618 million in October blaming the losses on CFO Andrew Fastow's failed business partnerships. By November, Enron adjusted its net income by $586 million. The adjustment went as far back as 1997. By the end of the year, Enron filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy, the largest in U.S. history (*Business Week,* 17 December 2001). These events at Enron make its denial ring hollow.

Andersen, like Enron, was also in denial. In a *Wall Street Journal* article quoted in CFO.com, Andersen's chief executive, Joe Berardino, blamed the company's problems with Enron on outdated rules and the failure of the auditing profession to adapt to changes in business (Taub, 2001). According to the article, Berardino wrote that "the current financial reporting was created in the 1930s for the industrial age."

Andersen's denial reinforces Benoit's (1997) assertion that when accused, individuals or corporations can adopt another tactic of denial by "shifting the blame." Enron exemplified this strategy by blaming its revised loss to CFO Fastow (whom it later fired) and debt concealment to Andersen for misstating its (Enron's) earnings (*Business Week,* 17 December 2001). Andersen in turn, blamed David Duncan, the lead Enron Auditor, for the company's mishaps. To further offset the negative feelings connected to the wrongful act and maintain some semblance of credibility, Andersen fired Duncan., whom it portrayed as the "rogue employee" who acted independently in ordering the shredding of the documents. The company acted further to revamp its Houston office by suspending three other auditors, and relieving four partners from their duties. In making this decision, Andersen's CEO Joseph Berardino said, "we are prepared to take all appropriate steps necessary to maintain confidence in the integrity of our firm" (*Business Week,* 28 January 2002, p.40).

Benoit (1997) posits that when 'denial' is ineffective as an image repair strategy, organizations adopt the 'evasion of responsibility' or an "excuse" tactic. Enron used this strategy when it shifted responsibility of the scandal to Merrill Lynch, from whom Enron borrowed money to pad its earnings in 1999. In essence, Enron implied that if Merrill Lynch had not provided the loan, Enron would not have padded its earnings. Merrill Lynch subsequently paid $80 million in settlement (Ferrell 2003). Deloitte and Touche accountants also revealed that they had ironed out "problems" in Enron's accounting so as to present a "clean peer review report" (Weil, 2001). Enron also used "defeasibility" or an excuse for a "lack of information" when it revised its net income dating back to 1997. This action is indicative of a company that wanted its stakeholders to assume it made the mistake of omission by not reporting its complete income before the scandal broke. Benoit (1997) notes that organizations or individuals use this tactic because they believe that the public will pardon an illegal act if it were "done with good intentions."

Both Enron and Andersen used some variants of reduction of offensiveness in their attempt to repair their image. Benoit (1997) notes that an accused organization may use *bolstering* to strengthen the public's positive opinion towards it and reduce negative reaction to the wrongful act. Andersen exemplifies the use of bolstering by restructuring its Houston office (the hub of the

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scandal), terminating the appointment of lead auditor, David Duncan, and suspending other top Enron auditors in both the Huston and Chicago offices. Andersen also ensured that its employees were seen on national television expressing their support for the company. The emotional appeal by Andersen employees was designed to "create the perception that the guilty party in the entire Enron mess is the corporate leadership" (Foss, 2002) and not the people of the company. To distinguish its action from Enron's, Andersen CEO, Joseph Berardino, said in a statement that "we are prepared to take all appropriate steps necessary to maintain confidence in the integrity of our firm" executives volunteered to Congress in December 2001 that they had cautioned Enron about "possible illegal acts" (*Business Week,* 28 January 2002, p. 40).

Although Andersen knew that the shredding of documents was considered both unethical and illegal, it was also aware that by volunteering information to federal investigators, it would be perceived to be the more forthcoming of the two companies. The action also made Andersen appear less offensive compared to Enron. Andersen also claimed that compared to Enron, it "made only one professional misjudgment in auditing which accounts for a relatively small part of Enron's earning restatements" (*Business Week,* 28 January 2002, p. 40).

On the other hand Enron tried to minimize the negative feelings stakeholders may have of the scandal by setting up a committee to investigate its accounting practices (*Business Week*, 17 December 2001, p. 33).

Another variant of image restoration that both Andersen and Enron adopted was to attack their accuser. Both companies as well as their top executives attacked each other through the media. When Duncan, the fired lead Enron auditor, attacked Andersen's motive, Enron weighed in and in January 2002, announced it was ending its long business relationship with Andersen. Not willing to go quietly, Andersen fired back by declaring through a spokesman that it ended its relationship with Enron when the company failed and filed for bankruptcy (Fulesday, 2002).

Both Enron and Andersen took 'corrective actions' in their attempt to repair their tarnished image. Andersen's dismissal of Duncan, the Houston-based partners, and the suspension of the other auditors exemplify an effort at corrective action. The company's hiring of Paul Volker, former Federal Reserve chairman, and former U.S. Senator John Danforth (R-Missouri) to review its management policies, and make recommendation, lent credibility and showed Andersen's willingness to correct its mistakes (Pellegrini, 2002).

Enron's firing of Fastow, ending its relationship with Andersen, and ordering an investigation of its accounting practices are all evidence of corrective actions. Enron's hiring of restructuring expert, Stephen Cooper, as interim chief executive, and sale of its assets, such as its "European retail arm" illustrate examples of 'corrective actions.'

Neither Enron nor Andersen officials fully embraced the concept of mortification, the final strategy of image restoration, which calls for 'confession and a plea for forgiveness. Given that

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this tactic could possibly invite lawsuits from the aggrieved, some CEOs avoid a full confession. Enron's and Andersen's CEOs adopted a modified mortification. Enron's Ken Lay's mild admission in November 2001, that Enron made some "very bad investments" and Andersen's Berardino's acknowledgement of "an economic failure," did not indicate any responsibility for their organization's misdeeds. Nor did they ask for forgiveness from the thousands of employees and investors who were left without jobs or retirement savings (*Business Week,* 17 December 2001, p. 33). However, given the evidence of document shredding stacked against it, Andersen's Duncan publicly admitted guilt in shredding of thousands of documents related to the Enron audit (BBC News Online, 17 June 2002). This public admission by Duncan made Andersen's initial denial open to questions from the courts and the court of public opinion.

Why the image restoration strategies failed.

The use of denial was not effective as an image restoration tactic. Although both Enron and Andersen denied their involvement in the scandals, it was obvious that published evidence contradicted that denial. Enron lied about its profits and the concealment of debts through creative accounting. Lindy Paul of the Joint Committee on Taxation said of Enron: "Enron deliberately and aggressively engaged in transactions that had little or no business purpose in order to obtain favorable tax an accounting treatment" (Schifferes, 2003). Andersen initially claimed it had no knowledge of any wrongdoing, yet its lead auditor, Duncan, subsequently contradicted that claim when he admitted that the company shredded evidence related to the Enron case. Andersen as forced to admit the truth to the Department of Justice and the Securities and Exchange Commission.

Both companies' use of the evasion of responsibility tactic proved abortive. Enron's attempt to put the responsibility of its scandal on Merrill Lynch, which loaned Enron the money used to pad its earnings backfired Andersen's attempt to make Enron and its top officials take responsibility for its own scandal also proved futile. Both companies were held responsible for their roles in the scandals.

Enron and Andersen's use of other image restoration strategies, including reduction of offensiveness and corrective actions seemed not to have swayed public opinion in their favor. Benoit (1997) argues that while some researchers posit that denials, excuses, and justifications can be effective, that might not be said for every case. The Enron and Andersen scandals illustrate Benoit's argument that denials, minimization, and bolstering were "least appropriate and effective" as image repair tactics. The strategy failed for both companies because the public did not believe in their innocence, excuses, and justifications for their actions. Benoit further opined that differentiation is also "least effective and appropriate" as an image repair strategy. In the Enron and Andersen case, news reports indicate that the public did not perceive either company as less offensive than the other.

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Both companies' attack on each other and their use of 'corrective actions' did not appear to have had any positive effect on their reputation. The public exchange of vitriol between both companies did not endear them to the public. Andersen's firing of lead Enron Auditor, David Duncan and the hiring of former Federal Reserve Chairman, Paul Volker, and former U.S. Senator John Danforth (R-Missouri) to overhaul its policies, may have lent credibility to the company, but it did not change public perception of the company. On the other hand, Enron's firing of Andrew Fastow, severing its relationship with Andersen, and instituting an investigation of its accounting practices did not prevent it from imploding. Furthermore, it has not stopped the barrage of lawsuits against individual executives and the now bankrupt company.

The image restoration tactics adopted by both Andersen and Enron failed because the public did not believe in the transparency and honesty of the executives. News reports of shady dealings by executives, high financial compensations, stock options and lavish lifestyles of top executives contrasted sharply to pictures of employees and retirees who lost their retirement savings and investments. Additionally, attempts by the executives to restore their image failed to consider the advantage of taking responsibility for their actions, instituting and taking corrective actions to minimize the effect of the scandal.

Implications of the corporate scandals

The consequences of the scandal for both Enron and Andersen continue to evolve. The immediate result of Andersen's scandal was a systematic implosion of the company. Its long-term clients decamped to the other four major accounting firms and other smaller firms. Accenture LLP, formerly a consulting branch of Andersen, publicly rejected any "historic" or "contractual" ties to Andersen (Accenture.com). The name "Arthur Andersen" was forever tainted. In addition to losing former clients and partners, and nearly two thirds of its workforce, Andersen was found guilty of obstructing justice by destroying evidence connected to the Enron financial scandal. Andersen was ordered to end its auditing of public companies by August 31, 2002. This decision spelled the demise of a formerly venerable 89-year old accounting firm, one of the "Big Five" in the business.

The case against Enron is yet to be fully pursued in the courts, but the company's public image is battered. Following Ken Lay's resignation and the de-listing of Enron on the New York stock market, the hiring of "restructuring specialist," Stephen Cooper, as interim CEO could not save Enron. The company's assets have been sold off to competitors and collectors. Sales of some overseas investments are pending. Thousands of Enron employees lost their jobs and their retirement investments as Enron executives forbade them from selling their stocks. Investors also lost millions of dollars. The hometown of Enron, Houston, Texas, whose baseball field was renamed "Enron Field" continues to reel from the negative consequences of the Enron financial scandal. Unlike Andersen, Enron is yet to face a jury. The government is still exploring options of criminally charging Enron. No trial date has been set. In the meantime, former CEO Ken Lay has refused to testify before Congress, claiming the fifth; a former senior executive, Clifford

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Baxter, committed suicide; Fastow, the mastermind of the dubious offshore subsidiaries, was fired, and subsequently indicted on 78 counts of wire fraud, conspiracy and money laundering. Jeffrey Skilling is yet to be charged (O'Meara, 2003).

In the wake of the Andersen/Enron scandal, over 700 companies have been compelled to revise and reduce their earnings since 1997 (Nussbaum, 2002). Experts agree that these and other recent corporate scandals have generated a "sense of outrage' among investors. Nussbaum suggests "the lesson from the Enron debacle should be to restore basic integrity to the bottom line, ethics to business professionals, and clout to overseers that even a deregulated economy needs" (p. 32).

The importance of reputation management

An organization's most valuable commodity is its reputation. The effective management of that reputation is one of the most pervasive and persistent challenges of contemporary organizations. In his book on *Image Marketing*, Joe Marconi (1996, p. xiv) observes that during the 1990s reputation took on such critical importance for large corporations in terms of their market share that it is now of as much concern to their banks as their marketing plans and their business plans.

A survey by Citibank and Interbrand found that 70% of the value of the top 100 British companies was attributed to goodwill in 1998 compared with 40% in 1988. -"Reputation is now so important that the Turnbull Report, which forms part of the UK's corporate governance guidelines, advises companies to treat it in the same way as all other assets-" (Brotzen 2000). Similarly the Chief Executive/Hill and Knowlton Corporate Watch survey of 1999 found that 94% of US CEOs in 10 industries agreed that a good reputation is 'very important' to achieving a company's strategic business objectives. CEOs claimed reputation had grown rapidly in importance over the previous 5 years and they expected that growth to continue (Haapaniemi 2000).

Share price is an indicator of a company's 'reputational capital' (Fombrun 1996, p. 5). And those companies with the best corporate reputations are the ones that perform the best on regular economic measures such as shareholder return (Brotzen 2000). John Budd (1999) from Selz/Seabolt Communications argues that increasingly -"it is being recognized that financial performance correlates strongly with reputation, in this context investors are investing in tangibles (the corporate track record) buoyed by confidence in the company's prospects by their perception of the intangibles, (the so-called non-financial variables)."

Companies that have had crises of reputation, such as Exxon after the Valdez oil spill and Texaco after being accused of race discrimination, have seen the market value of their shares drop by billions of dollars (Zingales 1998). Accidents and crises usually cause an immediate drop in share value but the speed with which that value recovers depends very much on a company's reputation before the crisis and investor perceptions of its response to the crisis. Those companies that do not recover quickly suffer cumulative losses up to a year after the

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catastrophe. A company with a solid reputation is likely to recover within a couple of months (Knight and Pretty 2000).

Similarly, a company's reputation can affect the willingness of communities to forgive corporate misdemeanors. In his book on Corporate Community Relations Edmund Burke (1999, p. 15) suggests that when a company with a good reputation does make mistakes or have accidents it is more likely to be given the benefit of the doubt. Good reputation also helps build support for a company, which is the subject of controversy (Greyser 1999). A good reputation means that a company can more easily set up hazardous facilities in new communities and the time needed to obtain approvals and licenses is shorter. Becoming a 'neighbor of choice' is necessary to maintaining a company's license to operate and 'it can serve as a competitive advantage in the marketplace' (Burke 1999, pp. xiv-xv).

Guidelines for effective reputation management

Formulating corporate reputation strategy is a key to business sustainability and growth. Reputable companies recognize the benefits inherent in building and maintaining strong reputations. We argue that following the outlined guidelines to reputation management will go a long way in preparing corporations for the arduous task of managing their reputations.

Communication as key
Communicating clearly and honestly with investors, the public, and other constituents is risky business if no evidence is presented. It creates expectations. It invites scrutiny. And it can come back to haunt the company making the company appear ridiculous, uncaring, or even deceptive. Disseminate corporate story to internal and external stakeholders - Leading companies communicate their corporate identities to key stakeholders inside and outside the company.

Internal triage
Organizations should double-check that their business practices will stand up under scrutiny before publicly proclaiming the company's integrity. It is better for the company to unearth its own questionable practices before shareholders; regulatory bodies and the media do it for them.

Social responsibility
Integrate environmental and social responsibility into the organization's strategic planning process. Consumers and investors expect companies to be good corporate citizens. Companies that prioritize environmental and social concerns reap long-term benefits from both internal and external constituents.

Crisis planning
Formulate crisis management strategy to defend the corporate reputation. Prepared companies manage crises and even turn them into reputation-boosting opportunities. When catastrophe strikes, companies that have a crisis plan in place suffer less damage.

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Corporate culture component
Build a corporate culture that attracts top talent. Research has shown a strong association between reputation-oriented corporate culture and employee commitment. Leading companies create work environments that attract high caliber employees. Additionally, such companies institute corporate codes of ethics to which everyone should adhere. The CEOs lead by example.

Being proactive
Be proactive rather than practice the Gnat Theory (Argenti 1998). An image audit is suggested at this juncture. Periodically study the perception of stakeholders through image audit. Understanding the stakeholders' perceptions and rising to their expectations would often reduce the risks. Internal departments—human resource or communications—can conduct image audits.

But it is best done by a professional agency outside the corporation, as it will be less biased in its approach. Moreover, stakeholders of a corporation will feel more comfortable with outsiders as they will feel freer to face the auditing process, and confidentiality will be guaranteed with respect to the identities of the respondents.

There are very few people trained in conducting image audits. If an internal communications department is to do it for the corporation, it is best done in tandem with the professional agencies involved in this work as they have wide experience, instead of doing it alone.

In the final analysis, effective management of risk will not only go a long way in protecting the corporation's reputation but will also enhance it. Every challenge coming the way of the corporation is to be treated as an opportunity to enhance reputation. Ability to manage reputation and its associated risks will effectively become a core competence for a corporation's competitive advantage over the long haul.

Conclusion

The crisis in the business community, which started with Enron and worked its way through WorldCom, Tyco and a number of other companies, has wounded confidence in the system. It has played a role in the stock market fall, contributed to an economy that struggles to turn the corner, and dashed the hopes of many who have lost retirement savings.

This study adopts image repair discourse to analyze the recent corporate scandals in Corporate America as experienced by Enron and Arthur Andersen. The study reveals that organizations should be mindful of their reputation in their crisis management planning and communication.

Looking ahead, those who advocate image repair discourse as a guiding philosophy of corporate communication may need to address an implied question raised by this study, and an analysis of image repair literature. Can an image be repaired? Additionally, what are the clear indications

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that a company has collapsed and may not be able to restore its image? The lesson to be learned is that in the midst of a crisis that threatens to destroy what may be a corporation's most valuable corporate asset—reputation—the public will listen to what a company has to say, as long as honesty and commitment are exhibited.

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Communication Perceptions in the Rural Business Community

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Abstract

Effective communication skills are among the most important in any business. This study examines this issue by identifying specific communication competencies needed for business operations in the rural business community and provides information to improve teaching strategies so that our graduates have the identified skills.

Introduction

As business communication professors at Southwestern Oklahoma State University, we interact most often with the owners/managers of rural businesses. These individuals hire our students in various capacities throughout the students' college careers. Some even hire our students as full-time employees after they graduate. In an ongoing effort continually to update the curriculum used in teaching business communication, we wanted to know whether we were teaching those skills that are needed in these small businesses in the rural community.

Therefore, this study was designed to answer these research questions:

1. How do business people in Western Oklahoma feel about the importance of oral, written, and electronic communication skills?
2. What communication skills (oral, written, and electronic) are needed by business people in rural communities in Western Oklahoma, and
3. Are curriculum changes necessary for the future instruction in business communication?

Review of the literature

A review of the literature including current business communication textbooks and research studies showed the use of effective communication in small businesses in rural communities has been virtually ignored. Our study was aimed at filling this gap.

Our examination of textbooks included *Business Communication Essentials* by Bovée, Thill, and Schatzman (2004); *Business Communication Today* by Bovée and Thill (2000); *Comtemporary Business Communication* by Ober (2003); and *Business Communication* by Guffey (2000). The major topics covered in each text include (a) foundations of business communication, (b) the writing process, (c) letters, memos, e-mail, etc., (d) information and

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technology, (e) reports and oral presentations, (f) employment messages, and (g) ethics in communication. These texts specifically use examples from large, urban corporations.

The reviewed research (Moss, 1995; Levenburg, 1996; Bell, 1996; Riggio, et al., 2003; Thatcher, 2000; New Hampshire Business Review, 2002) about perceptions of communication skills revealed studies targeting large corporations in urban communities or studies with data obtained from students and faculty.

The Moss (1995) study came closest to addressing the research questions that we wanted answered, and he defined small businesses as having no more than 500 employees. Since our need was to focus on communication skills required by **small** business in **rural** communities, we adapted the Moss survey to meet these particular research needs.

The Moss study asked "2,200 business people in 1,100 businesses in southeastern Wisconsin, including chief executive officers (CEOs) and directors of personnel or training, to respond to questions about communication skills in the workplace" (Moss, 1995, p. 66). Of the 2,200 business people sampled, 207 responses were received. Of those responses, 67 percent were from people who worked at companies with a maximum of 100 employees, and 21 percent were from companies employing between 101 and 500 employees (p. 66).

The skills examined in the Moss study were oral and written communication. Oral communication focused on speaking before large or small audiences. Written communication covered the areas of grammar, organization, reading, word-processing, and revising skills. Moss also was interested in perceptions about communicating bad news, the most frequently written document types, and how writing skills could be improved.

Methods and procedures

For our study, seven survey questions were based on and adapted from those included in the Moss study. Two additional items were included to address electronic communication not included in the 1995 Moss study.

Because of budgetary limitations, the questionnaire was mailed to a sample of 750 small businesses that were randomly drawn from a database of more than 3,800 individual business owners, executives, and managers working in rural communities. The 2003 business database was provided by the Center for Economic Development at Southwestern Oklahoma State University. These businesses are located in 13 counties in southwestern and western Oklahoma. The Center sponsors workshops, seminars, and conferences to help economic developers and small businesses in this region. The Center uses this database to inform these businesses about upcoming events and legislative concerns related to economic development.

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Findings

The questionnaire was mailed to these 750 businesses during February, 2003. A total of 142 usable questionnaires were received representing 18.93 percent of the random sample frame. Individual item response varied from 108 (the ranking question) to 142.

Sample profile
Using the Standard Industrial Classification (SIC)* coding system, these 142 businesses were representative of seven major categories: construction (n=8); manufacturing (n=9); transportation & public utilities (n=8); wholesale trade (n=10); retail trade (n=27); finance, insurance & real estate (n=25); and services (n=55). Almost half of the businesses within the service category represented health care businesses (see Table 1).

Table 1

Type of Business

Business Type (n=141)	Number	Percentage
manufacturing	8	5.7
retail	36	25.5
professional	48	34.0
service	29	20.6
other	20	14.2

The vast majority of employers in our study qualify as "small" under accepted criteria for small (i.e., under 500 employees). Only 2 of the 141 employers (1.4 percent) had more than 500 employees. We would argue that such a sample represents what might be found in other, similar rural communities. Of the employers, 84.4 percent had fewer than 25 employees. Examination of the professional and service categories that together constituted 54.6 percent of the sample reveal that many were individual CPA firms, attorneys, or health care providers serving small towns/cities in the region (see Table 2).

* Although SIC codes have been largely replaced by the newer, more precise North American Industrial Classification System (NAICS) codes, our data set did not contain the appropriate NAICS code for each business. Consequently, the SIC codes were utilized.

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Table 2

Number of employees

Number of employees (n=141)	Number	Percentage
fewer than 25	119	84.4
25-50	11	7.8
51-100	3	2.1
101-500	6	4.3
more than 501	2	1.4

Consistent with the previous discussion, the majority of respondents were owners of their own business (63.1 percent). Although the 'other' category seems large at 20.6 percent, examination of those responses reveals a difference in terminology across the diverse industries we surveyed. For example, the President of a bank used that category as did the Managing Editor of a newspaper, and a Program Director of a social services agency. Eleven of these respondents were office managers, office coordinators, or head clerks. This examination leads to the conclusion that the overwhelming majority of respondents were in a capacity to supervise the work of others or to monitor the communication of the business (see Table 3).

Table 3

Job titles

Title (n=141)	Number	Proportion
owner	89	63.1
personnel manager	13	9.2
training manager	0	0
CEO	10	7.1
other	29	20.6

Data analysis

Data were examined by tabulating the frequency of response for each answer option. The coefficients included alpha-numeric and percentage figures.

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First, the sample was asked to rank each task or skill from the most important to the least important with "1" being the most important and "7" being the least important. The list included activities related to speaking, writing, and reading/listening skills as presented in Table 4.

Table 4

Ranking of tasks and skills

Task/Skill (n=108 to113)	Most Important 1 (%)	2 (%)	3 (%)	4 (%)	5 (%)	6 (%)	Least Important 7 (%)
speaking formal/large audience	3.7	1.9	.9	1.9	8.3	7.4	75.9
speaking small group	10.1	10.1	9.2	11.0	7.3	51.4	.9
organizing communications	7.3	7.3	10.9	5.5	26.4	12.7	0
revising communications	1.8	7.3	14.7	26.6	30.3	10.1	9.2
reading/listening	56.6	6.2	19.5	8.8	4.4	.9	2.7
keyboarding	3.6	33.3	21.6	9.9	17.1	7.2	7.2
computer literacy	17.1	24.3	23.4	16.2	6.3	9.0	3.6

Most important to the sample was "reading/listening" (n=64, 56.6 percent). Speaking before large and/or small groups was indicated as least important (*large groups*: n=82, 75.9 percent, *small groups*: n = 56, 51.4 percent).

Next, the sample indicated how frequently their employees are required to perform six tasks listed in Table 5 using such frequencies as daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly, and annually. Of these tasks, 71 percent (n=100) write and/or respond to email messages at least once a week and 69.5 percent (n=98) write letters at least once a week. More than half of the sample write memos daily (n=76, 53.5 percent).

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Table 5
Frequency of tasks performed

Task (n=140 to142)	Never (%)	Annually (%)	Quarterly (%)	Monthly (%)	> once a week (%)	Once a week (%)	Daily (%)
write summaries/ reports	25.7	2.1	2.9	15.7	10.0	12.1	31.4
funding/outside	75.7	7.9	5.7	2.1	0	2.9	5.7
proposals/inside	47.1	8.6	9.3	18.6	5.7	5.0	5.7
write memos	17.6	.7	1.4	7.0	11.3	8.5	53.5
write letters	12.8	.7	4.3	12.8	17.0	23.4	29.1
write/respond to email	24.1	.7	.7	3.5	12.8	13.5	44.7

Table 6 shows that speaking formally to large audiences is not important to this group. More than half of the sample gave this response. On the other hand, speaking before small internal audiences was important for all management employees (n= 73, 52.5 percent), but not for entry level employees (n=113, 81.3 percent) as indicated in Table 7.

Table 6
Necessity of speaking formally to large audiences

Category (n=139)	Yes (%)	No (%)
all management employees	19.4	80.6
most management employees	28.1	71.9
senior executives	42.4	57.6
entry-level employees	2.2	97.8
other	17.3	82.7

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Table 7

Necessity of speaking before a small internal audience

Category (n=139)	Yes (%)	No (%)
all management employees	52.5	47.5
most management employees	38.1	61.9
senior executives	32.4	67.6
entry-level employees	18.7	81.3
other	11.5	88.5

Over half the sample (n= 81, 57 percent) perceived that there was a difference between good business writing and general writing. When asked when their staff needed help with writing, the sample responded that short courses or seminars on writing skills would be most beneficial (n= 64, 46.7 percent). See Tables 8 and 9.

Table 8

Perceived differences between good writing in general and good business writing

Option (n=142)	Percentage
good business writing is different	57.0
good business writing is the same	35.2
not sure	7.7

Table 9

Preferred writing assistance options

Option (n=137)	Percentage
credit courses at a college or university	10.2
internal training (in-house)	23.4
on-the-job experience	18.2
short courses or seminars on writing skills	46.7
other	1.5

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When the sample considered specific communication skills, the following were thought to be most important: (1) grammar usage and rules (n=128, 90.1 percent), (2) spelling rules (n=118, 83.1 percent), (3) letter writing skills (n=106, 74.6 percent), and (4) business vocabulary (n=105, 73.9 percent) as shown in Table 10.

Table 10
Necessary employee communication skills

Factor (n=142)	Yes (%)	No (%)
grammar usage and rules	90.1	9.9
punctuation rules	67.6	32.4
letter writing skills	74.6	25.4
spelling rules	83.1	16.9
business vocabulary	73.9	26.1
other	10.6	88.7

When asked to identify if specific communication deficiencies existed among their employees, the responses showed reasonable satisfaction with the communication skills of their current employees. The sample was directed to check all that applied (see Table 11).

Table 11
Current employee deficiencies

Deficient skills (n=131)	Yes (%)	No (%)
Lack of basic business English skills	46.6	53.4
Lack of basic communication skills	40.5	59.5
Lack of oral communication skills	42.0	58.0
Lack of proper telephone skills	29.0	71.0
Lack of other (n=130)	10.8	89.2

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Finally, the sample was asked how the Internet was used during business operations with regard to communicating, conducting research, promoting their business, selling products, or any other use as shown in Table 12. The Internet was used for communication purposes by 79 percent of the sample (n=109). Selling products over the internet was the least used purpose (n=107, 77.5 percent).

Table 12

Internet usage

Activity (n=138)	Yes (%)	No (%)
communicate	79.0	21.0
conduct research	64.5	35.5
promote our business	35.5	64.5
sell products	22.5	77.5
other	12.3	87.7

Interpretation of results

We searched for differences and commonalities across businesses identified by the SIC codes. Our findings show there are different perspectives and needs in rural business that are not addressed in the former research and in textbook information.

The differences focus on speaking before large/small groups, reading/listening skills, the use of email, and the desire for improving skills in grammar usage, letter writing, spelling, and business vocabulary through short courses and seminars.

Textbook comparisons

We found differences and similarities in the topics the Business Communication college textbooks show as important and those topics that our sample viewed as important. For example, textbooks and respondents held different views about the importance of (a) reading and listening, (b) oral presentations and report writing, (c) speaking before large and small audiences, and (d) grammar and usage. The textbooks reviewed (Bovee, et al., 2004; Bovee & Thill, 2000; Ober, 2003; Guffey, 2000) mention that reading and listening are important but devote only a few pages within one chapter to discussion of them with little instruction on how to improve these skills. Our sample ranked these skills as very important. On the other hand, textbooks devote at least one chapter each to oral presentations and report writing. Our findings show that small business employees spend very little time on these tasks. Our sample considers grammar usage

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and rules as necessary communication skills. If grammar usage is included in textbooks, it is placed in appendices and may only be referenced in the previous chapters.

One similarity we found between textbooks and our sample is that both find writing letters, memos, and emails important. The textbooks devote several chapters to instruction in these areas. The textbooks and our study consider there to be a difference between business writing and general writing.

Moss research findings

The Moss (1995) study was used as a basis for developing our survey instrument. By doing so, we expected similar results. This was not the case.

First, Moss found that his respondents believed that oral communication before a small and large group was important. Our findings showed that speaking before either size audience was viewed least important (see Table 1). Secondly, Moss's sample perceived good business writing the same as other good writing. Our sample indicated otherwise (see Table 5). Moss's respondents also did not think that memos were important. Over half of our sample wrote memos on a daily basis. However, our findings did compare favorably with Moss's results about reading, grammar, organization, and revising skills. Both samples also felt that short courses and seminars would help improve employees' writing skills.

Issues, application, and recommendations

We conclude that differences do exist among small businesses especially those located in rural communities such as those in Western Oklahoma. Those differences are notably important and more attention should be placed on the needs and requirements of communicating effectively in small, rural businesses. Moss (1995) states, "The standard course in business communication cannot provide everything a person needs for success, but it should be based on the evidence available about the needs of perspective business people" (p. 73-74). We recommend that college textbooks provide a balanced perspective noting the differences in the skills needed by business people in small as well as large and rural as well as urban business communities. In this way, students who may become employed in the rural community will be better informed and prepared to communicate successfully.

Individual businesses in rural communities and academic programs of business communication studies can benefit from our results. Through short courses and seminars employees can enhance and improve their communication skills. These improvements may contribute to successful business operations and positive client relationships. The findings will also offer ideas to enhance the planning and future instruction of business communication in the academic environment.

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Understandability of Banks' Annual Reports

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Investors, shareholders, employees, and other readers rely on annual reports when making important strategic and financial decisions. Recent allegations of misleading and fraudulent financial reporting by corporations to their constituents -- and the resulting legal, ethical, and societal impacts -- have brought a new urgency to the effort to compose reports that are accurate and clear. As business communication consultants and educators, we are interested in the connection between financial report writing quality and investor relations. Our ultimate goal is to promote good writing as a tool for improving investor relations. As a first step toward that goal, we investigated reader responses to excerpts from banks' annual reports. In particular, readers were asked to evaluate the writing quality of the excerpts. Based solely on their evaluations of the annual reports, readers were asked how likely they were to invest in the company.

Evolution of the Annual Report

The annual report ostensibly serves a simple purpose in American business -- to evaluate the financial performance of the corporation during the previous year. This stylized business report originated with the Securities Acts of 1933 and 1934, known as the "truth in securities" laws. These acts established the Securities and Exchange Commission and required companies with more than $10 million in publicly traded assets to issue independently audited annual reports providing investors with information, including:

- A statement of earnings
- A balance sheet
- A statement of cash flow
- A statement of stockholders' equity
- Relevant quantitative and qualitative information needed to understand the data (Plung & Montgomery 2004).

After thirty years, a new idea emerged. In addition to answering the financial obligations, annual reports could also serve as the corporation's principal public relations document. As a public relations tool, annual reports became advertisements for the company. Management used them as a platform for promoting their philosophies, strategies, and corporate successes. Annual reports took on a magazine look. They included glossy paper, color photographs, fancy graphics, and layouts.

By 1986, the SEC was receiving criticisms that annual reports sacrificed information for

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design. Investors wanted shorter reports that gave clearer perspectives on a company's earning potential. After three years of study, the SEC agreed to a radical change in reporting style – companies could put detailed financial information into a separate document (the 10-K or Proxy Statement) and create a Summary Annual Report (SAR). This SAR was more compact, concise, and readable. It moved footnote material into the narrative, used more graphs, and wrote financial information in laymen's terms (Kulkosky 1987). The SAR effectively recast the report into the province of the communicator, who would now be assisted by, rather than dictated to by, the analysts and design houses.

The first company to produce a SAR was McKesson Corporation in 1987. The company claimed they saved $60,000 in production costs, or 20 percent of their annual total expense for financial reports. The corporate Vice President also praised the SAR for "greatly improving the readability of the report and its use as a communication device" (Simone 1988).

Today the standard corporate annual report consists of both a 10-K and a SAR. The SAR's objectives are summarized as follows:

- Encourage readership by making the report easier to read and understand.
- Provide readers with relevant and concise financial and non-financial information without creating information overload.
- Improve the quality and effectiveness of financial communications.
- Enhance shareholder relations and management credibility through more effective communications. (Plung & Montgomery 2004)

After the scandals of 2001 involving Enron, Arthur Andersen, WorldCom, Xerox, and other companies, public confidence in the securities and accounting industries plummeted. Public scrutiny of corporate financial disclosures increased. As a result, last year, President George W. Bush signed into law the Sarbanes-Oxley Act of 2002, changing forever the financial reporting landscape. The most dramatic change to federal securities laws since the 1930's, the Act redesigns federal regulation of public company corporate governance and reporting obligations. It also significantly tightens accountability standards for corporate directors and officers, auditors, analysts, and legal counsel. Numerous changes are mandated, most relevant for this paper, "increasing the transparency" of financial reports. Furthermore, new powers are granted to the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC), requiring it to review reporting procedures and strengthening its authority to hand down criminal penalties for "white collar" (economic, non-violent) crimes.

Annual Report Writing Quality and Credibility

While the annual report continues to be recognized as a communication tool for financial reporting, it is important that its writers have the rhetorical skills to compose a document

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that is clear and understandable because, first and foremost, the annual report must be credible. A survey by Hill and Knowlton Inc. and reported by Jacobson (1988) revealed that lack of credibility is the main complaint against annual reports. Critics complain that annual reports are long on fluff and short on substance. In particular, the CEO's letter to the stockholders should engender trust and credibility (Courtis 1982). The CEO and the corporation must sustain an image of candor and honesty that accompanies the use of plain language (Plung & Montgomery 2004).

Previous literature examined the relationship between writing quality and corporate credibility and found that plain language in annual reports is perceived as a sign of corporate financial health. One study suggests that readers predict how a company's stock will perform based on the language used in the CEO's Letter to Shareholders. CEO's of top performers use optimistic phrases implying confidence and growth, while poor performers tend to discuss neither gains nor losses (Jacobson 1988). Kohut and Segars (1992) also compared the CEO's Letter in annual reports of high performing and low performing corporations and found striking differences between the two groups in content, themes, and strategies.

These findings are consistent with that of Subramanian, Insley, and Blackwell (1993), who assessed the readability of stockholder letters written by company presidents and CEO's. They found that a tenth grade education was needed to comprehend the reports of companies that were performing well. For companies that were not performing well, a reader would need a fourteenth grade education to read their reports. Thomas (1997) also examined the CEO's Letter and reported a disparity between the readability levels of reports that communicate good news and bad news to shareholders. She found that the letters from companies that were financially stable were easier to read.

In 1998, SEC Chairman Arthur Levitt commissioned the Office of Investor Education and Assistance to publish *A Plain English Handbook* (U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission). Designed to help writers create clear SEC disclosure documents, the handbook is not under copyright restriction and may be downloaded and printed by all. In his Introduction, Chairman Levitt explained the benefits of plain English for investors, brokers, companies, and even lawyers. He urged writers "in long and short documents, in prospectuses and shareholder reports, to speak to investors in words they can understand. Tell them plainly what they need to know to make intelligent investment decisions" (p.4).

Methodology

Given the recent emphasis on transparency in financial reporting, and given the connection between plain language use and corporate credibility found in previous literature, our research investigated reader responses to annual report excerpts. We were interested in determining the extent to which the reports' writing quality affects readers' perceptions about the company. Potential investors were asked to read excerpts from two

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annual reports and evaluate their writing quality. Based on their responses to the discourse features of the excerpts, the readers were then asked how likely they were to invest in the companies. Additionally, readers were asked what other sources of information they use when making investment decisions, and the extent to which their investment decisions are influenced by their understanding of the information in corporate annual reports.

Readers

For this study, the potential investors were 51 MBA students enrolled in two graduate courses during summer 2003. Ninety-two percent were employed at least part-time. The sample was demographically diverse in terms of race, age, and gender. Because of their occupational and educational experience, we can say that the sample reflects the population of potential investors in the stock market, and hence potential readers of corporate annual reports.

Annual Report Excerpts

Excerpts were selected from the 2002 annual reports of two banks, one a regional bank (Company A) and the other a national bank (Company B). The excerpts were found in the Management Discussion and Analysis section of each annual report, a narrative section rather than a section containing only financial data. All bank identifying information was withheld.

To measure readability, the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level and the Flesch Reading Ease Score were determined for each passage. A word of explanation about these tools may be in order here. They factor in the average number of words per sentence and the average number of syllables per word. Since they do not take into account the meaning of the words, it is possible for a passage of text to receive a good readability score but still be difficult to understand.

The Reading Ease score rates text on a 100-point scale; the higher the score, the easier it is to understand the text. For example, comic books score 92, and standard auto insurance policies score 10 (Flesch 1979). The minimum score for Plain English is 60, or about 20 words per sentence and one and one-half syllables per word. Conversational English for consumers should score at least 80, or about 15 words per sentence and one and one-half syllables per word.

The Reading Ease score is used to determine Grade Level, which identifies the average level of education a reader must attain in order to understand and interpret the text. Since grade level is expressed as a range, reading ease scores for texts can be quite different, but still fall within the same grade level. For instance, a Reading Ease score of 90-100 puts readers at the 5th grade level, and a Reading Ease score of 0-30 puts readers at the "college graduate" grade level. The authors discovered that the Flesch-Kincaid tool utilized in Microsoft Word does not go beyond the level of 12th grade. The excerpts

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used in our study scored in the 12th grade according to the Microsoft Word analysis tool, but when the original Flesch-Kincaid formula was used, the excerpts scored at a college graduate level of comprehension. This is quite a noticeable difference and illustrates problems relating to accurate text analysis.

In short, the two annual report excerpts used in this study were at the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level of "college graduate." The Flesch Reading Ease score was 24.8 for Company A's excerpt; Flesch Reading Ease score was 12.3 for Company B's excerpt. Thus, Company A's excerpt was easier to read than Company B's excerpt.

Both excerpts included graphic elements such as charts, tables, and headings. Other key discourse features are listed in the Table below.

Table 1
Comparison of Excerpts

	Company A	**Company B**
Length (in words)	692	984
Number of sentences	29	41
Percent passive sentences	3	19
Ave. characters per word	5.2	5.8
Ave. words per sentence	23.7	24.0
Ave. sentences per paragraph	4.1	2.7
Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level	College grad	College grad
Flesch Reading Ease Score	24.8	12.3

Writing Quality Criteria
Readers evaluated each excerpt's writing quality using the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission's writing guidelines, as described in their *Plain English Handbook* (U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission, 1998). The *Handbook* offers writers of prospectuses and other corporate reports a set of guidelines and standards for presenting "information in a clear, concise, and understandable manner" (p. 66). A rating form listing the SEC's guidelines was provided for each excerpt. The readers rated the excerpts on a five-point scale, from "excellent" to "unacceptable." Criteria were:

- Overall message--logically organized, understandable on first reading
- Language—concrete, concise, familiar, positive
- Sentences—short, active voice, personal, strong verbs, parallel, amount of repetition
- Design elements—graphs, tables, headings, bullets

Next, the subjects were asked about how they make investment decisions and, in particular, how they use annual reports in that decision process. They responded to each

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item on Likert-type scales. Questions included:

- To what extent are your investment decisions affected by the understandability of a company's annual reports?
- To what extent are your investment decisions affected by non-financial, qualitative factors?
- Based solely on your evaluation of each annual report excerpt, how likely are you to buy stock in each company?

Results

Ratings of Message Organization and Understandability
Readers rated both annual report excerpts on a five-point scale, with 1=excellent and 5=unacceptable. Company A's excerpt received a slightly higher evaluation for being logically organized, with 63.82 percent of the readers rating it "excellent" or "good," vs. 60.87 per cent for Company B. This result is not surprising, considering that Company A's excerpt was shorter. On the other hand, Company B received a slightly higher rating for being "understandable on the first reading" (52.7 percent) vs. Company A's excerpt (42.5 percent). While this result contradicts the Flesch Reading Ease scores of the two excerpts, a closer look provides some explanation. Company B's excerpt had an average of 2.7 sentences per paragraph, while Company A's paragraph length averaged 4.1 sentences. The shorter paragraphs in Company B's excerpt may account for the readers' higher ratings of understandability.

Ratings of Language and Sentences
Readers were asked to rate the two excerpts' language and sentences on a five point scale, with 1=excellent and 5=unacceptable. The readers' ratings of the two excerpts concur with their Flesch Reading Ease scores. The excerpt from Company A's annual report was rated slightly higher than Company B's on conciseness, use of everyday words, positive tone, sentence length, active voice, personal pronouns, and strong verbs. There were no differences in ratings of the two excerpts in terms of concrete language, parallelism, or repetition.

Ratings of Design Elements
Both excerpts included design elements such as headings, callouts, tables, and graphs. Company A's bar graphs received higher ratings than Company B's tables, while Company B received higher ratings than Company A for its excerpt's descriptive headings.

The Annual Report's Role in Investment Decisions

The mean readers' responses to the question, "Based solely on your evaluation of each annual report excerpt, how likely are you to buy stock in this company?" did not differ

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for Company A and Company B (Mean rating = 2.8 for each excerpt). Thus, while the readers identified differences in understandability and writing quality between the two report excerpts, they failed to evaluate the banks differently as an investment based solely on their annual reports' writing quality.

Nevertheless, the study yielded interesting results regarding the readers' investment decision-making processes. Over 50 percent of respondents said that they "always" or "often" read a company's annual report when considering investing in it. Only 13.6 percent of the respondents said that they "never" read annual reports. Perhaps more important for our study is the finding that 43.2 percent said that their investment decisions are greatly affected by the understandability of a company's annual reports, while just 20.4 percent said they are not affected by an annual report's understandability.

When asked what sources of information they read (other than the company's annual reports) when they are considering buying a company's stock, the readers listed these sources most frequently: The Wall Street Journal, brokerage company research reports, and the company's quarterly financial disclosure reports (10-Q's). It is interesting to note that 43.2 percent said their investment decisions are greatly affected by non-financial factors, while just 22.7 percent said their decisions are not affected by qualitative or non-financial factors.

Discussion

The value of this study is limited for several reasons. First, the sample size was small (n=51) and did not necessarily represent the population of readers of annual reports. An assumption was simply made that MBA students were likely to be potential investors and annual report readers. Second, the two annual report excerpts used in this study did not necessarily represent all publicly held banks' annual reports (or those of any other industry, for that matter). Nor were they randomly selected. The researchers selected narrative segments from the 2002 annual reports of one national and one regional bank that were on similar topics and of similar length but that had widely disparate Flesch Reading Ease scores.

Previous research has shown that the narrative components of annual reports are less important to analysts and investors than financial data. Investors ranked the CEO's Letter (a narrative section) 10th out of 11 annual report components in terms of usefulness in investment decisions (Most & Chang 1984). Yet, 77 percent of investors read the CEO's Letter, making it the most widely read section of the annual report (Kohut & Segars 1992). We may conclude that investors at least find the narrative sections interesting. The influence of these sections may center on shareholders' impressions and beliefs about the company and its executives rather than on their investment decisions. Indeed, although the subjects of the current study testified that a company's annual reports' understandability is an important factor for making investment decisions, they rated the

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two companies similarly as investment opportunities.

The chief value of today's annual report may be to promote the company image rather than to describe the company's financial condition. Today's investor can get up-to-the-minute financial data about any publicly traded company with the click of a button, making financial information found in annual reports obsolete. But in many cases, the annual report is the only window investors get into the thinking of the company, to determine what is important to its leaders. Thus, it must be skillfully written and designed to gain the reader's attention and leave a positive impression (Burrough 1986). It must say, "Here is why our company is a worthwhile investment" (Millman 1990).

Whether increased oversight, stiffer penalties, and more regulation will improve investor relations remains to be seen. Investor trust and confidence are complex attitudes that are not easily affected. Nor is identifying all the factors that influence investor behavior an effort that is within the scope of our research purpose. Of more direct concern to business communication professionals is the role that the annual report plays as a communication tool and as an impression management tool. Intuitively, we assume that clear and informative financial statements improve the corporation's credibility, while obfuscative writing and mindless marketing efforts damage credibility. Although the present study failed to provide support for this assumption, the call for empirical evidence continues.

Implications for Consultants and Educators

This study has implications for communication consultants and business communication educators. First, using the results of our research, a set of guidelines for composing annual reports will be developed. These guidelines for writing quality and process improvement will be offered to the banks and other companies that are interested in improving their annual reports and other financial documents and, perhaps, investor relations. To accompany the guidelines, consultants will design seminars for writers of financial disclosure statements. By offering such opportunities for employee training and development, radical change would be effected in some of the current communication processes and protocols of participating organizations.

Clearly the results of our research also have implications for higher education. Smith and Demichiell (1996) emphasized the importance of stakeholder surveys in designing curriculum. The results of this research may imply the continued criticality of business communication courses in both undergraduate and graduate business programs. As Tebeaux (1996) argues, research in nonacademic discourse is useful and applicable to students who are being prepared to work in the nonacademic world. Linking the results of this study back to the classroom suggests that students will be able to build their analytic writing skills while still in school so that they will be able to negotiate workplace discourse upon entry. In this manner educators will be able to change managers' belief that their employees' writing ability has not improved in the last decade (Tebeaux, 1996).

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Specific communication competencies, such as report writing and financial disclosure techniques, can be fostered in undergraduate and graduate courses so that graduates enter the workforce with necessary skills already in place.

Conclusion

This paper described the evolution of the annual report in the U.S. and demonstrated the role of this document in investor decision-making. Previous research leads us to propose that improving the transparency of annual reports will improve investor relations. Following the enactment of the Sarbanes-Oxley Act, companies have a greater incentive for improving the quality of financial reporting. With the media, analysts, investors, and government leaders all challenging companies' integrity, financial reports of publicly held companies should be comprehensible and written in "plain English" (Deloitte & Touche 2002).

In Berkshire-Hathaway's 1998 annual report, Chairman Warren Buffett described his goals in reporting: "We want to give you the information that we would wish you to give us if our positions were reversed, and we want to make Berkshire's information accessible to all of you…" (p. 16). These are worthy goals for all corporate financial reports. And professional communication practitioners, together with business communication faculty in academic institutions, must stand ready to help current and future corporate report writers reach these goals.

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Computer-Generated Correspondence and Customer Service Policy in Mortgage Loans

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Introduction

The phenomenon of businesses outsourcing their document preparation and letter writing to electronic groups and companies epitomizes the contemporary techno-philosophical view that knowledge lies with the database of an organization rather than its users. Rather than keeping a library of letters controlled internally, many businesses outsource letter writing to relational database companies that depend on their database of both letter content information and address information. The relational database is more than simply a mail-merge operation, however. The database stores the legal and governmental documents that govern mortgage banking then excerpts pertinent sections for correspondence: the relational database writes the correspondence. From a fiscal viewpoint, businesses view outsourcing as a way to free up resources for their core business. McCarthy (2002) explains that American Express is joined by other chief technologists in the financial services and banking sectors who are handing off to outsourcers day-to-day management of non-core -- yet crucial -- operations.

In the case of electronically generated banking correspondence, if the knowledge of both the user (the bank associate) and the end-point user (the customer) is skipped, and if no communications expertise is introduced into the relational database, the customer becomes the victim of a message intended to provide only as much information as is legally required to protect the bank or financial service center. This leap to outsourcing is being made throughout financial circles nationally and internationally. If the userdisappears in the process of outsourcing, customer service costs may actually increase, thus reducing the cost benefit intended to be gained by the outsourcing. This article describes one financial services company's decision to re-introduce a customer-centered approach to its correspondence database. The results of this project were practical and humanistic policy changes that evolved from the correspondence review.

History and future of correspondence outsourcing

In the banking world, mergers and acquisitions reached a fevered pitch in the 1980's and 1990's when state and federal laws changed to permit banks to acquire other banks outside their immediate geographic area and to expand their banks into other states. As

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the acquisitions grew, so did the communication problems. A bank with many purchases and acquisitions found itself employing large numbers of people who had received little or no training from the home institution, employees who had been employed under varying sets of criteria. Their writing skills, therefore, varied drastically, and their understanding of the home bank's mission also varied. As a result, some banks opted to maintain writing standards for external correspondence by outsourcing their customer service correspondence to companies that generate letters electronically as part of their information services. Outsourcing was also often cheaper than generating correspondence in-house.

Banks, now often called "financial services companies" found electronic document production companies to be useful. The outsource companies' advertising such as this from Metavante (2002) emphasizes the benefits of its services:

> The powerful, advanced architecture of CSF Communication Designer incorporates feature-rich, easy-to-use tools to produce any type of communication needed to create and retain vital customer relationships, such as bills, statements, notices, letters, policies, direct mail campaigns, booklets, and brochures.

It offers a unified service center, and the competitive advantages to businesses are a part of its advertising claims:

> a family of integrated loan origination, secondary marketing, e-business, electronic data transmission and loan servicing offerings that provide our clients with the most sophisticated solutions available. Our automation tools and dedicated team of professionals offer an unrivaled competitive advantage to your business.

Some of these outsource corporations predate computers and software. Now, however, with the advent of centralized relational databases, they can create entire sections or individual elements of a document quickly and with great flexibility. As technology advances, the number and complexity of services offered by the relational database companies increases. The range of services is easily visible through advertisements such as this one from Wendover (2002) with details offered on the Web.

> [Our company] can increase productivity, reduce overhead, and improve customer service. We support every aspect of back-office mortgage loan servicing, including payment processing, tax tracking and payment, monthly statements disbursement, escrow analysis, collections, loss mitigation, and more.

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Outsourcing of non-core business is forecasted to increase according to McCarthy (2002) to about 31 % of budgets by 2004 despite barriers such as strategic importance of customer data, security concerns, long-term stability of IT vendors, long-term dependence on IT vendors, lack of industrial expertise, loss of management control, high cost, and regulatory scrutiny. Two of these barriers—lack of industrial expertise and loss of management control —specifically apply to the problems created between the technology objectives of a relational database and the customer service objectives of a customer-friendly institution.

Databases and resulting correspondence

A relational database company is essentially a technology center that holds many documents for various concerns like publishing and banking. In the case of mortgage banking the database holds directives from government departments like HUD, FDIC, FNMA, and RESPA. Relevant content can then be extracted from the database using information extraction technology that Roa (2002) says "is already important to the publishing industry and mission-critical to the intelligence community" (15). When a mortgage banking center needs to send a letter about re-financing a balloon payment to a customer, for example, it requests the letter from the database, and the database reviews the most recent directives about balloon payment re-financing. The database, using the information from directives, creates the letter. Furthermore, the mortgage banking center sends format information for letters and relevant contact information like customer addresses, so when the database creates the letter's contents, it also formats the letter, addresses it, and sends it to the banking center's customer.

Creating letters from a relational database using legal and directive information provides safeguards against both data inconsistency and the problem of data redundancy that may occur without a database (See Tribunella, 2002), and obsolete information, since all information changes in the database are made at one location. The resulting letters, however, carry the stylistic dynamics of the writing introduced into the database. For example, the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC) notice FIL-84-2000 (1995) about consumer protections for bank sales of insurance is written in this style:

> The final rule prohibits the bank, or anyone acting on the bank's behalf (a "covered person"), from engaging in any practice that could mislead someone or otherwise cause a reasonable person to reach an erroneous belief about: [*sic*]
>
> - the uninsured nature of any insurance product or annuity;
> - the investment risk associated with certain products, such as variable annuities; and
> - The fact that the approval of a credit extension cannot be conditioned on the purchase of an insurance product or annuity

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> from the bank, and that the consumer is free to purchase the insurance product or annuity from another source.

Letters and notices created with their foundations in these relational database documents tend to be written in legal terminology and packed with information primarily relevant to the financial service company. An example of this is a letter from one mortgage banking center's relational database to a customer who asked if the private mortgage insurance on her property could be canceled. The paragraph below, from the responding letter, displays the legalistic writing style found in the database:

> The loan must be at least two years old. This requirement is waived only if the new appraisal includes documentation of improvements made to the property since the loan closing date. The investor may allow only improvements done by the original borrowers of the loan. For purposes of PMI deletion, "improvements made to the property" means the addition of square footage and/or updating or operating systems. For purposes of PMI deletion, "improvements made to the property: excludes cosmetic repairs such as painting, landscaping and carpeting.

This paragraph's style is clearly extracted from a document meant for some purpose other than satisfying a customer's need for information. The reference to "the investor" concerns the mortgage banking center's relationship to an investor and has little bearing what the customer needs to know. Also, the style of the material placed inside quotation marks appears to be legalistic—an excerpt from a directive in the database.

Another stylistic problem that develops when a database extracts information is unnecessary negativism. Many legal documents and government directives include long lists of prohibitions listed as actual prohibitions or as negative criteria. The next letter is supposed to persuade a customer to reinstate his required life, accident, disability insurance. The database, however, gleaned non-payment documents to create the message, and the result is a collection of negative sentences:

> This letter is to notify you that your Life, Accident or Disability insurance has been terminated for non-payment of premium and cannot be reinstated. We were unable to pay the premium due since your account was not current. You may reapply for coverage when your account is current.
>
> Effective immediately, premiums for this insurance will not be collected or remitted. You will receive a new bill statement reflecting this change.
>
> If we may be of further assistance, please call…

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The mortgage banking center wanted to persuade the customer, but the letter as created by the database has three problems. First, the customer who receives this letter would have received notices from his insurance company and a letter from the mortgage banking center reminding him of the problem. This letter to persuade, however, becomes one bad-news, almost threatening, message after the other. Next, in creating a request, the database probably scanned a government document describing when a customer has permission to—"may"--reapply. The mortgage banking center wanted to say that the customer "can" reapply, is capable of reapplying, when the account is current. And finally, because the database attached the same closing paragraph to each letter generated for the mortgage banking center, the result is a bad-news letter with a contrasting chirpy ending.

When financial service companies use a relational database that skips the fundamental understanding of audience, the result is an institution-focused discourse that obsesses on the financial institution's needs and requirements, not the customers'. Even when the letters do not require legal language, the writing carries an overly formal style, often telling customers what cannot be accomplished: the letters tend to be lists of prohibitions and directives. Because of their legal and governmental department bases, they are overly prescriptive and often negative. Most important, while they provide customers with information, they neglect to tell customers what action to take about the information.

Big Bank's correspondence problem

The 21st century arrived with all banks able to provide similar services-- investment services, life-estate planning, insurance—along with the traditional banking services of deposits, loans, and trusts. In the case of Big Bank (not its real name), the end-point user, the customer, became the target of the Big Bank's desires to find its niche in the banking world of the new millennium. Big Bank decided to hold fast to its reputation as the most customer-friendly financial services company among all the competing financial companies, and it launched a large internal program to re-train its associates in customer services, enhancing its customer-centric focus.

In the meantime, the Mortgage Division of Big Bank (BBMS) was redefining its business goals, and in the process of reorganization it identified the need to outsource mortgage service, customer service, and letter writing functions. During the BBMS reorganization, the recently employed Director of Corporate Communications began to read the correspondence being sent by the new BBMS relational database vendor, Megatech (fictional name). She and BBMS were astounded by the customer unfriendliness of its correspondence being generated by the relational database vendor. Therefore, before it began its roll-out of newly re-focused, brand-oriented customer service training for mortgage associates, BBMS reviewed and edited all correspondence sent to mortgagees from Megatech. BBMS hired a communications consultant to review the

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correspondence, and the problems uncovered by the consultant for this project created policy changes and process changes in the mortgage loan services provided by Megatech.

Research design and findings

Criteria for reviewing the letters were derived from leading business communication textbooks. Murphy and Hilderbrandt (1988) offer seven principles of effective business communication: completeness, conciseness, consideration, concreteness, clarity, courtesy, and correctness. These principles are repeated in variations in current business communications texts. Locker's text, *Business and Administrative Communication* (2000) spends a chapter on building goodwill, an element that does not program easily into a database. This text also discusses adapting the message to the audience, also an unprogrammable element. Guffy (2003) discusses profiling the audience, focusing on reader benefits, and expressing ideas positively. Bovée and Thill (1999) discuss audience-centered writing, problems of passive voice, and concise writing. All these elements could be viewed as meta-communications that are not programmed into most contemporary databases. They can appear in the database only if a set of well-written correspondence is introduced and monitored for line changes as the law or directives change.

The consultant analyzed 115 letters produced by the relational database. The correspondence was freer of surface errors than informational errors. The letters contained 5 spelling errors, 4 punctuation errors, and 1 grammatical error. By contrast, there were 153 informational errors. The problem description and frequency are presented in Table 1. Some letters contained more than one problem, so the total number of errors is more than the number of letters.

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Table 1
Correspondence Problem Frequency for Mortgage Letters

ERROR ID#	ERROR DESCRIPTION	FREQUENCY
1.	Information missing	30
2.	"Thank you" used as a crutch	18
3.	Unnecessary negatives	17
4.	We-centered rather than customer-oriented	15
5.	Failure to sell services	12
6.	Overly legalistic wording or bank-ese	11
7.	Impersonal wording	9
8.	Wrong or poor format more than basic letter formatting	8
9.	Instructions or information unclear	8
10.	Error in creating a list	6
11.	Assumes more than a customer will know	6
12.	Direct request buried	5
13.	Good news submerged	4
14.	"Enclosure" missing	2
15.	Selling services in wrong letter	1
16.	Unnecessary information	1

The most important problem revealed in the correspondence review of 115 letters was that the information vital to the customer was missing from the letters (30 incidences). The missing information was often a problem of the database simply not extracting enough information. At other times, missing information was the result of negative information: the database provided a prohibition but could not provide a solution to the prohibition. This problem was compounded by letters that assumed more than the customer could know (6 incidences) and unclear instructions or information (8 incidences).

Analysis of key categories

Missing information: what to do
The most common errors in the messages were neglecting to tell customers how to take effective action in response to the letter and neglecting to say whether a response was necessary. For example, in a letter responding to a customer's request for an

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amortization schedule, the BBMS letter said, "Thank you for your request for an amortization schedule. Please send the $15.00 fee to cover for this service." The customer could only guess where to send the $15.00. The letter made no mention of a self-addressed, stamped envelope because the customers' needs were not part of the relational database, and further computer programming would be required to sort and stuff SASE envelopes. The customer was also given no further instructions to prevent confusion in fulfilling the financial center's request. The customers' logic would include questions like, "Should a new request be sent with the $15.00 fee?" "Will BBMS hold my request until the $15.00 fee arrives?"

The consultant asked BBMS if amortization schedules were available free of charge at the Big Bank website. Because the website was under development, no one knew except the liaison person between Megatech and the Big Bank. Free amortization schedules had been available on the web site for a month, and the customer's letter could have said, "You can find a free amortization schedule for your loan on the Big Bank website." Changes in the correspondence were not keeping pace with changes in the website, and a process to keep the correspondence and the website capabilities current with each other was only pending. Moreover, the computer program that Megatech used to create the correspondence did not accept changes using word processing programs. If a change need to happen to update an existing letter or to improve it, the entire letter had to be re-entered into the database. The database was viewed as static unless a law or rule governing BBMS changed, which seldom happened. This inflexibility is a reflection of techno-philosophy in the creation of the relational database.

The amortization letter, which provided all the information the database held, created a situation requiring a phone call for clarification. At the same time, the tone of the letter was so confrontational that customer service could expect a dissatisfied customer on the phone.

In another letter about a loan payment sent to the wrong address, the letter simply said, "Recently, we received one of your loan payments at a post office box that is no longer valid." The letter gives instructions for further payments but neglected to tell the customer that the payment under discussion was located and processed, therefore leaving the customer without information until he or she received the next statement.

Missing information: what to expect

Another problem in the letters was neglecting to tell customers what to expect. In a letter terminating automatic mortgage payment deductions, the customer was told, "Please mail in your monthly payment until we receive corrected information for your ABA routing number and your bank account number." In this case, customers were left wondering if they should supply the missing ABA routing number and bank account number. They

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also were left wondering if they would be notified when the automatic payment deductions would begin again.

Missing information: negatives and requests

In a related problem, the request from the financial services company to the customers to respond with an action was buried in negative words and was almost lost. The letter explained that life, accident, or disability insurance had been terminated because the customer neglected to pay both it and the mortgage payment. The letter's intent was to say in the first sentence, "Please bring your account up-to-date, and reapply for Life, Accident, or Disability Insurance." Instead, the customer had to wade through negatives: "This letter is to notify you that your life, accident, or disability insurance has been terminated for non-payment of premium and cannot be reinstated. We were unable to pay the premium due since your account was not current. You may reapply for coverage when your account is current." This choice of attitude and wording reflects the set of rules held by the database governing what happens **to the account** when payments are missed. This is both database to database knowledge and correspondence. It ignores the account holder as a customer (user).

Confused information

An important letter about new mailing addresses for BBMS attempted to tell customers that different mortgage matters like payments, hazard insurance, or taxes each required different addresses. The letter led customers astray because the database producing the letter was programmed for one column. Therefore, in order to make a list of addresses fit on one page, the computer opted to omit "Big Bank Mortgage Services" from each of the five addresses listed and put headings at the top of the addresses so they appeared like this:

> Payment mailing address
> P.O. Box 12345
> Charlotte, NC 28272-0000

Obviously, customers would use these exact words "Payment mailing address" until the instructions letter was reprogrammed to provide the first line, "Big Bank Mortgage Services."

Similarly, another letter responds to customers' requests to cancel the required flood insurance. Because the computer knew it was writing about insurance, it neglected to write the word "insurance" in the opening sentence of the letter, resulting in the strange statement, "Thank you for your request to cancel the flood requirement on your loan."

The problems in these and other letters created additional phone calls to the customer service center. These additional phone calls are clearly an expense for the document

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generating company since they receive all customer complaints, a labor-intensive and expensive situation, and for the Big Bank in the long run. For example, when BBMS made a major announcement of the outsourcing of services using a computer-generated letter, it expected approximately 400 phone calls of inquiry, based on the relational database's other experiences with outsourcing announcements, and it provided enough staff to answer all 400 calls. The letter, however, was re-written by the Director for Corporate Communications who re-aligned the letter with good business communication principles, and only 50 phone calls were placed by customers to inquire about the outsourcing announcement. This episode became the impetus for hiring the consultant to review all the other outsourced BBMS letters.

Outcomes

After a 100 percent format change to personalize the salutation, 95 percent of the letters required changes to correct passive voice, institutional-centered writing, and iciness or rudeness of expression. Only 5 percent of the letters generated by the database remained unchanged and were viewed as acceptable for mailing to customers. Below are some of the most important changes that were made.

Format revisions
In response to reading the relational database generated correspondence, BBMS decided that customer-friendly letters needed many changes, and the first was format. The salutation, "Dear Valued Customer:" was dropped. The traditional "Dear Mr." or "Dear Ms.," however, is a very difficult programming problem. Because the customer (s) name is available in the inside address, the salutation became the first inside address line, for example, "Dear Monica E. Allen."

The signature line, which read "Customer Administration, Big Bank Mortgage Services" was reduced to simply, "Big Bank Mortgage Services." The customer service center at Megatech answers all calls with, "Big Bank Mortgage Services," so this was a logical change and simplification.

The most important change in the format was the first sentence of the last paragraph which read, "If we may be of further assistance, please call…." At times, the letter had not provided assistance. Also, the sentence's placement was a logical place for information or cross-selling. Sentences now read, for example, "If you have questions about re-starting your insurance coverage, please call…." "As you evaluate options other than a loan assumption, we will provide you with any assistance or information you need. Please call…."

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Policy changes
The review of the editorial changes made to the BBMS correspondence resulted in policy reviews and changes. For example, the unstated policy at BBMS was to add any unidentified money that a customer included in a mortgage payment to the loan's principal. The BBMS loan officers could not remember whether the policy had been stated at one time; therefore, they wrote the policy, and they added a consistent statement about unidentified payment money to customers' letters about unidentified money.

The loan assumption process, described originally in a two-page letter that included warnings about non-compliance, underwent review to align the process with a customer-centered mission. Also, the 90, 60, and 30 day warnings about balloon mortgages' maturing, which as a matter of policy asked the customers to phone the bank, now include language about details of the original note (some notes may be assumed; some may not.)

An important policy change was the addition of an inside address, salutation, complimentary closing, and signature line to notices like the Verification of Mortgage Notice that had been sent as documents rather than as letters. Also, notices already using an inside address such as an Interest Rate Change Notice were given a salutation, complimentary closing, and signature line. These changes changed the factual notices, some of them bearing bad news, into personal letters.

The customer service policy of sending a self-addressed, stamped envelope when Big Bank requested documents from a customer was re-instated.

Conclusion

Big Bank's reliance on its database, or in this case on Megatech, reflects the 21st century reliance on database as knowledge. In the case of computer generated correspondence, everyone involved relied on the database's sources—documents from government and legal departments. The only intervention offered was by an interpreter/writer at the correspondence generating company, a legal/technical person hired by Megatech. The user's needs—the human requirement for complete and friendly or at least, non-offensive information—were therefore being ignored in this situation.

When BBMS shifted its communication problem of customer unfriendly correspondence back to a customer-friendly focus it located itself in a more humanistic philosophy than the techno-philosophy it was pursuing. The change created a closer awareness of the link between correspondence with customers and the financial company's success. Also, it extended the humanist philosophical change because the new correspondence was entered into the relational database that serves all Megatech customers, not just BBMS.

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Moreover, both the BBMS and Megatech will continue to examine new correspondence using strong communications and business criteria: First, does the correspondence reduce further customer contact by being accurate and complete? Next, does the correspondence keep pace with changing technology in the financial institution? Finally, will the correspondence create more profit for BBMS and Megatech by saving money through fewer customer calls to customer service?

Big Bank Mortgage Service's lesson in technology was an expensive one. Companies that outsource their correspondence need to know the policies of the relational database company that they hire. A relational database company can invest in good written business communication from the first letter they generate, or they may prefer to generate customer-unfriendly correspondence and create large customer service departments to answer the many customer phone calls that poor letters create. The cost of customer dissatisfaction reflected in the number of phone calls, hard data, and in general customer unhappiness, soft data, may be quite high. Some relational database companies are facing this problem squarely and conduct research on clarity and readability of documents.

Computer generated correspondence does not have to ignore customers' needs. It can be customer-friendly if a financial company, or any other large outsourcing company, pays attention to and maintains control over its relational database's document format and content.

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Talking Up: Study of Upward Influence Strategies

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Abstract

The principal aim of this paper is to examine upward influence tactics used by employees working in a Fast Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) organization. Drawing on evidence from 23 interviews, the choice and significance of upward influence tactics employed in the company are mapped out. Informed by a plethora of data on upward influence (UI), several tactics are discussed. The main finding in this study is that there is more flexibility in terms of usage of tactics when the communication process is informal. This paper confirms use of many tactics discussed over the past three decades. It proceeds to analyze two different tactics, reasoned aggression and nonchalance, which emerged in the course of the analysis, and discusses the need for improved understanding of upward influence tactics both, in isolation and combination, and in relation to organizational culture and interpersonal relationships.

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Introduction

The ability to influence, within an organization, serves as an important determinant of the organization's effectiveness (Bass, 1990; Yukl, 1989). The success of an influence attempt depends on a variety of issues, like the choice of tactic, organizational attributes and interpersonal relationships. Frequently described as "getting one's way" (Kipnis, Schmidt and Wilkinson, 1980), influence is of two types – downward and upward. It can be understood as an attempt made by an agent (individual) to sway the target to a mode/manner of thinking that is in sync with the intentions of the agent. The focus of this paper is study of UI tactics in a multi-national FMCG organization, through an analysis of talk patterns.

Review of Literature

Literature on UI addresses the following issues: choice of tactic (Madison, Allen, Porter, Renwick and Mayes, 1980, Mowday, 1979; Judge and Ferris, 1993; Wayne and Ferris, 1990; Wayne, Liden, et al.,1997); reasons for choice of a particular tactic (Kipnis et al., 1980; Ansari and Kapoor, 1987; Waldera, 1988; Kipnis and Schmidt, 1988; Kumar and Beyerlein, 1991; Waldron, 1999 etc.) and tactics adopted (Kipnis et al., 1980; Kipnis and Schmidt, 1982; Schilit and Locke, 1982; Falbe and Yukl, 1992; Waldron et al., 1993 etc.)

Managers attempt to influence their superiors in a number of ways in order to secure personal and organizational goals (Madison, Allen, Porter, Renwick & Mayes, 1980; Mowday, 1979; Schein,1977). The choice of tactics however, varies in accordance with the goals. Research indicates that motives or goals of the members, be they personal or organizational, internal or external, determine the choice of tactic for influencing the leader (Kipnis & Schmidt, 1983; Kipnis, Schmidt & Wilkinson, 1980). This choice may affect the result by coloring the superior's perception of skills or competence, affection for the employees (Judge & Ferris, 1993; Wayne & Ferris, 1990) and/ or perception of similarity between the two (Wayne & Liden, 1995). However, the effectiveness of different influence tactics varies, and subordinates use them differently in their attempts to receive desired outcomes such as positive performance ratings, promotions and salary increase (Kipnis et al., 1980).

Substantial research has been conducted on UI tactics. Kipnis and Schmidt (1982) developed the Profiles of Organizational Influence Scale (POIS) with a 27–item sub scale that measured six tactic categories: rationality/ reason, ingratiation, exchange/bargaining, assertiveness, coalition, and upward appeal. Appropriateness of these six upward influence tactics has been measured by researchers and various research questions have been generated using the original questionnaire employed for measuring them (Ansari & Kapoor, 1987; Erez & Rim, 1982).

Reason has been understood to be the most "direct" of all tactics. Its use is contingent upon the relationship between the superior and the subordinate, and choice is directly proportionate to the goals and needs of the subordinate (Waldera, 1988).

Ingratiation is an informal or nonperformance specific exchange (Schilit & Locke, 1982). It takes into account interpersonal attraction, impression management, flattery and creation of good will (Kipnis & Vanderveer, 1971; Kipnis et al., 1980; Mechanic, 1962). Creating a favorable impression could be another reason for the choice of this particular tactic (Leary & Kowalski, 1990; Schlenker, 1980; Tedeschi & Reiss, 1981). Ingratiation has also been referred to as the influence tactic of favor rendering (Kipnis & Schmidt, 1988; Kumar & Beyerlein, 1991). The agent in this case renders favors with the purpose of ingratiating himself with the target (Kipnis & Schmidt, 1988; Liden & Mitchell, 1988). It has been observed that when subordinates have less power than the managers they are trying to influence, both ingratiation and reason are used (Kipnis & Schmidt, 1983; Rao, Schmidt & Murray, 1995).

The exchange tactic becomes operational when there is reward envisaged in the process. Individuals volunteer to exchange of benefits or favors (Kipnis et al., 1980), exchange resources or even propose to make sacrifices. Another example of an exchange/bargaining tactic could be indebtedness, which reminds the receiver of promises for exchange of obligations requiring compliance (Waldron, Hunt & Dsilva, 1993).

Assertiveness or the "hard" tactic is also referred to as overt or direct. Employees in complete command of the situation, with strong internal loci of control, technical expertise and

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information are more likely to use this tactic. Falbe and Yukl (1992) refer to them as “pressure” tactics.

The coalition tactic would entail working with colleagues and developing support among them for UI. There is more emphasis on numbers, majority opinion and ability to associate with prevailing opinion. In most of his works, Schilit (1987a; 1987b) refers to it as “group support”.

In upward appeal the manager convinces the target of the acceptance of the proposal by higher authorities. This tactic is normally used as a last resort in cases where all other influencing tactics have failed. It is normally understood as a secondary tactic, as the superior, in the initial stages, resists all other efforts on the part of the agent (Maslyn et al., 1996; Waldron et al., 1993).

Yukl and Falbe (1990), and Yukl and Tracey (1992) replicated the work of Kipnis et al. (1980). They added two more tactics, inspirational appeal and consultation, to the already existing list of six postulated by Kipnis and his colleagues (1980). Inspirational appeal (Yukl & Falbe, 1990) arouses enthusiasm by appealing to the emotions or values of the recipient. This tactic, referred to as *allurement* by Lamude (1993), presupposes that the target will eventually benefit by providing happiness to and complying with the wishes of other members within the organization. Consultation (Yukl & Falbe, 1990) involves the recipient in the decision making process so as to secure commitment at a later stage.

The foregoing discussion suggests that choice of UI tactics is contingent upon the motive/intent of the sender for achievement of a higher goal, be it organizational or personal. The present work borrows from the existing literature on UI and proposes application of the same to a FMCG company.

Methodology

Choosing the appropriate strategy for operationalizing the UI attempt is both tough and complex. Multiple influences, micro as well as macro, can determine the choice and application of a particular tactic for optimum results. Study of internal as well as external factors, individual as well as organizational factors affecting choice of tactic necessitates qualitative research. Further, researchers need to go deeper into the reasons for application of tactics for UI, to understand the motive/intent of subordinates. Statistical analysis precludes any possibility of understanding the "commonsense" or intuitive approach to UI. For these reasons, this research studies UI tactics through analysis of conversational discourse within a multi-national FMCG company.

The company chosen for study is a global player with strong presence in 100 countries. Known for its flexibility, transparency, open-door policy, and free-flowing communication or informal talk patterns, the company provided requisite grounds for analysis of UI tactics used within the organization. The managerial job profile involves a lot of traveling and interacting with internal

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and external customers around the globe. Questions that arose were: Do the macro and micro organizational influences impact the thinking and behavioral patterns of the employees? To further analyze the first part of the question a few queries can be raised: What is the influence of organizational culture on the choice of the UI tactic? Does it permeate to all levels? Do the members merely project or actually employ larger cultural dimensions (such as open policies) for enhanced subordinate-superior relationship? The impact of cultural attributes of the organization on the UI tactics was studied.

Two factors determined the choice of the present company for analysis:

1. The company should have had a substantial presence (inter)nationally for a considerable period of time so that the corporate culture processes have reached a certain level of stability.
2. Local offices should have been in existence for ten years or more, with a sizeable number of employees.

The first criterion ensured that relationships and organizational structure were well established, and the second gave flexibility in choosing the respondents.

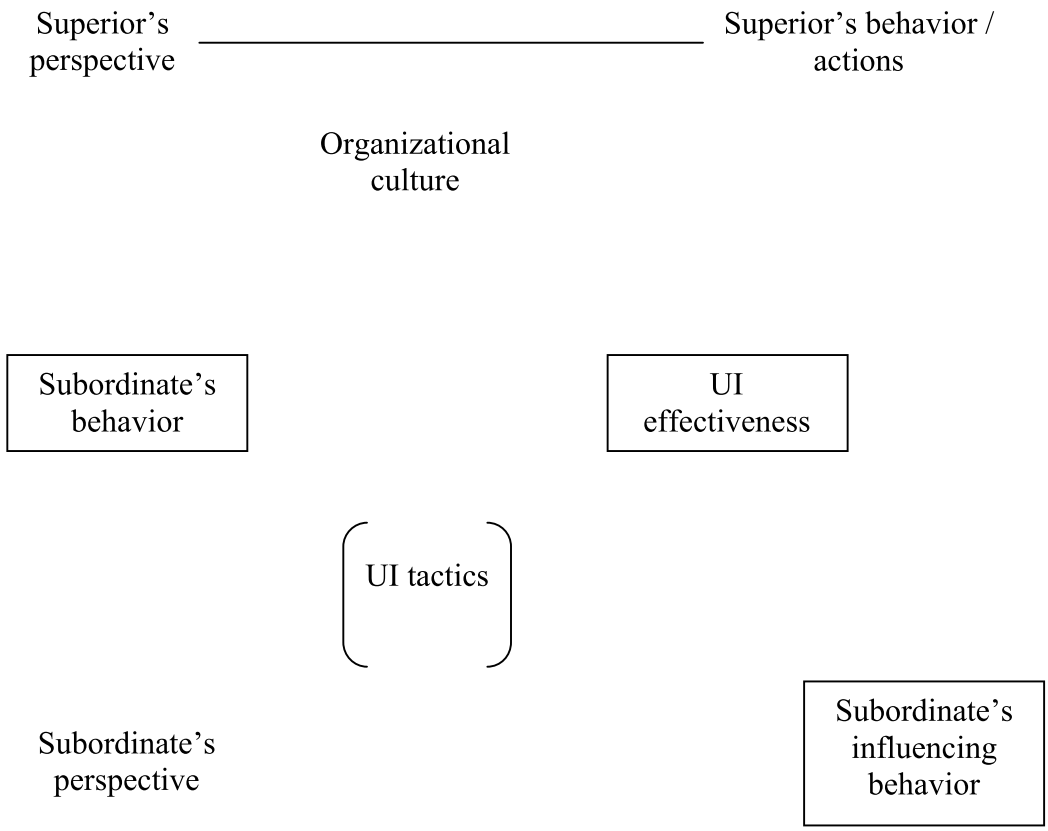
Sample

A purposive sample was selected for this study. The General Manager, Human Resources, provided a representative list of managers. After intense discussion with him, I identified 23 interviewees who would be willing, open and forthcoming. The minimum time respondents had spent in the organization was three years. At the preliminary round I decided to restrict the study to the western zone - in and around Gujarat. To make the data truly representative of the company, at least of the western zone, I selected managers at four different levels from Ahmedabad, Naroda, Bhuj, Rajkot, Bharuch, Vapi, Surat and Jamnagar. To avoid any bias that might arise due to departmental affiliations or politics, managers from different departments were interviewed, including finance, general management, human resources, logistics, manufacturing, sales and distribution. Given the existing standing and culture of the company, the interviews focused on the choice and use of UI tactics.

The following framework for UI was conceptualized as shown in Figure 1.

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Figure 1
Conceptual framework for a study of UI tactics in a FMCG organization



The above framework provides ease of analysis but it requires that the researcher carefully examine the validity of the data and removes possible bias by collecting data through multiple sources.

Procedure
I used an interview script because a detailed survey instrument would have interfered with the inquiry. The interview technique was preferred since the study dealt with complex issues, which were not predetermined, but emerged in the course of the discussion. Various nuances pertaining

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to processes and individuals could best be captured through interviews and not structured through a questionnaire that had little scope for probing. The list of questions elicited responses with overt and covert implications for choice of UI tactics within the company. The script presented the concept of tactics in relation to organizational culture and subordinate-superior relationships as a series of topics in a simple three-part outline. The first part was organization specific: it queried familiarity with the culture, adherence to norms, and likes and dislikes. The second part dealt with subordinate-superior relationship. Part three probed into reasons for the manager's choice of tactic for persuading/influencing the superior. The interviews were tape recorded and lasted about 45 minutes.

This study used an interdisciplinary approach adopted from the ethnographic traditions of mass communication. Hence the coding patterns emerged from the words used by the interviewees. The procedure used was that provided by Fielding and Fielding (1986) who stated that the frequency and themes offered by the participants should be used for analysis. As suggested by Walzer and Gross (1994) I chose to use the participants' own words, often grammatically incorrect, for descriptions and statements.

I assigned each interviewee a sequence number as a means of protecting his or her identity. The interview numbers remained to the very end for coding and record keeping. All interviews were transcribed and identifications of the speakers were removed from the transcripts. Two separate readers coded each transcript. I compared the coding and determined the ultimate classification of each type of item.

Data interpretation was validated through a presentation to some members of the organization. Analysis was further shared with faculty colleagues for their comments and insights in the interpretations presented in the paper. The statements of all the interviewees were cross-validated. Some managers were even interviewed twice for authenticating the data.

Analysis

To study application of UI tactics, 23 transcripts were analyzed. Examples provided in the text below represent a sample of these instances. In a few instances, the transcripts did not contain examples of overt usage of tactic. For these cases, evidence with covert statements is used. This was not thought to be problematic as (a) the study was exploratory and not definitive in nature, and (b) the examples provided seemed to represent common, not idiosyncratic, experiences.

In this study I explored three research questions:

1. What are the factors that impact the choice of UI strategies in a FMCG multinational company?
2. What strategies are adopted for successful UI?
3. What are the implications of this study for future research?

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Research Question 1: What are the factors that impact the choice of UI strategies?
Interviewees shared a view that organizational culture shaped their behavioral and communication patterns. Within this framework, the participants defined organizational culture as "transparent, flexible, with an open door policy and informal talk patterns". From the participants' comments I structured a typology of attributes: transparency, flexibility, open door policy, and free-flowing communication/informal talk that could be associated with their organization and explored the impact of the same on their influencing patterns.

Table 1
Organizational attributes

Organizational attributes	**Positive responses (in percentage %)**
Transparency	78.26
Flexibility	95.65
Open door policy	82.6
Free-flowing communication/informal talk	100

Transparency has been defined in terms of environment, definition of roles and job profiles, by the interviewees. Policies, roles, attitude to work, relationships with superiors or subordinates were clear and transparent. Attributing reason and logic to this phenomenon, participants agreed that transparency is a requisite for efficient functioning within the organization. "Ninety percent of the issues can be sorted out the moment you are honest, transparent, discuss along that topic."

Differences in opinion did surface. As one participant recounted: "at times it so happens that different rules are applied to different people depending on . . . on the kind of person he is." Top team players were, by some participants, accredited with avoiding embarrassing or threatening issues: "instead of being transparent, they resort to avoidance". The size of the organization, it was generally felt, precluded possibility of complete transparency, on all occasions within the company. As counter argument, 18 respondents agreed that " because of the size sometimes it becomes very difficult although the intention of the organization is very good, it happens so that you feel that communication has not happened to you or your people . . . wherever they are". All the participants stressed the importance and benefits of transparency in shaping the behavioral and communication patterns of managers.

Understanding of the term *flexibility* ranged from meeting deadlines, achieving goals, adhering to policies, to dealing with personal issues like: working with flexi-time, taking leave, and presenting new ideas. Interviewees proclaimed the openness of superiors to ideas, concepts and change: "if you are not able to achieve your numbers, ok, the top bosses will understand that there are certain limitations, there's possibly something wrong in the market, and that's why you are not forced beyond a limit." Logic was stressed by 22 participants and accredited as an

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important factor in generating and sustaining flexibility. Twenty interviewees professed that despite immense freedom given to them in terms of designing the input, strict adherence to time was also imposed.

> Suddenly they give us this period . . . you have to complete this work. They give the freedom. Whatever you want to do, do it. Deliver the result. Like that. For example, I'll give, suppose you have to put up a paper of your plan, okay? They give a certain time – in two months you have to finish. Whatever you do, you do, you have the freedom. We want the results.

Flexibility did not extend to personal goals or understanding or handling of personal issues. There is "no balance between personal life and work". Seventeen interviewees were of the opinion that genuine and sound reason can get desired results: "leave is never turned down, even if there is a critical situation. In a genuine case of taking leave, they never asked us to stay or compelled us to finish, never denied."

In terms of the open-door policy, systemic procedures encouraged reasoned interventions. Superiors were open to policy discussions, influences, irrespective of hierarchy, recounted 19 interviewees. "It's pretty open kind of an organization. Open as in . . . the top bosses are actually receptive to what you are saying. That way you are actually free to express your . . . opinion, feeling about any particular issue." Four, however, were skeptical of the existence of an open door policy, as their views were not taken cognizance of. A logical analysis of the problem led to the conclusion that a mismatch between the expectations and priorities of the superior and the subordinate occurred. While statements contrary to the hierarchical structure were made, evidence in the data proves that superiors did gain compliance from their subordinates by virtue of their position in the company. "Okay being a subordinate if he [superior] puts through some things down my throat, that no this thing has to happen, probably because I am supposed to be doing a job I might do, but I might not be convinced to do that."

Informal sharing of knowledge/information is preferred to formal meetings or emails, recounted 23 participants. Some representative responses to the interviewer's question of approaching the superior for influencing/chatting or discussing are: "informal talks are better", "informal talks and meetings", "informal talks followed by letters, memos", "verbal, I mean, informal talk". More important than meetings or informal talk was the telephonic conversation that "connected immediately".

Meetings, another form of interaction, are preferred to written, formal communication. Interviewees neatly tried to categorize the choice and use of informal channels for communication: an informal chat was preferred when there was involvement of two people and meetings when the number was over two. Informal talks, as recounted by interviewees, build rapport and help in influencing. Influencing as a process:

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> …begins usually with informal talk. Then you start talking about an idea that you have in mind, which is followed up with an e-mail, which then concretizes the whole thing, then you put a proposal in concrete and you refer to the discussion that you had earlier, then you put that up and on that basis, what ever happens.

Relationship building by making small talk before embarking on larger issues pertaining to the organization is viewed very positively.

> Informal way . . . you know normally we meet outside, then we talk it out . . . first, we talk, talk out those things which are of his interest and then slowly and gradually we begin talking about the organization, about the plant, about the plant operation and lastly about the people. What kind of people we have, you know, surrounding us and all that. Even we talk about internal environment as well as external environment. Like, we do talk about political issues and, you know, police administration, collector office and how do they influence our business, you know, even *goondas* [thugs] also at times.

The level of informality had decreased in the organization in the last five years with the introduction of different levels. However, the best part of this "happening change" was that "you can still communicate informally with your boss".

According to the participants all influencing is team-oriented. The communication and influencing patterns are a result of the relationship between the subordinates and superiors and the organizational culture. Reflection of it is seen in the behavioral aspects and the talk patterns of the employees.

> Generally see, admin. issues like whether it is arrangement of transport, or whether, you know, cost saving initiatives. On those points, suppose I differ with them [subordinates] or they differ with my decision, they do come to me, tell upfront that boss, whatever you are thinking is wrong, we are damned sure that if we do this we will deliver this.

When the goal is organizational or team related, any or all combinations of UI tactics are adopted to secure a desired output.

Seventeen interviewees stated that their relationships with superiors were informal, which accounted for aggression, arguments and confrontations. A few critical respondents stated that they did try to seek information about the leader's expectations as "it will elevate our position in the company, I think every individual does, those who don't . . . those people lie." These

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statements indicate that employees do try to informally gain information about the superior's expectations prior to vocalizing their intent. The boss was always kept "in the loop" through informal talks, so that in times of emergency, persuasion could be expedited

Three points emerged as a result of analysis of the interviews

1. Open door policy encourages informal talk
2. Informal talks are preferred for influencing
3. UI can be effectively done by informally using tactics.

Research Question 2: What tactics are adopted for successful UI?
Given a particular environment, what are the UI tactics employed within an organization for successful persuasion? On the basis of the responses of the participants, a typology of tactics emerged. I studied the participants' understanding of UI process, then looked at the sample for patterns and combinations, if any, for influencing the superior.

Table 2
Adherence to UI strategies

UI strategies	**Positive Responses (in percentage %)**
Reason and logic	100
Aggression	91.3
Reasoned aggression	91.3
Upward appeal	86.96
Imitation	73.91
Nonchalance	69.56

Reasoned presentation of arguments and discussions was unanimously agreed to be the best UI tactic. Influencing the superiors was easier in reasoned and logically sound processes. Sixteen respondents were of the view that appropriate use of reason would help them in UI. Acceptance of an either-or situation is relatively simpler when backed with logic. Major disagreements and arguments, when logically discussed, were sorted out with ease.

> Yeah, these four-five things in the past have not happened properly, and this is the reason that I need to intervene more than what I used to do earlier. I think this is the way . . . best part is you need to communicate. Whether it is with your peer group, whether with your subordinate group or whether it is your boss group.

Traits of being open and reasoned in presentation of viewpoints have been consciously developed for galvanizing the process of influencing. "There has to be a reason"; "They [superiors] will listen when there is logic." "Explain it logically" is an example from the

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transcripts that prove the overriding concern for reason and logic within the organization. All participants agreed that superiors are trained enough to understand the situation; hence if the subordinates can provide reason and logic the process can be galvanized. “End of the day, unless things are rational and logically presented, I don’t think it is going to be accepted." It is not only a case of persuading the superior but also convincing other members. Describing a situation, one interviewee recounts,

> [I] was very new to the setup; hardly joined organization. I spent about three. . . three months or so. But I could immediately figure that out, that this was wrong. So, in one of the review meetings I voiced it out, and it did not happen. So next time when the review meeting took place. . . this time I went with preparation. I told them, look this is variable cost and how it is variable cost. I had all other data and, you know, ancillary information with me. And, I proved the point that yes, this is a variable cost and it, it. . . in fact, it went into altercation kind of thing. You know, the person was showing, you know, blood rushing in his veins and that kind of a thing. But then, I stuck to the point I had in mind and ultimately I emerged victorious. Because then I asked him certain questions as to what is the definition of fixed cost, what is the definition of variable cost . . . there is variable cost attached in fixed cost, what is that . . .and what is fixed in variable cost, you know. He could only explain those terminologies. And . . .person could not explain. So, ultimately it so happened that he had to get convinced. And, it so happened that it was in a meeting with all the HODs. So, though it was heated argument, but ultimately I could prove my point. You know, without compromising on the, the definition part, you know, I did not play with the definition.

An issue raised is that one is “listened to”, “acknowledged”, and “taken cognizance of”. Reason and logic has to be structured in the content for the superior to pay heed. In this organization, referred to as "firm and fair" by a couple of interviewees, employees were divided in their opinion on action taken after the presentation and analysis of a viewpoint. Six interviewees categorized it as an issue of priorities: “superiors with different priorities [might] consider the presentation unsuitable in the current situation.”

Similar instances were cited by almost all participants. The technique, however, of using the tactic changed with a change in the HOD. “A story needs to be sold”—to whom, how and when are prioritized and the “story” is then suitably “sold”.

All participants stressed “aggression” as a way of functioning. Understanding of aggression took the form of a communication pattern in which interviewees need to take a stand, push their way forward, and convince the other by forcing their views and opinions.

Participants stated that a maximum amount of aggression is witnessed at the time of “seasonality” (the months in a year when the demand for the product is maximum). Elaborating

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further, an interviewee recounts that the appropriate person to take a decision in moments of crisis is the employee “on the spot”. Understandably, he or she has his or her constraints in terms of co-employees and resources. Deadlines need to be met, and targets achieved. In this situation, unwillingness of the superior to listen or unfamiliarity with the situation, for instance, can result in time loss and cancellation of deals. Such instances necessitate that the subordinates merely “tell” the superior of moves being taken for producing desired results “because our presence is in a do or die situation”.

Mismatches in perceptions between members and leaders, according to 14 interviewees, were referred to 'boss’s boss'. Dissent, whether with superior or subordinate, it was strongly felt, needed aggressive handling. “You cannot do conflict management by postponing it or by avoiding it.”

Aggression and “aggression in the market" while dealing with customers and competitors, 21 participants felt, was enjoyable and the best possible tactic to be adhered to. They recounted their enjoyment of aggressive display of attitude in the organization. Extolling the virtues of aggressive behavior, one interviewee extended the discussion by insisting that aggression was “part of human nature.” However, three members were mellow and stated that only in situations when they were pushed in a corner and could see no way out would they “sternly” and aggressively push their way forward. They stated that “vocally” they never became aggressive, with seniors they were never aggressive but in certain situations they were forced to take on an aggressive stance.

The subordinate-superior relationship is informal, and based more on team camaraderie than hierarchical bindings. Because there is immense pressure to deliver, need for cooperation in individual teams is higher with greater potential for confrontations and resolutions in the interest of the team. Hence, superiors are also open to the convincing strategies used by subordinates as individual performance is measured in terms of team performance. Assertiveness, as a strategy for conviction, can then give way to aggression, but one that is reasoned. Excessively smooth functioning of the team may signal apathy. Managers are thus rationally motivated to draw out the best from their subordinates. This can only happen if their choice of tactic for gaining compliance is mirrored by the subordinates’ adoption of similar tactic for convincing/influencing or persuading. Members in a team normally emulate the leaders in the group. Organizational and personal goals, it is felt, and rightly so, can best be achieved if the tactic for gaining compliance appeals to the superior and is also used by him. To further elaborate, if the tactic employed by a subordinate for influencing is one that the superior also employs, degree of compliance to the UI attempt is bound to be higher.

"Reasoned aggression" as defined by participants, entails forceful expressions or statements, pushing forward of ideas relentlessly, unmindful of the convictions of the other party. Employees using this strategy are "generally aggressive" (Devito, 1995: 164) people. They take over in almost all situations. They think little of the values, the beliefs and opinions of other people but

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are sensitive about criticism of themselves. As a result they frequently get into arguments with other people. However, this study revealed that there was a clubbing together of reason/logic and aggression. From the findings it emerges that usage of either reason or aggression is not enough. Conjoining the two tactics produces optimum results in persuasion. Twenty-one interviewees claimed that it was only with aggression that they could get an active audience; however, "reason/logic has to be built into the argument". The use of this tactic came out more openly when dealing with personal issues. All interviewees felt that they could use reasoned aggression in issues pertaining to leave taking, when work pressure was high and deadlines had to be met. The manager's "sincerity and integrity" was recognized and it took but little time for the superior to thaw and relent to the strategy adopted by the subordinate. Five participants were hesitant to use this tactic but the rest aggressively countered all arguments and stated that reasoned aggression with the boss worked and delivered results in 80 percent of the instances.

An open door policy, amicable subordinate-superior relationships and informal talks within the organization facilitate upward appeal. Twenty interviewees agreed that the boss's boss could be approached if immediate superior was not receptive. Fifteen attributed this to a flat organizational structure and stated that it was not a "hierarchy bound organization". As indicated earlier, not all agreed to this fact. However all 20 felt that the boss's boss could be influenced by reasoned arguments or presentations: "in case of policy guidelines, if my boss is not agreeing, I have to overlook my boss. I have to ask permission from his higher authority also."

The remaining three also agreed that not all problems and issues were necessarily handled at the immediate level. What all agreed to was the need for a reason for bypassing one's immediate superior. Recollecting an incident, an interviewee sums up the need for upward appeal,

> After presenting my viewpoint and listening to the viewpoint of the superior, I am still not convinced, I need to present additional data, more logic and reason. Failure on both counts can be then used as a reason for upward appeal for boss is in his place, [and] I'm in my place.

Arguments used in cases of upward appeal need to be well structured and logically sound. Reasons have to be given and risk factors spelt "I need to be *pucca* [absolutely sure] about my data, logic, why I am doing this." Inaccuracy in the presentation of data or facts would not be tolerated.

"If my senior is arrogant, then probably that attitude will trickle down to me as well. If he is arrogant, I'll also get arrogant." Imitation of communication and behavioral patterns is viewed as a successful means of gaining ground, according to 17 participants. How much of it is trickle down and how much is imitation is proved by employees stating their belief in—and practice of—"Do as I do" or "Do as I show," and not "Do as I say" or "Do as I reward." Recounting their interaction with and training imparted to fresh recruits within the organization, all interviewees

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stated that there were no theoretical concepts imparted. Knowledge was imparted by giving the participants an opportunity to observe and practically implement learning. “Whoever comes, I will do and show them. That is how they learn. No dialogue, but I can make them understand while doing work. They will learn more.” The learning is not restricted to technical details but also to behavioral patterns.

Nonchalance is a UI tactic in which the agent makes an attempt to sway the target by indicating lack of interest or involvement in the subject under discussion. However, it is not the truth but a mere projection of an attitude at the time of influencing. This take it or leave it tactic was seen to follow the reasoned aggression tactic. Time pressure is one reason attributed to adherence to this tactic. As one interviewee explained,

> Completion of various tasks in teams requires coordination at different levels. If the boss is not willing to listen or get convinced by reason, aggression or a combination of the two, I move on to a very effective way of convincing him. . . . Show total lack of interest in the issue . . . show disinterest in the team proceedings . . . the [superior] then asks me the reason for it and in an informal chat I tell him.

Sixteen interviewees recounted use of this tactic to persuade the superior. However, very pointedly they stated that a display of lack of interest or involvement is only at the superficial level; in reality it is a projection of an attitude that does not really exist. I refer to it as a projection, for the interviewees at different stages in the interview did reveal their concern with the superiors’ expectations and their desire to work towards accomplishment of the same. Twenty interviewees stressed that they were spontaneous in giving their responses. Out of these 20, only six were of the view that if they were unable to convince the superior by the "spontaneous integrity" of their responses, they would remain unaffected. As one interviewee out of these six stated, " Whatever the idea I believe is right, I'll stick to my decision." Similar statements were made by other participants as well.

Research Question 3: What are the implications of this research for future study?
Organization and organizational attributes play an important role in determining the choice of UI tactics. In this particular case, the participants clearly identified the predominance of four attributes: flexibility, transparency, open door policy and informal talks. A direct relationship between the attributes and tactics was identified. (Table 3)

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Table 3
Relationship between organizational attributes and UI tactics

Organizational Attributes →	Flexibility	Transparency	Open door policy	Informal Talks
UI Tactics ↓				
Reason and Logic		✓	✓	✓
Aggression	✓			✓
Reasoned Aggression	✓		✓	✓
Upward Appeal			✓	✓
Imitation			✓	✓
Nonchalance	✓		✓	✓

This section delves into the key findings of this report and discusses the implications for research.

1. Direct and positive relationship between organizational culture and UI tactics. As revealed through the study, UI tactics are impacted by both, the macro (organizational) and micro (team) culture. Of the 23 interviewees, all spoke of the organizational culture that impacted their choice of UI tactic (Table 3). My study would seem to indicate that culture and modeled behavior, that is imitated, play an important role in shaping the influence processes.

A study examining other dimensions within the organization, apart from culture and subordinate superior relationship, might facilitate a complete understanding of tactics and reasons for choice of a particular tactic. The study suggested that organizational culture and subordinate-superior relationship would exhibit stronger effects on choice of UI tactic, but its relationship to decision making was not analyzed. Within a larger population of organizations, explicit or implicit intent of employees while persuading or being persuaded may be more diverse and thus the potential for analytical generalizations may be greater.

2. High interpersonal relationships encourage reasoned aggression. All 23 participants spoke of good interpersonal relationships with their superiors, primarily a result of the preponderance of informal talks, team affiliations and open communication channels. Greater proximity and subsequent imitation of behavioral traits emerge as part of the findings. While reason has been recognized as the most basic yet powerful tactic for UI, reason in combination with aggression, in this study, provides ground for future research. Data would seem to indicate that interpersonal relationships are a major factor in deciding on UI attempt, specifically the tactic of reasoned aggression. However, healthy interpersonal relationships could also be a precursor to choice of other UI tactics.

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3.Nonchalance is preceded by reasoned aggression. The findings reveal that nonchalance always follows reasoned aggression. As discussed earlier it is projected and not real. Lack of interest in the discussion or the argument subsequent to receiving an unfavorable response from the superior qualifies use of this tactic. Only when reason, aggression or reasoned aggression fail, do employees resort to nonchalance. This tactic involves exasperation in behavior and mannerism at the failure of the superior to comprehend logical arguments.

Conclusions

The key findings of this study are related to the use of UI tactics in a multinational FMCG organization. The choice of tactics was determined by the organizational culture. These influences were partially mediated by witnessing behavioral traits in superiors as well as cultivating them for cohesion in the team and acceptance by the team members. From the descriptive perspective, team players who are not in sync with the rest of the team members or who do not abide by the cultural norms of the organization are misfits and would need to look for exit routes at the earliest. Thus ideally each participant's following a different tactic in the organizational context for influencing may not necessarily work. Hence, the need exists to work in situations in which being similar to one's superiors and their choice of tactics would yield the desired result.

From the perspective of the organization, successful UI influences suggest smooth functioning and good health. Thus, developing a culture conducive to open and informal communication patterns is of paramount importance for organizational well being. Understanding superiors, their expectations, constraints and being familiar with the types of communication would aid in influencing. Familiarity with the organizational culture and formulation of tactic in strict adherence to the same would facilitate the UI process.

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Communicating about Ethics in Classroom and Training Situations: Special Issues Related to Multicultural Audiences

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Abstract

The focus of this article is on issues related to ethics teaching and training in situations in which participants are from varying cultural backgrounds. After a review of relevant literature, we describe our personal experiences with two different ethics-related courses.

Literature review

Universities and corporations that address ethics training today often face new challenges due to the changing demographics in the work environment. Not too long ago, ethics training was taught predominately to students in the disciplines of medicine, business, and law (Davis, 1999). These students were most likely white males from middle class families who shared similar moral values. Today, college campuses are multicultural and include students from different races, cultures, and ethnic backgrounds. The American workforce has encountered similar effects with the increased attention to diversity efforts (Odenwald, 1993; Thomas, 1991). Meanwhile, 45 percent of American corporate revenues are generated outside the U.S. (GMAC Global Relocation Services, National Foreign Trade Council & SHRM Global Forum, 2003). Business is borderless, especially with today's technological advances. Corporations and institutions of higher learning are finding that ethics training is necessary in a global economy if professionals are expected to appreciate a broad range of ethical behaviors.

As universities and corporations respond to the needs of domestic and international clients, there seems to be a problem with transferring ethics training from the rhetoric level to the reality level as identified by William Bennett, Secretary of U.S. Education (George, 1987). In a talk given to business school administrators, Secretary Bennett discussed the gap between rhetoric and the reality of ethics training that exists in higher education. He argued two main points. The first point is that ethics training should be value driven. The second point is that ethics training does little to prepare students for the realities of working in an increasingly global and competitive work environment. If universities hope to generate future leaders, filling this gap is imperative.

In response to the demographic changes of their student bodies, institutions of higher learning are beginning to look at comprehensive ethics programs that integrate the shared beliefs and value systems of students on their campuses (Guelcher & Cahalane, 1999). Similarly, as faculty incorporate discussions about ethics in their curriculum, they consider the diversity of the student

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body when making choices about how to approach this subject. Kolb (2003) used the analysis of hypothetical ethical situations or vignettes in classroom training with U.S. and international graduate students. She chose an issues and options approach for discussion because this approach "allows for cultural differences in appropriate norms of behavior and encourages students to consider and discuss ethical issues and possible ramifications of behavioral choices" (p. 70). Dr. Nancy Tuana, Professor and Director, Rock Ethics Institute at Pennsylvania State University, used vignettes in a similar fashion in a graduate student seminar presentation, "Moral Literacy in the Workplace and Beyond" (Spring, 2002). In this presentation, moral literacy was defined as the ability to recognize moral problems and evaluate the complex issues that they raise from many perspectives. The use of hypothetical situations in ethics teaching and/or research has also been reported (Moon & Woolliams, 2000; Sanyal, 2000; Wilson, 2003).

As university campuses and classrooms become multicultural, faculty may find teaching ethics in a culturally-mixed class difficult (Cowton & Dunfee, 1995). In a telephone survey with more than 40 faculty from the United Kingdom, Asia, and North America, Cowton and Dunfee (1995) found that over half the faculty surveyed indicated that less than 10 percent of their ethics teaching focused on global issues. Many teachers found their students "to be insufficiently attuned to the international diversity of cultures and values" (Cowton & Dunfee, 1995, p. 334). On the contrary, however, some teachers found their students "relativistic and tended to deny any objective approaches to business ethics" (p. 334).

Thus, although students from culturally varied regions and countries are groomed with similar teaching methods and Western textbooks are widely used in business teaching (Ahmed, Chung, & Eichenseher, 2003; Cowton & Dunfee, 1995), culture is still a fundamental determinant for students' ethical decision-making (Lu, Rose, & Blodgett, 1999). A survey of undergraduate students in three states found that culture of a particular region was a significant variable in shaping a student's values and ethics (Spain, Brewer, Brewer, & Garner, 2002). In another survey of business students from six countries, including the U.S., all groups had basic agreement on what constitutes ethical business practices, but respondents from different cultures had significant differences in tolerance to unethical behavior and its potential harm (Ahmed, Chung, & Eichenseher, 2003).

Although students from different cultures may bring with them differing interpretations of ethical behavior, there exists a great debate, but little consensus, regarding whether faculty should focus their teaching objectives on relativistic values or universalistic values. Cowton and Dunfee (1995) found that faculty appear to be relying highly upon personalized teaching objectives. For those faculty who want to sensitize students to ethical issues through a focus on specific examples and business context, "students are encouraged to see cultural differences and to learn ways to manage important cultural distinctions" (Cowton & Dunfee, 1991, p. 333). Alternatively, for those who want to emphasize broad cultural or moral norms, students are encouraged to "learn how to apply universal values such as freedom and fairness," and "develop an understanding of universal principles" (p. 333).

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While both relativistic and universalistic elements could be present in ethics courses in a culturally mixed class, cultural relativism seems more dominant. According to a poll that surveyed a random sample of 2002 graduating American college seniors, three quarters of them reported they were taught that right and wrong depends on differences in individual values and cultural diversity. Only about a quarter reported they were taught in the traditional view that everyone should be judged by clear and uniform standards of right and wrong (National Association of Scholars/Zogby International, 2002). The poll has caused disturbed feelings among those who suggest that "colleges and universities are contributing to, and perpetuating, the ethical laxness behind the recent scandals at Enron, WorldCom, and other major American firms" (Colson, 2002, p. 1).

Personal experience

All authors are members of the Workforce Education and Development program at Penn State: one as a faculty member, the others as doctoral candidates. All have training and/or teaching backgrounds and an interest in ethics. Building on this interest, in spring 2003 we formed a project team to study the special issues and challenges involved in ethics teaching and training. This article is one product of that collaboration. In this section, we describe the content, methodology, and student outcomes in two ethics-related courses. Forty-one percent of our graduate students represent minority or international populations. The international students come from a rather long list of countries including, but not limited to, People's Republic of China, Taiwan, South Korea, England, France, Turkey, Thailand, United Arab Emirates, Venezuela, Egypt, and Uganda. The students teach, train, and develop and assess curriculum in a variety of academic, non-profit, and for-profit organizations in the U.S. and their countries of origin. Thus, the question of how best to discuss ethical issues in classes and workshops containing people from a variety of cultures is of particular interest to us and our students.

The first class we describe is a training course that contains a module on ethical decision-making. The main objective of the module is to stimulate a dialogue on professional and workplace ethics and to encourage critical thinking about the ethical issues commonly experienced by people in the training and development field. This module is taught early in order that issues raised may continue to be discussed throughout the class. After a review of the professional codes developed by the Academy of Human Resource Development (AHRD) and The American Society of Training and Development (ASTD) and a discussion of the benefits and constraints of such codes, the instructor gives examples of common types of ethical situations that occur in a training/consulting context. Since the students are, in many cases, mid-career professionals, they are able to add several of their own examples. Students then work in small groups to discuss ethical issues and options for behavior using sample vignettes provided by the instructor. Given the high percentage of international students present in this class, several cultural perspectives are explored during these discussions. As students struggle to understand cultural values different from their own, they develop an appreciation of the complexities of working in a multicultural environment. Each group also develops an ethical vignette and presents it to the class. Based on observations from the instructor, this approach has stimulated

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discussions on ethical issues in subsequent modules and also in other classes within the program. Additionally, written anonymous feedback from students who have taken this course indicates that students value the discussions on ethics and gain insights that they believe will help them when working with people from similar and dissimilar cultures.

Our second class, a seminar entitled Ethics in the Workplace: Issues of Relevance to Workforce Education Development Research and Practice, was taught for the first time last year as a special topics course and repeated this year due to the high interest exhibited during the first iteration. Special topics courses meet for two 3-hour sessions. In this class, each student researches an area of ethics that is of interest to him/her, develops a vignette related to that area, and presents the vignette to others in a small-group format. The purpose of the research is to prepare students for an in-depth discussion and analysis of the issues involved. Students gather relevant background information and come to class prepared to facilitate a discussion on issues, options, and possible outcomes. The 2002 class was multicultural and included Chinese, Korean, Iranian, African American, Hispanic, and White students. Students carried on lively discussions that centered on ethical perspectives related to multicultural issues. For example, students openly debated the impact of globalization on gift-giving and bribery and discussed other intercultural ethical dilemmas. Summaries of small group discussions were presented to the entire class for further exploration. Students also prepared papers expanding on their chosen topics.

Topics covered in both courses relate to copyright violations and interpretations of the law, confidentiality of information gathered from employees in the course of professional duties, recognizing and respecting boundaries of what is and is not appropriate training content and methodology**,** misconduct, falsification, fabrication, honesty, maintaining respectful climate in training situations, and trust levels in organizations today and how this affects organization development efforts. Technology was mentioned more last year than in previous years, with corporate monitoring of employee e-mail, cameras in break rooms, and information gathering in general receiving attention. Also receiving greater attention this past year was top management responsibility for ethical climate, and the effect of the current economic and international situation on diversity initiatives, willingness to travel, worker stress levels, and employee morale and collegiality.

Conclusion

The question raised in the literature review section of this paper regarding whether ethics teaching and training materials should focus on universalistic or relativistic values is interesting, and difficult to answer. As with all topics, content and methodology choices depend on the purpose and desired outcomes of the instruction. In the courses described here, the purpose was to increase awareness of ethical issues encountered in the workplace, stimulate dialogue on these issues, and encourage critical thinking. An additional purpose was to develop sensitivity to multicultural viewpoints. The discussion of ethical dilemmas was the primary means used to accomplish these objectives. This approach would be considered relativistic in nature since there was not one right answer for each dilemma. Questions raised in a dilemma often were subtle,

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such as, “Is it ethical for a trainer to deliver content that s/he does not believe in?” Our discussion of professional codes appears to fall under the universalistic umbrella since the same rules or standards of behavior are proposed for all members of the profession. These standards tend to be vague, however, and open to interpretation. For example, the students agree that professionals should represent their credentials fairly and accurately, but they disagree on what that means. What some view as ‘putting a positive spin on their experiences,” others view as lying.

The ultimate goal, of course, is for these classroom discussions to help students when they face ethical choices in the workplace. Follow-up studies on students and trainees who complete instruction in ethics are needed to determine the effect of such courses on behavior on the job. A related question here concerns measurement issues. What data do we collect? Diversity training faced similar measurement questions in the early days. At first, measurement focused on participants’ self-perceptions of how the training increased their sensitivity to others. Most recently, measurement centers on the collection of hard data, such as number of minorities in higher positions in the company and the number of grievances filed. Measurement in the field of ethics teaching/training may take a similar path. Is it enough that students and trainees believe that the instruction helped them to make better ethical decisions, or do we need other measures?

Ethics is an emerging research area in several academic disciplines. With this increased attention, those of us who teach ethics should soon have information that will shed light on some of the issues raised in this paper. Our research team plans to continue to study ethics teaching and training related to ethical preparedness for multicultural and global situations.

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Integrating Ethics and Corporate Citizenship into the Business Communication Curriculum

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Since 1997 I have been integrating professional ethics and "corporate citizenship" into undergraduate business communication courses, with positive responses. This paper will examine reasons why I believe ethics and corporate citizenship are legitimate topics in an undergraduate business communication course, and will provide examples of the assignments and resources I have used.

Why integrate the topics of Corporate Citizenship and Professional Ethics?

Initially I was hesitant to create a curriculum that might seem to impose my values on students. Was it possible to offer ethics readings and assignments without engineering specific solutions that students would feel obliged to deliver? Fortunately, a number of studies by business ethics researchers indicate that the very discussion of ethical issues proves useful to students in forming professional ethical practices. According to these researchers, ethics education should not force standards on students, but *should assist students in recognizing ethical issues and developing their existing sensibilities* so they can make decisions not simply between right and "wrong" but between right and right. As Michael Davis points out, professionals should "study ethical problems the way generals study old battles" so as to see "the essential facts in the fog of detail." (1988, p. 57)

Given recent national events—notably the Enron scandal and "whistleblowers" in corporations and in the FBI—I have come to believe that the study of professional and organizational ethics, and the development of ethical sensitivity in students, should become a more prominent component in higher education. *Fortune* magazine's annual quest to determine the "100 Best Companies to Work For" and "Most Admired Companies" gives us a good sense of what Americans are looking for. In selecting the most admired companies, Fortune evaluated eight attributes; one of these was the company's "Social Responsibility" or "corporate citizenship" (in addition to Innovativeness, Employee Talent, Use of Corporate Assets, Financial Soundness, Long-term Investment Value, and Quality of Products/Services). American consumers—and investors—now look beyond the numbers, and they no longer assume the credibility of any corporation. "It must be earned." In these post-Enron times, "we value character and credibility a whole lot more than charisma"(Boyle, 2002).

The topics of ethics and corporate citizenship focus on character, values, and what it takes to "do the right thing"—as a professional and as a company. Why not integrate such topics for

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consideration in business communication? As Harvard business ethics professor Joseph L. Badaracco Jr. (1997) asserts, ethical problems can raise questions about personal integrity, can create conflicts between responsibilities for others and one's personal values, and can involve responsibilities a company shares with other groups in society. Integrating professional ethics into business communication courses may help students. According to Alfonso Oddo, Accounting Professor at Niagara University in New York State: "the goal of teaching ethics in the business class should be to get students to recognize ethical issues and to apply their own personal values to resolve the issues" (1997)

Further, I share the cautious optimism of Clark and Lattal (1993), authors of *Workplace Ethics: Winning the Integrity Revolution*, who believe that "ethical change is possible…. clear expectations and consequences designed into the work place can make a profound difference in people's behavior, including their ethical behavior. Moral leadership, discussion of ethical dilemmas…training sessions, statements of corporate values…all can make a most significant difference" (pp 2, 3).

Why is education about ethics and corporate citizenship important?

Perhaps a class incorporating ethics can help provide an "antidote" to the modern business trends of mergers, layoffs, outsourcing, and globalization that alienate individuals from the human implications of corporate decisions and systems. Modern management and professional practices can objectify human beings, as is charged by critics who have implicated the accounting profession for its role in the Holocaust. According to Dr. Ken McPhail (1998), this charge against accountants is "primarily related to the technical, mathematical nature of accounting and its ability to dehumanize individuals." McPhail argues that "emotion should be introduced into accounting education and in particular emotional commitment to other individuals should be encouraged" (p. 279).

Further, McPhail suggests that requiring a business ethics course might "rehumanize" accountancy, engendering a "sense of empathy for and moral commitment" towards others (pp. 280, 282). A recent study of accounting students exposed to the AICPA Code of Conduct in an auditing course, indicated that "exposure to the code not only influenced students' ethical development, but also improves their ability to select the ethical course of action in resolving an ethical dilemma" (Green & Weber, p. 786).

I have expanded my interpretation of teaching business ethics to include teaching about corporate social responsibility or "corporate citizenship." I believe that this topic is often more accessible than "ethics" to business students. Later, as students begin to expect more out of business organizations (to serve as positive forces for good), they can then expect more out of the employees and managers in that organization—and, hopefully, more out of themselves as professionals.

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Why a writing course?

Our university (UCSB) does not have a business school. Although we have a nationally recognized accounting program, our students can only minor in accounting. Their degree is in Business Economics, and most of their required classes are highly theoretical. No course in business ethics or organizational behavior is offered for these students.

The business communication courses that we offer --"Writing for Economics" and "Writing for Accounting" are required for the Business Economics degree. Our writing courses are typically interdisciplinary and stress critical thinking, and all include oral communication as well as a variety of written genres. Because students must summarize and analyze articles, I have supplied articles about corporate citizenship and professional ethics. Students must work on a collaborative report or proposal that requires research using both primary and secondary sources. This project can be focused on corporate citizenship and professional ethics. In short, our business communication courses lend themselves to these topics because some text is needed anyway for critical thinking, research, writing, and oral communication tasks.

Because UCSB's writing teachers teach in specific disciplines (mine is business and engineering), they are probably as "equipped" as any business economics teacher who decides to incorporate ethics and social responsibility into his/her course. In fact, because so many business teachers have no training in business ethics and often are uncomfortable with more interactive discussion-based courses, many writing teachers might be even better suited to teach this material; see assertions by Krohn (1985) and by Golen, Powers & Titkemeyer (1985).

If a writing teacher is willing to commit to such a focus, I believe that the following course assignments and suggested readings should be enough for a strong start. Furthermore, numerous members of our professional society—the Association for Business Communication—have written articles suggesting both the validity and possible methods for incorporating ethics into composition courses. See the *Journal of Business Communication* special issues, with editors P.V. Lewis(1990) and S. Ralston (1997), and the online bibliography compiled by Dr. Linda Brown (1994).

I believe that raising student awareness of potential issues and examining guidelines for making ethical decisions is a service to students, and to the business community. Instead of asking students to enroll in a quarter-long business ethics course, a business communication course provides an excellent way to integrate ethics into the curriculum without alienating students (see Joanne B. Cuilla,1985, who believes that many business students consider ethics to be a useless abstract area of philosophy and/or an obstacle to free competition). Indeed, a number of scholars argue that ethics integrated into the business curriculum is more effective than offering a one-time, standalone course.

Having to research corporate ethics and professional ethical decisions helps students to prepare for their futures, and to appreciate what some exemplary organizations and individuals are doing.

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Typically our students are amazed that business can be both "green" *and* profitable; too often, our students have already resigned themselves to either making money *or* doing good! (These impressions, unfortunately, are similar to those noted in the 1985 *JBC* article, "How to Teach Ethics in a Basic Business Communications Class," by Golen, Powers & Titkemeyer).

Finally, by integrating the study of business ethics and corporate social responsibility into our curriculum, we teach students the role that ethical corporate and professional communication can play in business success. Indeed, attention to corporate reputation requires attention to the importance of words (Argenti & Forman, 2002, ch. 4). Without strong credos, developed and presented by an articulate leader, improvement of a company's culture and role in society remains an unrealistic quest (Goldberg, 1997).

Sample Assignments and Sources

A variety of assignments can work to assist students in their exploration of professional ethics and corporate social responsibility. I will identify my learning objectives, describe three assignments, and list possible sources teachers can use or adapt for classroom use.

Learning objectives
Specific cognitive objectives for students include the following:

1. Become familiar with ethical issues that they will likely encounter in their professional lives and the ways in which they might apply ethical principles to their professional lives
2. Know what resources are available, or *should be available*, to them—especially from their professional organizations and employer when they confront ethical dilemmas
3. Demonstrate written and oral competency in clearly explaining ethical concerns, identifying possible options in resolving these concerns, and determining a resolution to ethical problems

Further non-cognitive objectives include increased student confidence that they will be capable of both (1) recognizing ethical issues and making ethical decisions, and (2) retaining their personal and professional integrity while serving various stakeholders.

Assignments
The first assignment is to summarize an article in writing and in a 5-minute informal oral presentation to a group of fellow students. Sometimes I provide a list of abstracts to articles or book chapters about corporate and professional ethical codes, outstanding corporations that are committed to social and environmental causes, ethical challenges faced by employees, etc. Each student then selects one article, reads the entire article, summarizes it and reports on it to other students.

An alternative I've used provided lists of *Fortune's* "100 Best Companies to Work For" and *Business Ethics'* "Best Corporate Citizens." I have students select one company from each list

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and examine each company's website, with the intent of summarizing attributes that mark each company as "a good place to work." Besides the written summary/comparison, each student reports his/her findings to a small group of fellow students.

This first assignment allows students to become familiar with several exemplary businesses, and to begin sorting out what attributes they would like to see in the future organization they create or work for. As a class, we begin to identify positive actions, while practicing research, writing, and oral presenting skills.

The second assignment is collaborative, with the students in teams of four or five, working on a "scenario" that I've created. Often that scenario asks the students to serve as consultants to a client who wants to set up an ethics program and an ethical corporate culture. These consultants must review articles on corporate ethics programs, and determine what are the key elements in a successful program. That is, they report descriptively about what persons and organizations do, and then interpret and recommend normatively what people and organizations should do (See Reinsch, 1997, p. 224).

In recent years, with pre-professional students in our "Writing for Accounting" and our "Writing for Engineering" classes, I have used a short case with an ethical decision; this gives me an opportunity to discuss corporate and professional codes of conduct, and how these might be useful to guide one's ethical decision. Several years ago I developed a case about software piracy and had students conduct surveys of other students' software usage and knowledge about software licensing. The student teams had to create an educational pamphlet and training plan for their client's employees to learn about the ethical and legal problems of stealing software.

With this second assignment I will usually supply four or five articles to "jumpstart" their research. Within two or three weeks the students need to provide their client with both a memo report (given to me to grade) and an oral report (given to our class).
This assignment requires research and collaborative efforts as the team synthesizes the research findings and develops recommendations for their client. The memo reports are often three to five pages long, with several attachments. It takes additional effort for students to refine their report for a collaborative ten to fifteen minute oral report.

The final assignment is also collaborative and results in both a sustained research report, *or* business plan, and a formal oral presentation. This project takes much of the quarter (at least five or six weeks) and results in a document of 25-40 pages. As teams of four or five members, the students will collaboratively select their topics, determine if they will create a business plan or report on their research, and then write and edit the written document. They also will prepare and deliver a collaborative oral presentation.

For the reports in past years students have researched the ethical challenges of technology, merits of social investments, dilemmas faced by "whistleblowers," and the test of workplace ethics and corporate communication in the Challenger launch decision.

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If the students decide to write a business plan, I challenge them to establish a "green business" or a socially responsible business. For example, one student team proposed a company called "Ecolibrium" that served as both a consultant and purchasing source for other companies trying to purchase environmentally-sensitive products or behave in a more environmentally-friendly manner. Another company was called "Higher Motives: Quality Clothes with Moral Foundations," and promised products made without sweatshop labor and with only organically-grown fabric. Although these businesses may be highly idealistic, they are useful efforts for students to apply what they have learned from the earlier assignments and readings. Furthermore, according to *Entrepreneur* magazine, even smaller businesses want to demonstrate good corporate citizenship (see Blanchard, 1998, and Stodder, 1998).

Sources: Readings, Websites, Teacher Training

When I began integrating issues of ethics and corporate social responsibility in my writing classes, I was intrigued with the promise of a particular *Harvard Business Review* article by Michael Porter and Claas van der Linde(1995), "Green and Competitive: Ending the Stalemate." The environment's well-being is a defining societal and business challenge. Most business students see only a distinct polarization of choices: pro-business OR pro-environment. In an effort to explore this important topic and the possibility of compromise (a market-based environmentalism), I introduced a theme of "business and the environment" in my business communication courses. The highly respected *Harvard Business Review* was showing business students a different expectation for business!

Soon after this, The Body Shop CEO, Anita Roddick, was a guest speaker at UCSB. She described the corporate citizenship her company practices, and I was impressed enough to research more about her company and her CERES affiliates (like Ben and Jerry's and Patagonia). I discovered an excellent book that provided numerous models of corporate citizenship from financially successful firms, *Companies with a Conscience* (Scott & Rothman, 1992). A film, developed by the Online Business Ethics Certificate Program, that focuses on the stellar corporate citizenship of New Belgium Brewing Company (2002) became another inspiration for both teachers and students.

Because I was also teaching engineering students, I encountered the tragic story of the Challenger launch decision and engineer Roger Boisjoly's role in it. Because Boisjoly believes strongly that students can learn from the ethical mistakes in the past, he has developed materials (like his website with original documents accessible) to help others see what communication surrounded—and might have prevented-- this disaster. Both the websites of the Online Ethics Center (2003) and the Association for Teachers of Technical Writing (2000) provide excellent case materials. I also recommend some specific articles (Winsor 1988; Elliot 1990) and a book chapter (Tufte, 1997), along with the film *GroupThink (1991)*, for teachers who are willing to incorporate one case report into their business communication course. The Winsor, Elliot, and Tufte sources focus specifically on communication weaknesses that contributed to the Challenger disaster.

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As my research expanded from corporate social responsibility to professional ethics, I was able to tap ABC's website and the excellent annotated bibliography gathered by Dr. Linda Ginter Brown (1994), "Teaching Ethics in Business Communication courses." This source, as well as the two 1990 and 1997 special issues from the *Journal of Business Communication*, gave me the professional "endorsement" to continue integrating ethics and corporate citizenship into all of my professional writing courses.
Another source that has been of particular value is the online *Business Ethics* journal. And from that, I learned of the distance-learning course in Business Ethics offered by Dr. O.C. Ferrell and the College of Business at Colorado State University. I took that course in fall of 2002, long after I'd begun to research on my own about corporate citizenship and business ethics. The course materials (including Ferrell's 2002 textbook, *Business Ethics*) were excellent, and so were my colleagues and teacher. Many of the course participants were employed as corporate ethics officers, and the online discussions were insightful and provided a unique education. We were able to work on a number of ethics cases, and discussed the then-new Sarbanes-Oxley Act.

So, my advice to other business communication teachers is to start small (one assignment, with four or five associated readings, or use of the film *GroupThink* with the communication articles associated with the Challenger case) and learn as you go. Ronald R. Sims' (2002) book, *Teaching Business Ethics for Effective Learning*, is a very helpful guide for teachers (see, especially, chapters 1 and 8). Also McDonald and Donleavy (1995) have an interesting article which, ultimately, suggests that teaching ethics can result in "achieving ethical awareness and sensitivity in students," IF the teacher is careful and aware of some obstacles. If you wish to continue expanding your knowledge and skills in teaching these topics, there are professional associations and training seminars that you can take. The Association for Practical and Professional Ethics provides both an annual conference and quarterly publications (please see http://www.indiana.edu/~appe/).

While I am encouraged at the growing number of articles linking business communication, ethics, and corporate social responsibility, there is still much for communication teachers and researchers to learn and to develop. I agree with ABC colleague Lamar Reinsch (1997, p. 222) who encourages us to borrow from other disciplines as we advance our research and course curriculum. As researchers, we need more specific evidence that time spent on these topics does transfer, eventually, to a student's professional behavior and organizational leadership.

What I know thus far has encouraged me to continue integrating topics of professional ethics and corporate citizenship into my business writing courses. I have asked students to comment about these topics on their anonymous course evaluations. So far, I have never received a complaint, but I have sometimes received thanks and compliments for introducing these. More positively, I have seen how inspired many of students became when learning about "good companies." The students incorporated many aspects of good corporate citizenship in their business plans and consultant reports-- *and* in their career plans. This raising of student expectations seems good to me.

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For now, I my intentions are to continue educating myself on these topics and to design an assessment tool to more accurately evaluate the value of this approach. Until I get more measurable data, I share Challenger engineer Roger Boisjoly's hope that study of ethical challenges and organizational decisions can create some good so that students become "aware of what to expect when you commence your careers" (quoted in Elliot,1990).

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A Hermeneutic Rubric for Teaching Ethical Communication via "Realworld" Proposal Writing

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Abstract

Ethical concerns related to persuasion and the dimensions of professional credibility can be explored and developed in proposal writing assignments when we encourage students to think beyond short-term proposal objectives. To balance the usually overwhelming focus on persuasion that characterizes traditional approaches to teaching proposal writing, students can be introduced to Gadamer's notion of the "fusion of horizons." This hermeneutic rubric supports development of ethical awareness by stressing careful interpretation and pragmatic reasoning. By drawing attention to the strengthened relationships and the more satisfactory long-term outcomes that result from ethically constructed proposals, we can enable students to more clearly see the benefits of ethical communication.

Introduction and rationale

Context
I direct a large business communication program housed in a school of management, and in addition, I teach business and organizational communication. Along with my teaching team, I've struggled with ways to integrate writing ethics and ethical communication into our curriculum. As part of that effort, proposal assignments are integrated into all of our courses, because the ability to write effective proposals is critical to business students' future career success, and because proposals almost always have ethical dimensions.

As many business communication teachers are aware, "real world" proposal writing assignments compel students to step outside the classroom and to interact with and get feedback from audiences who actually have power and authority to address the problems and solutions that students present to them. Although students regularly receive feedback from business communication and writing instructors, and also from their peers, feedback from off-campus management professionals compels high respect, and conveys to students that they are engaged in realistic situations. For example, a student may identify and actually resolve a problem for a local business, in a club or sports organization, or in his or her local town, and students who hold full- or part-time jobs can promptly identify problems in their work organization.

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Once a need or problem has been identified, I ask my students to locate the person or persons holding the position, power, and resources to help them develop and implement a proposal, and then to work with that party throughout. The external audience can help students shape proposals, and students will directly experience the interactive nature of proposal writing.

Differing needs and values and ethical quandaries are likely to arise between readers and writers in these interactions, however. For example, I recall one student who worked closely with a local authority to get a housing ordinance changed, but in the process, suppressed discovery of information that would reveal a disadvantage to other parties. This deception could have been harmful to the reader, had he not noticed it and brought it to the student's attention. In similar cases, students have told me that they just thought they needed to argue for their solution and leave out what was not helpful. Earnestly task-oriented, they did not view suppression as professionally unethical, and they did not demonstrate reflection on the range of consequences related to their proposal writing action, beyond succeeding or failing with the specific proposal. Based on these and other experiences with students, I decided that it's important to introduce ethics in a more direct way.

Please note that I'm not belittling my students; I like them, and I respect their efforts to learn. Not evil or mean-spirited, many simply haven't yet developed the awareness or gained the experience to perceive and analyze complex, ethical dimensions of arguments. They're struggling to write, and to learn to construct arguments, yet at the same time may not have clearly articulated their own values, or imagined how their values would apply to solving professional dilemmas. The result is that they may work in an ethical fog, discarding what is more difficult, aiming for short-term objectives, and ignoring the "relational" consequences of proposed solutions. How many will fail in their writing tasks on the job, after they graduate? Too many, I'm afraid. But no amount of teaching based on standard proposal writing formulas will fix a problem that is rooted in undeveloped ethical awareness – or in the "I-centered" youthful behavior that many undergraduates have not yet left behind. Fortunately, we can help them develop by assigning external proposal writing projects in which ethical concerns are given focused attention, and by explicitly integrating ethical analysis and reasoning into our teaching of proposal writing.

Why use proposal writing to teach ethical communication?
First, more than other kinds of business report writing, proposal writing lends itself to highly persuasive argumentation, with all the potentially conflicted consequences that entails. Second, since proposals are among the most important and widely used special reports in the business environment (Beck, 1999), students need to know how to write them effectively. Teaching ethical communication via proposal writing clearly allows us to accomplish more than one major objective at once, but in addition, because proposal writing requires that students learn to develop problem-solving skills, analyze data, and create persuasive strategies, we can simultaneously teach critical thinking and writing skills. Perhaps most importantly, proposal writers can use highly persuasive arguments to deceive as well as enlighten, with potentially damaging outcomes for the writers and their organizations. Exploring the ethical dimensions of

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proposal writing becomes a natural and pragmatic requirement of the genre, rather than an imposed moral act.

Ethical intervention via proposal writing is tricky, however. One can bring ethics into the classroom half-heartedly, fearfully, or one can be overly directive, preachy. Balance is hard to achieve. In addition, there is not enough scholarly research to support our teaching efforts. In fact, there are strikingly few books on proposal writing in our field, given the subject's importance to professionals in industry.

Ethical dimensions of proposal writing: Research in the field

Of the half dozen or so proposal writing books to which I refer most often (e.g., Tepper, 1989; Sant, 1992; Freed, Freed & Romano, 1995; Holtz, 1998; Weiss, 1999; Johnson-Sheehan, 2002), none investigate the ethical dimensions of proposal writing. I suspect this is so because most authors of trade books assume that management and communication professionals will act honestly, producing reliable, fair, and balanced proposals: the audiences for their books have typically consisted of business professionals writing on the job, not college students. Although the more comprehensive business communication textbooks have significantly stepped up their coverage of proposal writing in just the past three years (e.g., Bovée, Thill & Schatzman, 2003; Guffy, 2001; Lehman & Dufrene, 2002; Locker, 2000; Penrose, Rasberry & Myers, 2004), most still treat proposal writing cursorily. That is, they offer only brief explanations and proportionally short coverage of proposal reports. For example, Bovée et. al. (2003) devote only 22 pages in a 600 page text to proposal writing, and those pages are scattered throughout various chapters, rather than developed contiguously.

Basically, proposal writing presents a challenge to textbook authors because there is scant research on which to base their texts. Since proposal writing generally is still largely unexplored research territory, it should not be surprising that ethical dimensions of proposal writing have not been explored for their value to pedagogy in business communication. Prompted by Enron and similar debacles, scholars and instructors are scurrying to research ethical communication in greater depth, but our field is still new and developing this body of knowledge will take time. Unfortunately, limited research on proposal writing, and on proposal writing ethics is not the only problem business communication teachers and scholars face.

Additional concerns

For at least two decades, in many US business schools the role of virtue or ethical behavior for business management professionals has taken a clear back seat to technical knowledge development, especially in accounting, finance, and marketing. Students in my institution understand that they are supposed to learn about their majors and master the technical knowledge and skills, but they tell me that they understand from professors that they are supposed to rely on their own values when it comes to action. And in a recent online discussion about business ethics, that's the sentiment that several of my colleagues promoted. I am worried, however: I

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argue that ethical communication requires examined personal values, professional knowledge, maturity, and solid writing and speaking skills, not all of which my students have fully mastered.

In regular feedback sessions, my management colleagues have identified effective argument as a critical writing skill for students to develop, and in response we have stepped up our teaching of argument, with positive results. But even when students are competent writers, I worry that their lack of practice in grappling with ethical issues in writing will become visible and problematic when they are called on to transmit expert knowledge to clients -- to Jane Q. Public. As we know, professional "oversell" can lead to great mistrust by the public for management professionals. While we can't just give our students a moral code, even if to do so was ethical, we can minimize the incidence of unexamined or unethical persuasive strategies. We can teach students to think deeply about purposes, to analyze and interpret their audience's needs carefully, and to consider the importance of the long-term relationships and the potentially damaging long-term outcomes embedded in the proposal situation. To accomplish this teaching objective, however, we need to go beyond traditional teaching of proposal formats and arguments.

How proposal writing creates opportunities for teaching ethical communication

I've written before about using hermeneutic thought as a pedagogical tool (LaDuc, 1991; 1994), in articles that focused on ethical sales proposal writing, and on proposal writing as leadership and social action. In the next part I hope to share with you how proposal writing can be used to teach ethical communication in a way that is (hopefully) not preachy, but rather integrated into the processes of proposal writing in a natural way. To see how, when and where we can bring ethical communication into our teaching of proposal writing, let's first review some salient information that can make it easier to see points in the proposal process where it makes sense to bring in ethical communication.

First, a proposal is a kind of communication in which readers are persuaded to act in a particular way in response to a carefully identified and analyzed need or problem. Proposals may be formal or informal; written or oral; solicited or unsolicited; internal or external; fund-seeking, need-justifying, or problem-solving; and business focused or aimed at bringing about social action. Despite these differing functions, types, and styles, all proposals are characterized by their persuasive intent – and business proposals are characterized by the use of more or less standard proposal arguments. Most business proposals put forth two primary sets of arguments and sub-arguments: those that identify and explore the extent of a problem or need, and those that identify and defend a solution or course of action. At several points in the writing process, during the development of certain arguments, ethical communication can emerge as a key element or potential concern.

Listed below are the major "standard" proposal arguments that business writers try to cover in their proposals, listed in two categories (problem set; solution set).

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Arguments that present and develop the problem or need

1. Describing the problem or need and the physical site
2. Describing the effects on, and collecting reports from the affected population (survey).
3. Uncovering the roots of the problem: thoroughly analyzing and identifying contributing causes.
4. Discussing the undesirable consequences that a problem has generated, or will continue to generate if not resolved.
5. Specifying the unethical consequences, if any, of not addressing a problem or need.
6. Determining audience awareness of the extent of a problem or need.

Arguments that present and develop and defend the solution or course of action proposed

1. Discussing the beneficial consequences of implementing the proposed solution.
2. Reviewing any consequences that will be eliminated if the proposed solution is adopted.
3. Articulating the ethical basis or appeal, if any, of the solution.
4. Stating the commitment, expected gain, and credentials of the proposal writers.
5. Anticipating and answering objections that readers may pose.
6. Demonstrating the feasibility of the solution: costs, time, personnel, equipment, implementation, tradeoffs, and so forth.
7. Offering reasons why the proposal improves on prior proposals. What obstacles existed in the past, but have now been eliminated? What new circumstances have arisen that make a proposal more feasible now than in the past? What new knowledge or technologies are now available?
8. Establishing the superiority of the proposed solution or course of action. How is this proposal better than the competing ones?

After identifying a problem or need, writers are charged with investigating all the aspects of the problem, including all possible causes (e.g., historical, precipitating, and root or perpetuating causes). Once it's clear which parties have the authority to implement a solution, and the extent of their awareness of the problem or need, writers should thoroughly analyze their audience and their audience's needs. In similar fashion, writers must discover and develop solution elements of a proposal, strive to articulate the benefits for the audience of acting promptly in ways outlined by the writers, and show how the proposed solution or course of action is feasible for the reader to implement.

It's important to note that at each stage in the development of proposal arguments, writers can shape the proposal positively or negatively -- for disclosure and inclusion, or for concealment and exclusion. For example, designing and conducting a survey (steps related to preliminary argument development) are phases of research that can be shaped in a variety of ways according to the prejudices of the designers. Causal analysis, so critical for solution development (a solution to be effective must eliminate the root causes) may be thorough, or the writers may truncate, or even elide it. Since experts are often called in to identify causes, this is a point at

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which an expert could easily deceive the reader. Last but not least, the feasibility section of a proposal can be poorly developed or it can offer false facts. It's in the feasibility section that writers demonstrate that a product or service will truly fill a need, and that the proposed solution can in fact be implemented, so misrepresentation in this part of a proposal can lead to serious, negative consequences over the long term, even if a writer's poorly communicated or unethical strategy works in the short term.

Hermeneutic theory applied to proposal writing

It is at just such critical points in the proposal writing process that philosophical hermeneutics can serve as a pedagogical counterbalance to traditional, rhetoric-based teaching of proposal writing. Before we go too far, however, I need to be clear that I'm informed by a hermeneutics of tradition found chiefly in the work of Hans-George Gadamer, and not a "hermeneutics of suspicion" as informed by Nietzsche, Derrida and Marxist thought (Crucius, 1991). Crucius argued that one of our prime concerns as teachers is to understand interpretation itself, as the aim of philosophical hermeneutics. I chose traditional Gadamerian philosophical hermeneutics as my counterbalance, because it is directed in a wide sense toward a theory of interpretation as the uncovering of insights, in which the parties involved can achieve a "fusion of horizons" (Gadamer, 1984, pp. 395-396). The purpose and power of a hermeneutical approach is "to see what is questionable" (Gadamer, 1976, p. 13) and to hold at bay the urge to invoke transcendent standards or preconceived solutions. The latter concept provides the rationale for using hermeneutic theory: to urge students to analyze more deeply, and to carefully examine their aims and products, so that a true fusion of mutual needs can be brought about in their proposed solutions—rather than allow them to drive unguided toward a pre-determined and largely unexamined end.

While originally intended for analysis of philosophical and theological texts, Gadamer's notion of the fusion of horizons is also useful for exploring models of argument, as a foil against the frequently incompatible decision to persuade at all costs. Instead, the fusion of horizons concept shifts the writer's focus to the process of coming to mutual agreement in preparation for aligned action. That is, it is a writing rubric that promotes reflection – an approach that stands against closure tendencies, which can force an end to the process before full reflection has taken place. Like rhetoric, a hermeneutic approach involves mediation processes between writers' and readers' perspectives and aims, but unlike traditional argument, the process of proposing is not simply and primarily one-way. Interpretation continues until the writer and reader understand the needs and capabilities of each other, perceiving that they are united by a bond or relationship, and thinking with the other (Gadamer, 1984, p. 145). I find that explaining the importance of interpretation and balance is a natural way to foreground the ethical dimensions of the proposal writing process, and to highlight the connections between ethical communication and professional credibility.

In practice, when I now teach argument I also introduce my students to the hermeneutic concept. As they work their way through the proposal writing process, but before they zoom in on a

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solution, I ask them to analyze and interpret audience needs, their purposes, and the problem context very thoroughly, while keeping in mind that they are engaged in a professional trust relationship with the readers. I've noticed that bringing hermeneutics in when writers first interview their readers usually results in richer, two-way communication: students listen better, and they ask broader and more probing questions. Similarly, when they draft their solution-recommendation sections, I ask them to be careful with the feasibility section and with their benefits claims, to verify data with their readers, and to be honest in writing their biographical sketches. The goal is to bring them to understand that an honest, accurate, limited, but persuasive proposal is better than a hedging, inaccurate, overblown, persuasive proposal.

A quick glimpse at a more hermeneutically informed proposal argument
For example, a traditional proposal might use the following language: "The primary benefit of this medical management system is that it will handle all of your accounts receivable, accounts payable, and general ledger needs, now and into the future. If you act quickly we can have you up and running by August." What the writers are leaving out in this benefits sub-argument is that the reporting functions are still under development and will likely not meet the company's needs, and the modules are not yet well integrated. An ethically informed proposal, after reflecting on the mutual needs of both parties and the potential for a long-term positive relationship, would instead point out: "The accounting packages we're recommending are very powerful, and they can perform all of the functions that you specified and more, but the reporting and linking modules are still under development. We expect to have them completed by January, and we'll provide you with help and support, but you could experience some limitations between now and then." Certainly the honesty might cost the writers an immediate sale, but the client also might buy, and in addition add more packages later, forging a long-term relationship based on professional trust.

Although this example reflects a traditional sales proposal situation, I've encountered many similarly conflict-laden examples in unsolicited and civic action proposals that I've assigned students to write. What I've discovered is that my students often think they must make the immediate "sale," or gain immediate acceptance at all costs, and so they argue very persuasively, but not always honestly – and they tell me that's what they thought was expected of them. When I encourage them to consider both parties' best interests, as well as the consequences of their writing strategies, their proposals become more professional in tone and content. This could be a short term victory on my part, of course. But I'm certainly hoping that they'll get the point: there's more at stake than just getting the strongest arguments down on paper.

Conclusion

When the hermeneutic rubric for proposal writing introduced here works well, student writers understand that it's not enough for their proposal process to be clear and persuasive. They also understand that both the process and the resulting proposal should be "exempt from the suspicion of falsehood" (Gadamer, 1984, p. 246). That is, not only should the proposal be a good, sound,

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well-argued communication, but it should add to their personal and professional credibility. It should hold up over time; it should not get them or their readers in ethical, interpersonal or legal trouble in the future; it should help them build and maintain solid business relationships.

Today's organizations expect managers not only to communicate effectively and to contribute knowledge, but also to analyze and conceive sound ideas; they expect intelligence and personal energy, and most expect ethical behavior. As Reave (2002) points out, few employees will be fortunate enough to receive on-the-job training in proposal writing -- and any boilerplate files they might be lucky enough to have on hand will hardly help them understand the writing complexities or the ethical and political consequences of the process. Clearly, we can't take responsibility for company negligence, nor for students' unethical or unwise future decisions. We can, however, call attention in our classrooms to the importance of ethical communication, and we can provide students with conceptual tools to handle some of the more difficult proposal writing tasks they'll face in the future. Taking a hermeneutic approach toward teaching proposal writing allows us to address ethical concerns embedded in proposal situations from a pragmatic rather than moralistic standpoint. That's a singularly important benefit.

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The Impact of Social Style on Student Peer Evaluation Ratings in Group Projects

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Many instructors at all levels of education use collaborative learning experiences to enrich student performance and encourage active participation. In higher education, the use of group projects serves many needs, from building students' teamwork skills to reducing instructors' grading loads. Additionally, a quick glance at job advertisements reveals that employers value effective teamwork skills. Regardless of the motivations (or outcomes), the use of group projects continues to be a reoccurring theme in many academic disciplines of higher education. This trend is especially true in business and managerial communication courses. Most business communication textbooks conclude with a unit on business report writing and presenting. Many instructors use projects to address collaborative skills by assigning group research projects that require written reports and a group presentation to the class.

The conundrum for many instructors is how to incorporate peer evaluation in the grading process. A student's teammates are obviously more aware of an individual student's participation and contribution in a group project than the instructor. However, several concerns arise, the most critical of which is the validity and reliability of students' peer evaluations. For example, one study (Johnson & Smith, 1997) identified rating bias based on gender and minority status. Another study suggests that students may have negative attitudes about assessing group members for grades and may conspire to give each other good scores (Greenan, Humphreys, & McIlveen, 1997). Our current study seeks to determine whether personalities, in terms of perceived social style, were a contributing factor to students' peer evaluation ratings of group projects.

Theoretical framework and review of literature

The conceptual framework of this study embodies two theories: social style and perceived similarity. Among the competing personality style preference theories (e.g. Myers-Briggs and DISC), we chose Social Style Theory for our study because it is often used in communications skill training to teach the concepts of building interpersonal rapport and incorporating style flexibility (Bolton & Bolton, 1996).

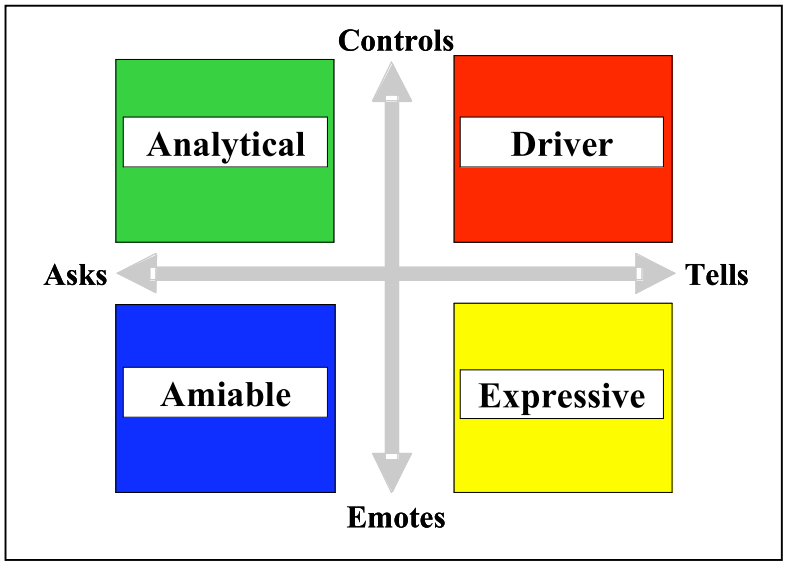
Social Style Theory

Dr. David Merrill, an industrial psychologist, developed the Social Style Model nearly 40 years ago (Tracom, 1991). Social Style is defined as a particular pattern of actions that others can observe and agree upon for describing a person's behavior. The theory is based upon the analysis of adjective checklists completed by three to five acquaintances of the individual being assessed. Through factor analysis, Merrill identified two reliable scales, which he designated as

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assertiveness and responsiveness. Assertiveness is defined as the effort a person makes to influence the thinking and actions of others. It is a measure of whether a person appears to ask or tell. Responsiveness, on the other hand, refers to the extent to which a person reacts to influence or stimulation with a display of feelings – whether a person appears to control or express his or her emotions. As Figure 1 indicates, the two dimensions of assertive and responsive behavior can be combined, resulting in four "styles" of observable behavior.

Figure 1
Social Styles Model



If your personal style is less responsive and more assertive, you are a Driver. Drivers tend to be independent, results oriented, candid, and pragmatic; however, they can also be poor collaborators, impersonal, abrasive, and shortsighted. If you are more responsive and more assertive, you are Expressive. Strengths include being articulate, fast-paced, visionary, and fun loving; however, they can also be poor listeners, impatient, impractical, and distracting. People who are more responsive and less assertive are Amiable. This social style is often diplomatic, dependable, supportive, and people-oriented; yet they can also become conflict avoiders, dependent, permissive, and inattentive to task. Finally, those who are less responsive and less assertive are Analytical. This type is often prudent, painstaking, task-oriented, and systematic; but they can also be indecisive, nitpicky, impersonal, and bureaucratic.

Because social style describes how a consensus of people perceive the way another person behaves in interpersonal situations and how they are impacted by that individual's behavior, the theory has been used in a variety of skill training programs related to communication, sales, and team dynamics (Bolton & Bolton, 1996). However, little research has addressed how perceived personality style affects intra-group peer evaluation. A study by Kobes and Lichtenberg (1997)

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tested whether homogenous Myers-Briggs styles affected the "quality of dyadic communication (understanding), and subsequently, on relationship satisfaction" (p. 1). They found no differences among personality styles.

Theory of Perceived Similarity

Perceived similarity theory embodies both conceptual definitions and concrete operational constructs. As a theory of social psychology, perceived similarity can be defined in terms of attitudes of social issues and operationalized when "perceiving others to have 75 percent or more similar answers on a social attitudes questionnaire" (Bolton Institute of Psychology, 2002). In short, perceived similarity reflects the adage that we like those most who are most like us.

Several research studies have tested the theory of perceived similarity. Rofe and Lewin (1988) addressed perceived similarity with respect to the levels of anxiety people reported. The study found that when under stress, people prefer the company of those who are perceived to be similar to themselves. Duck and Allison (1978) conducted a similar study and found that subjects preferred to spend time with people who construed things similarly. They used the California Personality Inventory to compare friendship relationships and personality style. Findings indicated that friends were significantly more similar to each other than non-friend pairs; however, subjects often overestimated the actual comparisons of similarity. Jagers & Mock (1995) also found a significant correlation between perceived similarity and relationships. Ensher and Murphy (1997) found that "liking satisfaction and contact with mentors were higher when protégés perceived themselves more similar to their mentors" (p. 460).

With regard to student peer evaluation, Orpen (1994) assessed students' perceived similarity using "a three-item scale, which required the students to indicate the extent to which each assessed student or peer was similar to themselves" (p. 5). He found that students who perceived themselves similarly are more successful at rating each other's future final examination performance. However, Keyton and Springston (1990) concluded that students' perceptions of cohesiveness did not consistently support the theory of perceived similarity.

The idea that others who are perceived as similar to ourselves are "attractive" to us is based on two theories: cognitive consistency and reinforcement theory. Cognitive consistency assumes that those who are similar will consistently agree with us, whereas those who are different will be inconsistent or disagree; thus, disagreeable relationships are avoided. Reinforcement theory suggests that attitude similarity is rewarding in that it confirms our views of the world and provides consensual validation. Attitude dissimilarity is "punishing" in that it undermines our beliefs. Thus, we dislike people with attitudes that are dissimilar to ours. (Duck & Allison, 1978)

These theories are supported by Rosenbaum's (1987) repulsion hypothesis that focused on interpersonal attraction ratings and perceived similarity. Using photographs of hundreds of faces, Rosenbaum's subjects perceived those photographs that were similar to the subjects to be more attractive than those photos they perceived as dissimilar. Further, Clore and Baldridge (1970)

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reported that both similarity and dissimilarity are important. Dissimilar people are filtered out and friends are selected based on perceived similarity. Drigotas (1995) also studied similarity and dissimilarity and supported Rosenbaum's repulsion hypothesis: people have a tendency to include similar others and reject dissimilar others.

These findings have significant implications for social comparison theory. First, we need confirmation of our own view of the world and our view of self. Secondly, comparison of self against others helps us to evaluate ourselves. Finally, perceived similarity is used for judgment and improvement of self, friendship selection, and information about our emotions. Social Exchange Theory (Wicker & Bushweiler, 1970) focuses on interactions with people. We choose to work with people when "high rewards" can be achieved and avoid those people who are dissimilar because the costs outweigh the rewards.

Combining the theories of social style and perceived similarity, we sought to determine if students with the same social style would perceive themselves to be more similar than other students and thus rank each other more favorably on their group peer evaluations. Conversely, students with opposite social styles (diagonals on the model) would rank each other less favorably because their preferred behaviors of social interaction would conflict. For example, students who are Analytical (less assertive and less responsive) would not perceive themselves to be similar to students who are Expressive (more assertive and more responsive). Thus, our hypothesis is as follows: *on intra-group peer evaluations for a group project, students will score team members with the same social style higher than they score team members with the opposite social style.*

Methods

Subjects
Participants in the study included 196 sophomores and juniors from two different undergraduate universities in the southeast. The gender mix was 63% female and 37% male. With regard to race, 60% were African-American, 37% Caucasian, and the remaining 3% evenly divided between Latino and Asian. All students were enrolled in a managerial communications class and participated in a mandatory team project that resulted in a report and oral presentation. Teams were made up of four or five students each.

Procedures
Teams were formed at the beginning of the semester by using a stratified random method based on grade point average (GPA) and gender. Assignments were then manually adjusted to ensure diversity based on ethnicity and major. Adjustments were also made to ensure each team had a representation of the requisite skills sets (research, writing, and computer skills) based on self-rated surveys.

The first half of the semester, students worked collaboratively in their teams on a variety of managerial communication competencies, including writing clearly, concisely, and correctly,

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building interpersonal rapport, working in teams, and presenting persuasively. The project was introduced at midterm and was designed to be a capstone experience, requiring the students to integrate and apply the skills they had studied the first half of the semester. The project, in the form of a business simulation, required each team to collect data, reach consensus on a recommendation to management, prepare a report, and make an oral presentation. Each team member completed a social styles assessment of other team members at the conclusion of the project. Peer evaluations, as part of the grading process, were also completed at the conclusion of the project after the oral presentations.

Measures

Each participant's social style preference was assessed using the Social Style Profile (SSP) instrument developed by Wilson Learning Corporation. The SSP has been used by Wilson Learning to introduce the social styles concept in a variety of workshops that teach interpersonal versatility (e.g., selling skills). Respondents are asked to rate an individual on 30 adjective descriptors (e.g., "takes charge") using a 7-point Likert scale ranging from low (1) to high (7). Wilson Learning provides a protocol for scoring the instrument to determine the degree of assertiveness and responsiveness based on mean scores and assigning an individual to one of the four social style quadrants (analytical, drive, expressive, or amiable) based on norms from a national database. The SSP has been found to be a valid and reliable measure of the social style dimensions (Wilson Learning Corporation, 1990; Leimbach, 1991).

Students scored the participation and contribution of each team member to the group project by using an intra-group evaluation form (Gueldenzoph & May, 2002). The form required the student to rate each team member, including self, on ten behaviors using a five-point scale for each behavior with ratings from 5 = strongly agree to 1 = strongly disagree, resulting in a maximum score of 50 points. Example behaviors from the peer evaluation form include (a) "attended every group meeting (both in and out of class)," (b) "did his or her homework; brought data to the group as agreed," and (c) "completed his or her fair share of the workload."

One issue noted in the intra-group peer evaluation literature is the tendency for students to "rate up" because they know their ratings influence the grades of fellow students (Greenan, Humprhreys, & McIlveen, 1997). Our experience with a pilot study, in which 40% of the peer evaluation ratings were perfect scores of 50, confirmed this tendency. To control for this rating inflation, we devised a method to assess the degree of "rating up." We asked the students to complete the evaluation in the traditional manner for grade points and to submit the evaluations prior to their team presentation. At the conclusion of the presentation, without prior announcement, we asked the students to complete a second evaluation that would not be used for grading, encouraging them to "tell it like is." The mean score for the "not for grade points" evaluation was 41.4 out of 50. The mean score for the evaluation used for grade points was 43.9, indicating a 6% inflation factor. A dependent t-test indicated a significant difference between the means ($t_{(.05,190)} = 10.9$, p - .000), so we used the "not for grades" peer evaluations in the analysis as more accurate indicators of the raters' perceptions.

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To analyze the resulting data, we constructed a table that captured each team member's peer evaluation rating of other team members and the respective social styles of the rater and each person being rated. Given the four social styles, there are 16 possible rating combinations of one style rating another (see Table 1). For the purposes of this research, we collapsed the data into three categories: like rating like (e.g. analytical rating analytical), adjacent rating adjacent (e.g., analytical rating driver), and opposite rating opposite (e.g., analytical rating expressive).

Table 1
Social Style Rating Combinations

Category 1 Like Rating Like	❑ Analytical rating Analytical ❑ Driver rating Driver ❑ Expressive rating Expressive ❑ Amiable rating Amiable
Category 2: Adjacent Rating Adjacent	❑ Analytical rating Driver ❑ Driver rating Analytical ❑ Analytical rating Amiable ❑ Amiable rating Analytical ❑ Driver rating Expressive ❑ Expressive rating Driver ❑ Expressive rating Amiable ❑ Amiable rating Expressive
Category 3: Opposite Rating Opposite	❑ Analytical rating Expressive ❑ Expressive rating Analytical ❑ Driver rating Amiable ❑ Amiable rating Driver

Results

Table 2 presents the means, standard deviations, and variances for the peer evaluation scores for the three rating categories. A one-way analysis of variance, with peer evaluation scores as the dependent variable and rating category as the factor, yielded a significant difference among the category means, $F_{(.05,2,707)} = 6.81$, $\underline{p} = .001$. Table 3 presents the analysis of variance summary.

A test of homogeneity of variances indicated equal variances could not be assumed (Levene's test, $F = 8.03$, $p = .000$). Therefore, Dunnett's T3 multiple comparison procedure for post hoc analysis was used (α .05). The post hoc analysis revealed the mean evaluation score for Category 1 (like rating like) to be significantly higher than both Category 2 (adjacent rating adjacent) and

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Category 3 (opposite rating opposite). There was no significant difference between the mean evaluation scores of Category 2 and Category 3.

Table 2
Mean Peer Evaluation Scores by Social Style Categories

Group	Mean	N	SD	Variance
Like Rating Like	42.94	231	7.11	50.51
Adjacent Rating Adjacent	41.11	307	8.06	65.04
Opposite Rating Opposite	39.98	172	9.76	95.26
Total	41.43	710	8.29	68.73

Table 3
Analysis of Variance Summary for Peer Evaluation Scores

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F Value	Sig.
Between Groups	920.825	2	460.41	6.81	0.001
Within Groups	47809.293	707	67.62		
Total	48730.118	709			

Discussion

The results indicate support for the hypothesis. As predicted by social style theory and the theory of perceived similarity, students rated team members with the same social style higher than they rated team members with different social styles. However, student ratings of team members with opposite social styles were not significantly different than ratings of those with adjacent styles.

Conclusions

Because grade points are involved, we should be concerned about the validity and reliability of intra-group peer evaluations in a classroom setting. As instructors, we want students to evaluate peer behaviors related to task and process in their team projects, not based on race, gender, personality, or other factors.

The findings of this study support the theories of perceived similarity and social comparison and suggest that rating bias based on a personality dimension, such as social style, can be a problem in student evaluations. In conjunction with other studies demonstrating rating bias based on gender and race, the study suggests that business communication instructors need to add two elements to their instructional design for team skills.

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The first is to include some background instruction on personality style preferences and the theory of perceived similarity. It is a psychological reality that "we like those most who are most like us." Yet, we know that our students will be participating in a diverse work force, often working in teams, and evaluating team members as part of their work process. They need to be aware of their propensity to allow personality preferences to influence their judgment of others.

The second instructional element is rater training. Research indicates that rater training can be effective in improving the accuracy of behavioral evaluations. (Woehr & Huffcutt, 1994). Teaching students about common rating errors such as "halo" and "leniency" should help reduce errors and improve our confidence in the rating process.

Peer evaluations for grade points are a mainstay of group projects in communication courses. It is a prudent strategy for all instructors to be sensitive to the issues of validity and reliability, to become familiar with the research related to rating bias, and to equip students with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to perform accurate evaluations of their team members' performance in group projects.

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Improving the Writing Skills of Business Majors: The Collective Responsibility of all Courses and Professors

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Abstract

Having had a variety of English courses in the public school system, and having passed Composition I and II as pre-requisites for Business Communications, most business students still are unable to produce well-written business correspondence. Sending them to the writing center is not a cure for all writing problems. Writing centers have a role to play but they should not be a dumping ground for professors who do not want to take the time to assist students with their writing. This paper makes a case for teaching writing in all business courses and explores strategies for making the business of improving students' writing the collective responsibility of all courses and professors.

Introduction

The National Commission on Writing in America's Schools and Colleges (2003) affirmed that "Writing today is not a frill for the few, but an essential skill for the many" (p. ii). In accepting the challenge to lead the Commission's implementation campaign, former Senator Bob Kerrey stated that our economic success and our social networks are all directly affected by our willingness to do the work necessary to acquire good writing skills. The Commission's report, *The Neglected "R",* notes that writing weaknesses of first-year college students cost the nation's campuses up to $1 billion annually; and business leaders still complain about the writing skills of new employees.

Flanegin and Rudd (2000) lamented that though communication is essential in all professions, too often it has been overlooked in business and management education in favor of more analytical course work in which communication competence is often ignored. This has led to a steady decline in the writing skills of business majors, and research is now showing that the writing skills of executives are also shockingly low. Grensing (1988) found that approximately two-thirds of college graduates were unable to write a simple letter.

Flanegin and Rudd (2000), of Robert Morris College, argued that communications courses alone cannot make college students good business communicators. Students need opportunities to develop and apply rhetorical skills in all business disciplines. This is very consistent with the

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view of the National Commission on Writing (2003) that "Writing is everybody's business" (p. i).

Importance of excellent writing to employability and promotability

Johns, et al. (1986) noted that a continuing problem facing businesses is the number of college graduates who are unprepared to write because their communication abilities are limited and they are largely unaware of the kinds of writing done in the workplace. Yet Barrie (1980) found that loan officers in his study considered writing to be extremely important to their jobs, and reported that writing comprised an estimated 20% of their work schedule, and was one of the factors used for promotions. All 80 participants in the study agreed that writing contributed to the bank's image with its customers and to their image with their colleagues and superiors. Hamermesh (1986) also reported that executives in her study stressed the importance of effective communication, noting that poor writing detracts from the effectiveness of the message and creates a poor image of the company and the writer—they both come across as ignorant. All participants in her study agreed that effective writing is a skill that is crucial to achievement in the corporate world. More recently, The Industry Report (1999), published in *Training Magazine*, found that US organizations budgeted $62 billion for formal training and that 88 percent of these companies provide communications skills training. The study found that a larger percentage of US firms provided training in communications skills than in management skills, customer service skills, supervisory skills, or executive development.

A 1991 report by the U.S. Labor Department indicated that most future jobs will require writing skills. And, Lahiff and Penrose (1997) stressed that though written communication can often be understood in spite of grammatical errors, excellent writing improves the writer's credibility. "No matter how good your ideas are, if they are presented on paper with poor grammar, many readers will discount the ideas because the grammar detracts from them" (p. 128). Furthermore, as Dobrian (1998) added, e-mail and other online services are very widespread, often replacing telephone and face-to-face meetings. Furthermore, with English becoming the international language of business, more people are writing it and business executives must be able to communicate in this growing international culture.

Though the value of business writing skills is very clear to businesses and graduates, convincing students of the value of business communication skills to their career success can be very challenging. However, we might try the following:

1. Invite guest speakers, including recent graduates and local executives and entrepreneurs, to talk about the writing demands of their jobs and how the level of their writing competence affects them in the workplace.
2. Have students bring in writing samples that they have received that contain errors, and have them discuss how these errors affect their perceptions of the organization that sent them the correspondence.

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3. Discuss research findings that show the importance of effective communication to job performance and job promotions, e.g., Barrie (1980), Hamermesh (1986), and Munter (1997). Munter (1997) provided a synthesis of research on how businesses perceive the value of communication abilities. Her findings include:
    a. A 1986 survey of Fortune 500 companies showed that 97.7 percent believed that communications skills affected their advancements to top executive positions.
    b. In a 1984 study of over 5000 executives, over 80 percent cited communication as the most important course for their career preparation, and all noted that communication continues to play the highest overall role in management advancement.
    c. A 1989 survey of 1000 personnel managers found that communications skills were identified as the most important for business jobs and career success.
    d. When CEO's from 5000 US companies including a variety of industries and sizes were survey in 1984, they were asked, "What are the three most important things you have learned in order to perform your role as an executive?" Communication was ranked as number one.
    e. In a 1995 study commissioned by the Johnson Graduate School of Management at Cornell, 75 percent of the 200 Human Resources Managers and other senior executives of Fortune 1000 companies identified the most desired skills in new MBA hires as "communication skills."
    f. Findings from a 1994 survey done by the Fisher College of Business at the Ohio State University which polled hundreds of alumni from the honors accounting program who graduated between the mid-seventies and the early-nineties found that alumni valued the communication training far more than any other feature of the program.
    g. In 1992 when the Smeal College of Business Administration at Penn State conducted a "Build the Ideal MBA" survey of 750 leading US firms, respondents indicated oral and written communication as the highest ranked skill to be included in the program.
4. Invite a few Advisory Board Members, who are typically higher level executives, to participate in an online chat with students on a specific topic such as *The importance of communication skills to job success.*
5. Have students interview an executive in the industry they are planning to enter. Help students to develop a set of questions regarding written and oral communication demands and practices on the job and how speaking and writing skills have impacted career success.

Improving writing skills in the business communications course

The Business-Higher Education Forum (1985), an affiliate of the American Council on Education, recommended that business schools seek to insure that their graduates are competent in oral and written communication. The AACSB, the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business, has consistently included written and oral communication among its

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accreditation standards. And, the literature suggests that most schools and colleges of business value effective business communication skills (Young & Murphy, 2003; Carnes, et al., 2001; O'Connor & Ruchala, 1998). Kleen and Gross (2000) found that approximately 77 percent of business schools required a course addressing communication skills, and 57 percent of those courses were in the school or college of business. Yet Lanier, et al. (1997) like Hansen and Hansen (1995), and Harper (1987) found that business students are especially weak in communication skills. In 2003, The National Commission on Writing in America's Schools and Colleges described writing as the neglected "R", noting that:

> American education will never realize its potential as an engine of opportunity and economic growth until a writing revolution puts language and communication in their proper place in the classroom (p. 3).

We are challenged to find effective ways to help students improve their writing. Strategies such as the following may be helpful:

1. Encourage students to review and edit their own work before submitting for a grade.
    a. Teach students to use the electronic writing tools that are available with most word processing software and require that they submit a printout of the analysis with each written assignment. Take time to review the types of errors that these tools typically catch and those that they tend to miss. Make sure students know that these tools are a first line of defense only, and that additional review will still be needed.
    b. Deal with students' grammatical errors as they arise in students' writing. It is often helpful to label errors, using the proper grammatical terms, such as agreement problem, comma splice, and so on. Doing this helps to build students' awareness of the various types of grammar errors they are making and helps them to look up these errors in grammar handbooks (Gocsik, 1997).
    c. Allow students to recall any final drafts that were presented with errors, and resubmit them with the errors corrected. Only reward with a specific number of points and if papers are returned within given deadlines, and in perfect form. Don't develop the habit of pre-grading students' work, but try to reward their efforts to perfect their writing samples.
    d. Teach revision and rewriting skills, including peer evaluation, to help students improve the quality of their written assignments (Pomerenke, 1984). This can be particularly helpful in the earlier weeks of the course. Encourage students to ask their peers to comment on their writing before printing final copies to be submitted for a grade.
    e. Have students note errors that they detect in the writings of others, such as politicians, TV personalities, and their instructors and academic leaders. Periodically, discuss some of their notes in class. Also, discuss the perceptions that these errors cause in the readers.

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f. Bring in materials that are loaded with errors and have students work quickly to detect the errors. Those who find all the errors in the allotted time can be given a small reward.
g. After the first month or so, heavily penalize errors in written correspondence. Make the penalty high enough for it to serve as a deterrent to carelessness in writing and refusal to proofread and edit drafts before submitting for a grade.

2. Grade conscientiously and meticulously, so that the feedback contributes to learning.
   a. Use a grading rubric that includes grammar when evaluating all written and oral communication activities and assignments. As Vice and Carnes (2002) noted, checklists [and rubrics] provide a consistent reminder of what is needed to successfully complete a written assignment.

3. Relate learning situations and activities to students' lives.
   a. Include micro-writing activities that focus on the problem, the process, and the product of a typical rhetorical situation (Ober, 1992). Use activities that are simple and are grounded in students' real-life experiences.
   b. Use student experiences that are analogous to those the instructor wishes to reproduce in the classroom (Butler, 1985). Too often cases reflect an imaginary set of circumstances to which students are asked to respond. This superficiality tends to lead to shallow, canned, or otherwise inappropriate responses. On the other hand, using students' experiences on campus or in their part-time jobs to build writing activities assists them in responding intelligently to situations that affect them today, and prepare them to respond to situations that they will encounter in their future jobs.

4. Model the work environment in the classroom
   a. Play the "boss" role instead of the "instructor" role, using workplace conventions instead of classroom policies to manage the class. Require students to write, speak and behave professionally (Garay, 1995). Garay also suggested peer review of assignments before they are graded as well as tracking students' progress from one activity to another.
   b. Emphasize clarity and brevity (Eustace, 1996). Business people manage a myriad of activities each day and are increasingly under pressure to get more done. Anything that saves time is better than the alternative, so brevity is appreciated. Of course, content is even more important than length. Encourage students to use clear, strong, unambiguous phrases and sentences in their writing. Redundancies and clichés are totally unacceptable.
   c. Provide real world experience by asking local employers or campus offices to have students assist in their writing activities. Atkinson (1983) noted that this involvement will expose students to memo writing, letter writing, survey writing, and report writing and will give students opportunities to learn to deal with experts outside the classroom.

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d. Use an evaluation strategy that reflects evaluations that are used in business. Dyrud (2003) suggests a 0-1-2 system for unacceptable, acceptable, and excellent work. The 0-1-2 system encourages instructors to stop editing and start evaluating students' writing. She describes this holistic evaluation strategy as having three primary virtues: simplicity, efficiency, and equity. I would suggest waiting to implement this strategy of grading until the second half of the semester, after you have had a chance to work with students to improve some of their basic writing and proofreading problems.
e. Use cases to help set the context for business writing, however, keep them realistic. As Dorn (1999) found in her research, too often the cases used in business communication focus too much on the exceptional rhetorical situations that require students to solve critical problems by written correspondence. The employees in her study suggested that workplace writing requires fairly mundane rhetorical interactions. I suggest giving cases that solve problems that are related to the course content and then include oral or written presentation of the solutions for assessing students' work.
f. Divide the class into two large groups of students. Have students in Group 1 play the roles of the originators of the correspondence--writing mailable letters that are then passed on to the recipients—members of Group 2. Group 2 will play the role of the recipients and will respond to the letters they receive. Try to maintain equal numbers of students in each group and have each student write and respond to only one piece of correspondence for each activity. Take time to discuss any problems in the correspondence that were sent and received, and why the problems may jeopardize the communication process.

Improving writing skills in all business courses

Writing improvement programs are essential in all business programs. For example, Brown and Paapanen (1996) found that graduates of accounting programs often need to improve the quality of their written and oral communication skills in order to be successful at work. Epstein (1999), noted that when Georgia State University integrated Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) into its 1995 Strategic Plan it embraced the following three basic principles:

a. Writing is integral to learning, regardless of subject matter
b. Writing is a practice rather than a skill, that is, an ability which requires continuous effort
c. Any expert in the field can teach writing in that field better than the best general writing professor (Epstein 1999, p. 30).

Those three points support the view that teaching communication solely in communications courses is insufficient and that it is the collective responsibility of all courses and professors in business schools and colleges.

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The concept of including more writing in discipline specific courses is not new; it is well documented in Russell (1991). The "writing in the discipline" (WID) approach emerged from the belief that each discipline has its own conventions of language use and style that can best be taught to students in the specific contexts of courses in the disciplines. The goals of WID programs are very similar to those of broader-based "writing across the curriculum" (WAC) programs which Carnes, et al. (2001) listed as: (a) enabling faculty of non-communication disciplines to build on the writing skills taught in communications courses, (b) providing students with opportunities to strengthen and reinforce communications skills, and (c) encouraging consistency in communication training and assessment.

Teaching writing in all business courses is not an attempt to relieve the business communications courses of some of its responsibilities and obligations. It is an attempt to help all business majors develop that most critical business skill—effective communication—by providing a wider and more varied context for the development of business writing skills. O'Connor and Ruchala (1998) supported this view, arguing that people who pursue careers in areas such as accounting or physics need opportunities to practice writing in those professions. The impact of WID on writing skills is well documented in the literature, for example, Day (1989) and Riordan, Riordan, and Sullivan (2000). Carnes, et al. (2001) noted that a primary benefit of writing across the curriculum [including WID] is that students can integrate and apply the skills gained in business communication in other business classes. Students know that they can no longer forget about good writing when they complete the business communications course. And Day (1989) found that students in WAC programs showed improvement in writing skills when all assignments were graded for content, spelling, grammar and logic.

But the benefits are not only in improved writing skills. There is also evidence that WID leads to the learning improvements in content specific knowledge and skills. For example:

1. Writing enhances understanding and retention of concepts (Bransford & McCarrell, 1974).
2. Writing forces students to develop and express their points of view, and enhances reinterpretation of what has been learned (Waller, 1991).
3. Writing can become an exercise in logic, forcing students to move away from rote memorization (Weinberg, 1993).
4. Writing provides feedback on what was actually learned—the writer reveals his or her level of understanding. A glaring writing problem might actually reveal a problem in reasoning or understanding (Bean, Drenk, & Lee, 1982).
5. Writing creates an intellectual dialogue and forces the student to 'join the conversation,' thus becoming a more educated part of the community (Blair, 1988).
6. Writing supports higher levels of cognition, because it requires application, synthesis, and evaluation of the new material (White, 1989). This view is also supported by Gere (1985), and Barr and Healy (1988) whose research attests to the fact that writing improves higher-order thinking skills.

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7. Bechard (1998) found that writing in the business department promotes active learning, with students using hands-on activities to apply theory to real world problems. The writing activities also enhanced team skills, research skills, critical thinking skills, and analytical skills.

Probably Bruffee (1984) expressed the benefits of writing in the discipline best, noting that one cannot truly prove mastery of a concept until s/he can clearly articulate it, communicate it, and in so doing "teach" it to another.

Notwithstanding the benefits of teaching writing in the disciplines, business school professors might need more than assurances that learning in their courses will be improved if they include the teaching of writing. They may also need assistance in implementing the WID approach, for example workshops to help them develop appropriate writing activities. Other collaborative efforts such as team-teaching or the development of interdisciplinary courses might also help to make WID a success.

Strategies for teaching writing in all business courses include the following:

1. Include brief written assignments that require students to develop and defend a decision (Sanborn, 1991). Students will reinforce the content area while improving their writing skills.
    a. Short activities may include journal writing, freewriting in response to topics provided by the instructor, postings to discussion board or e-mail summaries to the instructor.

2. Take time to assess writing, not just the content of written papers.
    a. Include communication skills on all rubrics that are used to assess written or oral activities in the course. This will help students to remember the importance of good writing and speaking to all business activities.
    b. Require students to use grammar analysis programs to assist in reviewing and evaluating their written work. The first time an assignment is given, review the strengths and weaknesses of the software in the context of the course being taught so students can better interpret the results of the analyses.
    c. Take time to mark and label writing errors so drawing students' attention to them. Periodically, discuss some of the writing errors and how they might negatively impact the communication process in the specific discipline.

3. Conduct mid-semester and end-of-semester performance reviews. Have students produce a memorandum to the instructor (immediate supervisor) that discusses specific elements of their performance in the course, e.g. attendance, punctuality, class participation, peer critiques and so on. Give specific guidelines, preferably in the form of a grading rubric, to help students prepare their review. Remember that the rubric should include writing skills and grammar, as a part of the assessment of students' memo. Have three levels in

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the performance review: (a) self evaluation, (b) peer evaluation, and (c) instructor evaluation. Provide as much feedback as possible to the students (adapted from Bergland, [1997]).

4. Collaborate with other professors in the business school, including colleagues in business communication, to assign a "Community Service Learning" project that crosses the boundaries of several courses. Community service learning projects involve having students perform a service for a nonprofit organization or an administrative unit on campus, e.g., disability services or student services (Tucker, et al., 1998). Not only do students apply the skills that they have been learning, they have to engage in oral and written discourse, and they have the added satisfaction of providing service to the community.

Summary

All business professors can and should share the responsibility of helping business majors develop excellent writing skills. Though business communication courses continue to play a very important role, teaching writing only in these courses is insufficient. The critical importance of helping business students develop excellent writing skills requires that all courses share the responsibility. Students need to be constantly reminded of the importance of excellent communication skills to job success. This can best be done by holding students accountable for effective communication in all business courses. Students cannot be allowed to forget about effective communication after they leave the business communication course(s). Furthermore, including writing in all business courses promises to enhance learning of the content areas as well as improving writing skills.

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Flaming Spam

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Abstract

This article presents findings of a study examining students' experiences and practices of netiquette in two virtual courses, Business Communication and Business Ethics. The objective of the study is to determine whether instruction in the classroom leads to modified behavior in students' lives as they practice netiquette, or whether they simply perform netiquette in order to pass the course. This investigation of online communication is timely as it relates to social trends affecting pedagogy and practices in business communication.

Introduction

During the past half century the technology revolution has improved the efficiency of numerous tasks in businesses, industries, education, and personal communication. The extent to which information technology has escalated has contributed greatly to productivity and expansion of knowledge, but problems regarding their use have also accelerated. Spamming, which has been described as receiving unsolicited electronic communication without consent, has created problems primarily related to their bulk (Falk, 1998). Spam of various types clogs up the transmission systems causing the loss or delay of important messages.

Sorkin (2001) identified several varieties of spam, which he categorized as commercial and noncommercial. He also classified spam in terms of whether it is unsolicited bulk electronic mail (UBE) or unsolicited commercial electronic mail (UCE). Some varieties of noncommercial spam include charitable solicitations, opinion surveys, religious messages, political advertisements, chain letters and hate mail. This study focuses on one kind of spam, flaming, which refers to that which provokes anger as well as that which involves unethical acts such as vulgarity, pornography, and offensive slurs related to cultural diversity.

The purpose of this research is to investigate online communication as it relates to a social trend affecting pedagogy and practice in business communication. The paper proceeds to discuss the following: the impact of spam on workplace productivity, the affect of netiquette on spam, the survey methodology in this study, findings, and summary.

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Impact of spam on workplace productivity

The escalation of technology in the workplace has provided more opportunities for users to engage in spam. These practices can affect workplace productivity in negative ways. A survey conducted by Pitney Bowes, Inc. (1999) in London revealed that the increasing amount of technology in the workplace is actually hindering productivity. The report revealed that in the United Kingdom (UK) the majority of workers are interrupted by communication technology every ten minutes. The report also found that the typical UK worker received 171 electronic mails a day; the comparable typical worker in the United States received over 200 per day.

Another survey conducted by Surf Control Company (2000) reported that the average worker goes online more than three times a day for non-business purposes. The report revealed that the cost and consequences associated with non-work related Internet usage include (a) productivity loss, (b) bandwidth waste, (c) legal liability, and (d) security breaches.

Specifically, the following percentages concerning the cost of non-work related Internet usage are as follows (Surf, 2000):

1. Ninety percent of employees use the Internet for personal reasons while at the office.
2. Wasting time online accounts for thirty to forty percent of all loss productivity in the workplace.
3. Fifty-one percent of businesses nationwide have disciplined employees for inappropriate Internet use.
4. About forty percent of companies use software to block connections to unauthorized or inappropriate sites. These measures are primarily designed to prevent internal interruptions and employee-directed interruptions to workplace productivity.

Businesses and employers must also manage external interruptions of spam such as pop-ups. This is a strong form of spam which is more complicated in that pop-ups come from any angle, any site, and users have to stop what they are doing on the Internet to close them (Hansen & Olsen, 2002). These authors reported findings from Nielson/ Net Ratings, which conducted a study of the growth of pop-up ads during a three-month period that measured Internet traffic patterns. The results showed that the number grew from 3.9 billion to nearly 5 billion impressions. The findings also showed that pop-ups were a useful source to subscribers but permitted users to be disturbed at any time while online

According to Bovee and Thill (2000), many people, from consumers to state attorneys, are trying to stamp out the irritating spam online sales pitches. The United States congress has jumped into the act by passing a bill that would regulate this scourge of cyberspace. The authors also recommend the following steps Internet users can take while waiting for the act of Congress to

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take effect. These steps can help users wage their own counterassault if spam is jamming their electronic mail boxes:

1. Keep a low profile by (a) using a different online identity than your electronic mail address, (b) not listing yourself in your service providers members directory, and (c) altering your electronic mail address.
2. Drown out the noise by (a) trashing some of the junk when the barrage of junk electronic mail gets to be too much, and (b) using the filter to weed out people or services you've targeted as offenders.
3. Fight back by (a) avoiding, ignoring, or deleting spam, (b) filing a complaint with the Federal Trade Commission, and (c) sending a complaint to the Internet service. provider.
4. Don' t reply.

In a summary of spam laws in the United States conducted by Sorkin (2001), only 29 states were identified as attempting to strengthen federal laws regulating unsolicited commercial electronic mail. The state of Nevada was reported to have been the first state to enact spam legislation. This law was enacted in July1997 and strengthened by amendments in 1999 and 2000. Under this law it is now illegal to send unsolicited commercial electronic mail unless it is labeled or readily identifiable as an advertisement. The electronic mail must include the sender's name, street address and electronic mail address, along with opt-out instructions. The law prohibits all unsolicited electronic mail that contains falsified routing information that is likely to cause disruption.

The impact of netiquette on spam

A major effort in the technology revolution during the last few decades has been the development and expansion of electronic learning often referred to as virtual courses. According to Jones (1998), virtual classrooms are defined as those within a computer-mediated communication system where interaction between teachers and students takes place by typing and reading from computer terminals. Virtual schools or distance learning utilizes a number of electronic machines and material that provide individualized learning experiences online. These technologies can be accessed through communication media any time and any place where connections are available. Virtual programs offer many opportunities to students for learning workforce skills. Among groups being affected most by the results of spamming are students pursuing courses online. Spamming affects their education due to interruptions which delay or stop transmissions. Emerging from the problems created by spam are studies such as the Ferris Study (in Bekker, 2003), which recommended strategies to reduce the cost of spam. Some of the strategies include a combination of user education, industry initiatives, and legislation designed to regulate unsolicited commercial electronic communications.

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Paralleling these initiatives are the core rules of netiquette recommending the use of netiquette as a means to reduce or extinguish some varieties of spamming. Netiquette is defined as a professional code of behavior for electronic communication. The core rules are a set of guidelines for behaving properly online. Five guidelines are important when netiquette is involved (http://www.albion.com/netiquette/corerules.html).

1. Remember that you are communicating with another human being.
2. Behave ethically.
3. Look before you leap.
4. Respect other people time and bandwidth (the information carrying capacity of the telephone lines or networks used to transmit your message).
5. Be tolerant of other people's mistakes. Give them the benefit of the doubt.

Along with the guidelines, five of the *Ten Commandments for Computer Ethics* developed by the Computer Ethic Institution (www.fau.edu/rinaldi/net/ten.html) should be considered:

1. Thou shalt not use a computer to steal.
2. Thou shalt not use a computer to bear false witness.
3. Thou shalt not use or copy software for which you have not paid.
4. Thou shalt not use other people's computer resources without authorization.
5. Thou shalt not appropriate other people's intellectual output.

Bovee and Thill (2000) also emphasized the fact that electronic communication (e-mail) is one of the most useful features for business. As a result of this fact, individuals in the workplace as well as students preparing for the workplace should be aware that the majority of messages sent should be concerned with factors dealing with company business. The following netiquette should be remembered:

1. *Be courteous*, which means (a) save your company money, (b) check your electronic mail regularly, (c) don't spam, or contribute to electronic mail, (d) don't simply reply to a message that was originally sent to multiple recipients, (e) respond quickly, and (f) don't use all capital letters.
2. *Be brief*, which means (a) don't send too much information, (b) avoid adding too many attachments, and (c) change the subject line when replying.
3. *Be careful*, which means to (a) edit every message for criticism and sarcasm, (b) proofread every message to avoid misunderstanding, (c) be aware that companies have the right to search company electronic communications, and (d) avoid flaming.

The authors of this study wanted to find out if students were aware of netiquette and to what extent they practiced the behaviors so clearly spelled out in the literature.

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Methodology

The case method with an online survey was used to examine students' experiences and practices of netiquette in virtual management courses. Ninety-seven senior level business students participated in an 8-week project during the 2002 fall semester. Data generated from background information—gender, race, employment history, and virtual experiences—were used to assign students to geographically dispersed virtual teams within a large metropolitan area. There were fifteen teams of six, and one team with seven members.

Although instructional and practical implications can be inferred from this study, two limitations of the study, external validity and sample size, must be noted as they related to instruction and practical applications. The sample size of the study was 97 business students, and they were enrolled in senior-level virtual courses. Both factors were considered when analyzing data. Accordingly, two standard frequency distribution analyses using the program Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) were performed.

The objective was to obtain (pre, during and post) experiences and practices of netiquette using simulated cases designed for this purpose. Table 1 shows the participants' experience with virtual teams. The virtual teams were asked to use concepts of Total Quality Control since in the case they would form quality circles as a replacement for traditional organizational hierarchy. Participants were informed that each member of each quality circle would evaluate each member's contribution within the circle during each phase (pre, during, post) of the project.

Table 1
Participants' Experience with Virtual Teams (pre-investigation)

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1 sem or less	57	58.8	58.8	58.8
	2 sem	25	25.8	25.8	84.5
	3 sem	12	12.4	12.4	96.9
	3+ sem	3	3.1	3.1	100.0
	Total	97	100.0	100.0	

Findings

Data collected was designed to assess four components of students' experiences and practices of netiquette online. The four components are (a) communication experience in virtual teams, (b) helpfulness of communication content in virtual teams, (c) reported use of netiquette online, and (d) prediction by students of application of case online behavior in actual practical workplace situations. These findings provide assessment of instructional strategies.

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Case objective of component 1: communication in virtual teams
Component 1 focused on the concept of virtual teams of students. The questions were designed to assess advantages and disadvantages of using virtual teams with an instructional objective focusing on netiquette behavior. Table 2 shows the findings supported the advantages of virtual teams focusing on netiquette behavior.

Communication is essential in non-traditional structures such as virtual management. The learners' outcome was to develop techniques that demonstrate an understanding of the communication matrix (formal, informal, downward, upward and horizontal.) (Table 2).

Table 2
Did the objectives for Virtual Circles Assignments follow a logical communication format?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	88	90.7	90.7	90.7
	No	9	9.3	9.3	100.0
	Total	97	100.0	100.0	

Case objective of component 2: *content of communication*
Component 2 focused on content of the online communication. The questions were designed to assess theoretical and practical applications of virtual team usage across disciplinary lines. Many students change disciplines or self-advise within their discipline during the course of their educational pursuits in order to enhance their current or future work place marketability.

Similar to understanding intercultural communications, cross-discipline communication has become an integral factor as we build multi-tasking skills. The learners' outcome was to identify communications patterns that may be applied regardless of discipline. Substantiating these findings, Table 3 supports the need to investigate a more integrated approach to business curriculums.

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Table 3
Virtual Circles experiences and practices were helpful in different disciplines

		Yes Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Business	82	84.5	85.4	85.4
	Hum & S/Sci	8	8.2	8.3	93.8
	Sci & Tech	6	6.2	6.3	100.0
	Total	96	99.0	100.0	
	Missing	1	1.0		
Total		97	100.0		

Case objective in component 3: netiquette behavior
Component 3 focused on netiquette (online behavior). The disciplines included: Business, Humanities & Social Sciences (Hum & S/Sci), and Science & Technology (Sci & Tech). The questions were designed to assess the online students' pre- (current course) and post- (after course) experiences and practices of netiquette. The objective is to determine whether instruction in the classroom leads to modified behavior in students' lives as they practice netiquette, or whether they simply perform netiquette in order to pass the course. Table 4 findings support the significant of linkage between academic learning and workforce applications.

A general reasoning of work teams is that the outcome will be enhanced by collaborative efforts. The learners' outcome was to develop and utilize communications skills for maximum usages (courses, work, personal) with respect to netiquette. Students responded to the question: Will you use netiquette in online communications for courses, work and personal exchanges?

Table 4
Will you apply netiquette in practical situations?

	Yes	No	Neutral
Courses	77%	17%	6%
Work	81%	12%	7%
Personal	72%	1%	27%

Case objective in component 4: Professional applications of netiquette
Component 4 focused on professional applications of virtual online teams. The questions were designed to assess the linkage of instructional strategies to professional (workplace) applications. Table 5 supports this investigation's assertion of the need to investigate online communication as it relates to social trends affecting pedagogy and practices in business and professional communications.

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Paralleling the skills needed in the workplace, this project was designed to assess students' academic outcome of transitional professional skills they acquired in the use of netiquette in virtual teams. The learners' outcome was to identify and use netiquette techniques to sidestep communication barriers. The researchers wanted to answer the question: Were the virtual team applications transferable to employment situations?

Table 5
Can you apply what you learned in the virtual online circles to actual job practices?

Applications	Yes	No	Neutral
Transitional to employment	85%	10%	5%
Instructional objectives: traditional vs. virtual workplace scenarios	76%	22%	2%
Workplace virtual circles (practices)	74%	24%	2%
Enhancement of virtual skills (experiences)	81%	17%	2%

While Component 4 focused on the linkage of instructional strategies to professional workplace applications of virtual online teams, findings are relevant with respect to pedagogical implications; the results also support this study's premise relating to use of netiquette as a regulator for spam. The data supports the linkage of instructional strategies with learning a professional application (netiquette) for online communications within the workplace.

Summary

The findings of this study provide data to support the introduction of instructional strategies for students to learn netiquette for professional applications. With a US workforce of 140 million, this topic is relevant to the discussion about regulating spam. The findings suggest the current and future workforce population can learn a solution to interruptions in workplace productivity. As noted earlier, the majority of workers are interrupted by communication technology every ten minutes, with the average U.S. worker receiving over 200 e-mails per day totaling 1,000 messages a week.

Ironically, while e-mail is the fastest growing method of communication, the instructional goal of enabling students to use it effectively has not completely been achieved. Technological advances provide an instructional opportunity that can be applied in classrooms to teach students

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effective communication management resulting in productive work environments. This study, which evaluates an instructional strategy for enhancing the use of netiquette, is part of the dialogue about the impact of technology in business communication pedagogy.

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The Ethical Connection Between Academe and Industry: A Model for Promoting an Organic Ethical Climate

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"The students plunge into Machiavelli, Kant and Aristotle. They fish for answers in the murky waters of moral ambiguity. They plumb their own souls. This is no philosophy class. It's business ethics at St. Edward's University, and it's packed" (Roser, 2000, p. B1). This quote by a reporter from the Austin, Texas city daily, *Austin American-Statesman*, reflects the trend in curricula towards ethics and gives us a glimpse of how one institute of higher learning is preparing its students for ethical interaction. Given recent accounting scandals and questionable corporate ethics, the reciprocal relationship between ethical communication and ethical behavior should be at the forefront of our endeavors, not only in industry but also in academe, where future professionals begin to formulate their sense of ethics. This paper highlights the ethical activity at St. Edward's University (Austin, Texas) as a model for creating the academic/industry ethical link and also for illustrating the dynamic between ethical communication and ethical behavior.

By learning about St. Edward's strong focus on ethics, and its powerful link to industry, readers will gain a greater understanding of the reciprocal relationship between ethics at school and ethics at work; gain a greater sense of how fostering the ethical industry/academe relationship is beneficial for both students and industry professionals; and learn about the type of criteria by which we can assess ethical behavior and ethical communication. Most importantly, readers will benefit from this information because it can provide a model for similar ethical activity at other universities.

Perhaps it is useful to begin with a brief description of St. Edward's University, before continuing on to its curricular and co-curricular ethical activity. As cited in the St. Edward's University website (2003),

> St. Edward's University is a private, Catholic liberal arts institution of about 4,300 students located in Austin, Texas. Founded in 1885 by the Rev. Edward Sorin, superior general of the Congregation of Holy Cross and the same priest who founded University of Notre Dame, the university offers a liberal arts education emphasizing critical thinking and ethical practice. Students enjoy the advantages of small classes and personal attention coupled with excellent internships and service-learning opportunities. St. Edward's University offers undergraduate degrees in more than 50 areas, as well as seven graduate degrees, including a Master of Science in Organizational Leadership and Ethics.

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> St. Edward's University takes pride in its distinguishing characteristics: the courage to take risks, an international perspective and the commitment to provide educational opportunities for students of varied cultural, religious, education and economic backgrounds. St. Edward's University anticipates and responds to a changing world with innovation. The University provides a culturally diverse student body with an education that achieves a balance among the humanities, the sciences, and the professions. The University's mission is to make its graduates competent in a chosen discipline and to help them understand and appreciate the contributions of other disciplines. Graduates are prepared, through training in critical and creative thinking as well as moral reasoning, to analyze problems, propose solutions, and make responsible decisions. They are encouraged to develop an understanding of the human individual, which is derived from reason and open to faith.

Closely linked to St. Edward's mission and values, which center around critical thinking, service, and responsible decision-making, the University also fosters an ethical climate that resonates across campus and creates ethical connections to the outside world. The University's solid link to industry is best demonstrated by its annual "Business Ethics Award," which is given to area industry leaders and nonprofit organizations that exemplify the highest standards of ethical communication and ethical practices.

In conjunction with the Samaritan Center for Counseling & Pastoral Care, St. Edward's Center for Ethics and Leadership, under the direction of Phillip Thompson, developed and launched the Samaritan Center Ethics in Business Awards (EIB) in 2002. Thompson first formed a steering committee to designate ethics criteria for judging. He then invited students in St. Edward's Master of Science in Organizational Leadership and Ethics to participate in the detailed and rigorous research of each nominee (Elsea, 2002, p. 25). Annually, one nonprofit organization, three local businesses, and one individual receive the award for demonstrating leadership and proven commitment to practicing the highest ethical standards. While many nominees prefer to be nominated by someone outside their organization, self-nominations are also accepted (Samaritan, 2003, p. 4). This year, the EIB awards drew fifty-nine nominations for central Texas companies, nonprofits, and executives. Neither committee members nor sponsors, which included Dell Computer Corporation, could make nominations or be nominated for the award (Anna, 2002, p. C1). The criteria for selection, as defined in the "2003 Samaritan Center Ethics in Business Award Nomination Form" are as follows (cited verbatim):

> Selection criteria for a nonprofit organization award:
>
> - Clearly demonstrates ethical conduct in the treatment of staff, volunteers, clients and other stakeholders.
> - Exhibits consistent quality in its service delivery and integrity in fundraising.
> - Is properly governed and carefully maintains its fiduciary responsibilities in terms of board selection and financial management.

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- Partners effectively with other nonprofits, businesses, and/or government entities.

Nonprofits selected as nominees are asked to provide:

1) Authorization to contact the organization's independent auditor.
2) Information regarding accountability to donors.
3) Information regarding the percentage of funds for payroll and overhead and the percentage used for the organization's stated purpose.
4) Authorized interviews with staff and clients to explore the ethical commitment and treatment of clients, staff and other core constituencies.

Selection criteria for the business award:

- General background of the company (size history, location, financial profile, geographic markets, history, record of earnings).
- Employee relationships (policies and practices regarding salaries, benefits, promotion, layoffs, etc.).
- Organizational design as it relates to ethics (mission statement, ethics policies, codes of conduct, ethics training, etc.).
- Relationships with customers as demonstrated in quality of products and services, advertising, pricing, formal ethics component in sales force training.
- Relationships with suppliers as demonstrated in fairness (use of local suppliers when possible), formal policies on gifts, proven ethical conduct in buyer/seller relationships.
- Community relationships as demonstrated in policies and actions, solicitation of community input, communication regarding projects materially affecting the community, participation in and impact of volunteer programs and activities, percentage of after-tax profits contributed to philanthropic projects, commitment to preservation of the environment.
- Financial integrity.
- Proper responsiveness to an ethical dilemma or crisis, and/or the ethical transformation of a business.

Selection criteria for the individual award (based mostly on extensive interviews with persons who know the individual):

- Meets the highest ethical standards.
- Is a model and mentor for others.
- Exhibits strong qualities of fairness and integrity.
- Is an acknowledged leader according to others in their field of business or service to the community.
- Has a history and reputation of exemplary ethical behavior.

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The screening and questioning process is extremely rigorous, so rigorous in fact that one of the business leaders who was not selected as a finalist stated that it made the company "look at their internal operations in a different light and evaluate the ethics of their business" (Reinlie, 2002, p. 2). With such stringent criteria, winners of the EIB awards truly have something to be proud of. This year, Aetna Group, Applied Materials Corporation, and Hart InterCivic Inc. won EIB awards in the Business category. Earl Maxwell, a partner in the Maxwell, Locke & Ritter accounting firm, won the individual award. Hospice Austin was the winner in the nonprofit category. Award recipients are honored at a banquet at St. Edward's University, attended by community leaders and members of the St. Edward's campus. This banquet serves as an additional forum for dialogue on ethics. At this event, EIB award winners provide a panel discussion regarding the nature of ethics in their workplace; they also answer questions from the audience.

The EIB award is not the sole medium for taking ethical dialogue from within the walls of the University into the local community. In conjunction with the EIB Award, George Martin, St. Edward's President, recently initiated a series of Presidential Dialogues on Ethics where small groups of expert panelists and community leaders create a forum for meaningful discussion of prominent ethical issues across disciplines and industries. As Martin states, "this is a very important role for St. Edward's University. Our goal is to offer an appropriate environment for the community to engage in a serious exchange of ideas about ethical challenges within a framework of moral reasoning" (Martin as cited in Elsea, 2002, p. 25).

Moreover, the Presidential Dialogues on Ethics are accompanied by the "University Lecture Series," which is free and open to the public, where visiting speakers lecture on various topics at the forefront of ethical dilemmas and popular topics regarding ethics. This year's University Lecture Series included:

- "Ethical Leadership," featuring Joanne Ciulla, Coston Family Chair in Leadership and Ethics, The Jepson School at the University of Richmond
- "Bioethics and Justice: Economics, Care and Conflict," featuring Carmela Epright, Furman University, Greenville, S.C.
- "Professional Ethics--Revival of the Legal Profession," featuring David T. Link, JD, Dean of Law Emeritus, University of Notre Dame Law School
- "Reexamining the Foundations of Civic Virtue," featuring Aine Donovan, Dartmouth College, Hanover, N.H.
- "Integrity: The True Driver of Ethics - Having the Courage to Do the Right Thing vs. Doing things the Right Way," featuring Robert Staub of Staub Leadership Consultants

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This lecture series, along with the EIB Award and the Presidential Dialogue on Ethics has strengthened the co-curricular connections and communication that St. Edward's has with its surrounding community and industries. These ethically-centered programs illustrate the University's commitment to ethics and its genuine belief that fostering a sense of responsibility, accountability, and "doing the right thing" should exist within the larger context of an entire community. Inherent in St. Edward's ethical programs also lies the notion that the community at large, not just the University, is responsible for instilling ethical virtues in our younger generations and college students who will soon become professionals and face ethical challenges that require moral reasoning and critical thinking. Phillip Thompson, director of St. Edward's Center for Ethics and Leadership seems to agree: "[T]here are three basic phases to shaping ethical graduates. First, you begin with classroom instruction. Then you expose students to businesses and mentors who incorporate ethics into their work. The final step is creating ethical habits" (Thompson as cited in Elsea, 2002, p. 24).

Yet ethical habits, as Thompson points out, do not always come naturally: "once students have learned about and seen others doing the right things, it's crucial that they are required to participate in some kind of experiential learning to create those good habits within their personal work styles" (Thompson as cited in Elsea, 2002, p. 24). This leads us to the topic of curricula and how St. Edward's fosters high ethical standards across disciplines and applies ethics within its campus.

Because moral reasoning is an important part of St. Edward's mission statement, the University adopted moral reasoning as an initiative across the curriculum. During the summer of 2000, faculty from different departments on campus convened, under the auspices of the Center for Ethics and Leadership, to forge the new "moral reasoning across the curriculum" initiative. "The committee recognized that at a liberal arts university such as St. Edward's, moral reasoning should be woven into the tapestry of every course and campus activity" (St. Edward's, 2003).

The result was the addition of moral reasoning components to already existing courses, including Freshmen Studies, which is a required course for all first-year freshmen, and the development of new courses such as Business Ethics, Law and Ethics, and Ethics and the Environment. In addition, a general education core was established for all students, regardless of major, which includes an ethics course and an ethics component in all courses within any given discipline.

To complement ethics instruction, the University also re-emphasized the importance of experiential learning by making it a requirement in several courses across the curriculum. For example, students in Freshmen Studies courses are required to do substantial volunteer work with nonprofit organizations such as Habitat for Humanity, the National Arbor Day Foundation, and the State of Texas Adopt-a-Highway program.

Similarly, St. Edward's School of Business Administration (SBA) implemented a service-learning component into its Business Communication courses, which are required of all SBA majors. Through this service-learning component, SBA majors gain hands-on communication

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and business experience while learning to "create those good habits within their personal work styles" as Thompson stated. SBA students spend a semester volunteering for a nonprofit organization in varying capacities. Some students, for example, provide administrative or consulting services to nonprofits such as the American Heart Association, in the area of marketing, advertising, or operations management. Others opt for physical labor such as maintaining Austin's Zilker Park Botanical Gardens or stocking shelves at the local food bank or Salvation Army.

Faculty make this experiential learning relevant to the Business Communication classroom by using the experiences as the subject or purpose of various course assignments, including memos, contracts, formal letters, and PowerPoint presentations. Additionally, ethics is made the underlying guiding factor of such assignments as students are asked to practice "ethical communication"—communication that is both informative and accurate, does not mislead or misguide, does not misrepresent an organization, promotes goodwill for all involved, and creates an opportunity to help the cause of the organization through ethical means such as volunteerism and responsible promotion. The service-learning project, more explicitly defined, allows students to:

- Create letters of introduction and request, where they introduce themselves to representatives of a nonprofit organization and request volunteer opportunities.
- Learn about interview etiquette in a business setting by interviewing a representative of the organization to learn more about the infrastructure of the nonprofit with which they will volunteer.
- Develop interpersonal business communication skills during both the interview process and their volunteer work.
- Develop and create a PowerPoint presentation that features the organization and utilizes the information they gathered from the interview, secondary research, and from their volunteer experience.

Thus, through the service-learning experience, students gain awareness of the connection between ethical communication and ethical behavior by building goodwill with organizations through their communicative interaction, promoting the organizations' causes in the classroom through accurate information, and by informing other students about volunteer opportunities.

At a macro level, St. Edward's focus on ethics across the curriculum is also apparent in its development of programs such as an undergraduate Minor in Professional Ethics and Catholic Studies and a Master of Science in Organizational Leadership and Ethics (MSOLE). The minor in professional ethics focuses on critical analysis and ethical reasoning, intended as a guiding factor for students in their own moral questioning and decision-making. Courses for this minor include:

- Ethical analysis
- Ethics and society
- Legal ethics

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- Business ethics
- Environmental ethics
- Ethics in public policy
- Ethics in technology
- Ethics internship

The MSOLE is a graduate degree designed for experienced managers, consultants and professionals—both for profit and nonprofit organizations—"who want to develop the skills and knowledge to become organizational and community leaders." The MSOLE is also useful for those who currently have or are about to assume the responsibility of leading others in a global environment (St. Edward's, 2003). Masters-level courses for the MSOLE program include the following:

- foundations of organizational leadership
- leadership and team development
- organizational ethics
- ethics and leadership
- leading organizational change
- critical thinking
- global leadership perspective
- leadership and imagination
- organizational behavior
- leadership in action research/internship

Both the minor in professional ethics and the MSOLE program require extensive experiential learning via extended internships that provide students the opportunity to directly apply and practice what they learn, in real-world contexts (with adequate degrees of rigor for undergraduate-level and graduate-level, respectively). Aside from providing students with real-world experience in applying ethics, the internship requirement further strengthens the University's relationship with the Austin community and the various industries and organizations that comprise it. St Edward's has built a reputation as having high ethical standards and expectations of anyone who studies or works at the University, and as a result, community leaders and organizations have come to expect a certain caliber of student when it comes to ethics. Frank Krafka, Dean of St. Edward's School of Business, explains: "local business leaders look at St. Edward's, and they expect our students to be well equipped in moral reasoning and ethics. They are excited to interview and hire St. Edward's graduates because they know they will have that ethical framework" (Krafka as cited in Hernstrom, 2002, p. 20). So, through its initiatives both on campus and within the community, the University has been successful in creating an ethos as an organization that values ethics and makes it a high priority in its academic components and industry relationships.

Despite outstanding achievement in the ethics arena—in its community partnerships and curriculum—St. Edward's as an ethically-conscious entity is just gaining momentum. The

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University, under the steady direction of Phillip Thompson and the Center for Ethics and Leadership, will continue to maintain and strengthen its curricular and co-curricular ethics programs by providing resources and faculty development workshops on ethics across disciplines, in essence, teaching teachers how to teach ethics in their classrooms, regardless of the subject. The University will also emphasize the importance of fostering universal ethical awareness in education by hosting its fifth annual International Conference on Ethics Across the Curriculum in October 2003, where the theme will be "Creating Leaders—Teaching Ethics" (visit www.rit.edu/~692awww/seac/index.html for updated conference material).

In summary, St. Edward's ethics programs define the relationship between ethical behavior and ethical communication as reciprocal: the ethics lecture series, symposia, workshops, awards, and strong academic components in moral reasoning and service-learning create a campus-wide awareness of ethics which in turn establishes the parameters for ethical communication. A salient and concrete example of a St. Edward's program that best embodies, exemplifies, or explains the relationship between ethical behavior and ethical communication—and one that I will close with here—is the University's Diversity Training program called "Safe Zones." This semester-long training program for faculty and staff (and also available for students) centers on ethical behavior and ethical communication and how the two are strongly related to our attitudes about

- culture
- disability
- gender
- socioeconomic class
- sexual orientation
- spirituality

As one of the many ethically centered programs at St. Edward's University, the Safe Zones Diversity Training program makes a strong argument for establishing a solid ethical connection between "how we behave" and "how we communicate," whether in the workplace, in school, or in the community at large.

The information highlighted in this paper has implications for anyone interested in ethics, its application in everyday existence and communication, education, and the creation of strong bonds between academia and industry. The ethical activity at St. Edward's University can serve as a model for incorporating ethics at a macro and micro level, within university/industry relations, in academic programs, or even at the course level. The ethics-centered activity at St. Edward's can also be useful as a marker, for illustrating and establishing criteria by which we define the dynamic between ethical behavior and ethical communication. Based on the activity at St. Edward's, for example, this dynamic can be viewed as symbiotic. And ethical behavior and communication can be defined as activity that

- promotes open and shared communication

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- disseminates information that is accurate
- builds goodwill
- solidifies the relationship between the University and its surrounding community

A successful model for ethical behavior/ethical communication, as evidenced by St. Edward's, is one that is responsive to the needs shared amongst its campus and its community, and one that produces creative and ethical structures and initiatives for meeting those needs, through a combined effort with industry. It is through such initiatives and creativity that universities can envision and create unique educational programs that promote goodwill and opportunity. An example of such a program is St. Edward's CAMP (College Assistance Migrant Program)—a program that just celebrated its 30th anniversary at St. Edward's—which provides scholarships for Mexican-American migrant workers to attend the University. Finally, and most importantly, a successful model for ethical behavior/ethical communication is one that is organic in nature. It should create an ethics initiative that is systemized, and originates at the very heart of its infrastructure. This organic system of ethics must be the driving and guiding force, and the standard of any activity at every level, both within our campus and in our external relationships with local industries and the community at large.

The link between education and industry is crucial to the successful development of future professionals and leaders within our community. It is through experiential learning gained in industry that students experience, observe, and learn to recognize and practice ethical behavior and ethical communication in their daily interaction with others. The relationship between academia and industry, as illustrated by St. Edward's University, is not asymmetrical, where only one side benefits. Community organizations and industries gain valuable volunteers who can contribute practical skills, positive energy, and theoretical insight. Additionally, we, as scholars, researchers, and educators in institutes of higher learning can also contribute our experience and resources to strengthen ethical initiatives in industry. As Phillip Thompson points out, the academe/industry relationship is indeed reciprocal. As a small university, for example, St. Edward's has the flexibility to respond to and work with the local business community's needs. "We enjoy a mutually beneficial relationship with many Austin-area businesses. The companies provide us with the necessary mentors and internship opportunities and in return, we re able to offer resources to help them develop ethics programs or to examine and refine existing programs" (Thompson as cited in Elsea, 2002, p. 24). With a bit of clear focus, modification, and open communication with their communities, larger universities can also reap similar benefits through strategic relationships with industry, by defining and establishing the needs of each entity involved and working towards a win-win structure that allows for the mutual—and ethical—fulfillment of those needs.

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Bridging the Interaction Gap: Addressing ethical dilemmas by combining on-line/on-campus business communication courses at San Jose State University

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In an attempt to overcome the difficulties in meeting team and oral communication learning objectives in online courses, an innovative course was created at San Jose State University's, College of Business. Students in one online business communication course became virtual team members with students from four on-campus courses; the curriculum was identical for all five classes. Student teams were responsible for managing communication channels in addition to meeting course assignment and learning objectives. Mastery of core communication concepts and skills (written, oral, team) did not differ between students in the two course formats (online/on-campus) and there were additional benefits. Students in both course formats were highly-motivated, developed more diverse interpersonal relationships, and displayed a higher level of critical-thinking and decision-making abilities. This paper discusses course structure, significant assignments, design strengths, and limitations.

There is broad support for the effectiveness of online, or distance, learning; and such courses meet the learning and curriculum needs in many universities (Mabrito, 2001). San Jose State University, located in the "Silicon Valley" of California, offers business communication courses in both online and on-campus formats, to meet the needs of different students. Some of the course content is well-suited to online instruction: for example, the use of technological communication tools such as email, instant messaging, and teleconferencing (Fortune, 2003) as well as writing instruction. However, the nature of online instruction does not lend itself easily to student mastery of oral and team communication skills (Mann, 2003), thus creating two distinct ethical dilemmas:

1. Media limitations for oral and team communication mastery are difficult to mitigate in an online business communication course. Can oral and team communication mastery be achieved by students in an online course format? *(Are we teaching what we say we are teaching?)*
2. Media limitations make it difficult to provide equitable learning opportunities to both online and on-campus students. Can the online and on-campus classroom environments provide equitable learning opportunities to both student groups? *(Are we teaching what we say we are teaching, to both groups equally?)*

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These ethical dilemmas are more than pedagogical. The issue is larger than simply attempting to maximize student learning in the virtual classroom, given the inherent drawbacks with regard to student interaction and oral communication skills. When programs face accreditation, and when on-line students are compared with their peers (student marketability), the question is whether an online format can provide students with sufficient opportunity to master communication skills, not just learn course content.

These ethical dilemmas were considered in the design of an innovative, combined on-line/on-campus business communication course at SJSU's, College of Business. The goal was to bridge the "interaction gap" between the two populations of students by combining students in online and on-campus classes and by increasing the number and variability of "interactive" course assignments.

Course Structure

Twenty-five online students became virtual team members with one hundred on-campus peers, jointly responsible for information-sharing, decision-making, and creating effective communication channels to accomplish group objectives. Approximately five online students were added to each on-campus class of twenty-five. Each autonomous, combined class (of approximately thirty students) was divided into five functional teams, resembling departments in an organization (marketing, finance, operations, human resources, legal). In three out of four autonomous classes, all five online students were in the same department, acting as a virtual team (the overseas branch) within the same on-campus department (so the team was larger). In the other class, each online student was assigned to a different department, acting as a virtual team member, or telecommuter. Originally, all four classes were structured in the same way to address the difficulty for online students to build community (Stephenson, 2001). However, one class restructured to have an online representative in each on-campus department. Regardless of structure all five functional teams worked together during a semester-long simulation, which culminated in an end-of-semester event.

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Significant Assignments

Every student met a minimum writing requirement of 8000 words during the semester, in addition to three oral presentations and two interviews. The writing assignments included a research paper, resume and cover letter, memos, emails, and short reports; most writing assignments were directly related to simulation decisions and activities, so were shared in and among teams. To bridge the "interaction gap" in writing assignments, asynchronous, threaded discussion boards, email and email groups, and synchronous chat activities were planned. For example, four "all hands" meetings were held during the semester. WebCT's Chat tool was employed in the classroom and online students attended the team meetings via the chat room. Using the tool, they were able to brainstorm, clarify discussion topics, and vote on issues.

Students in both course formats were very engaged in the conversations, and were able to apply "virtual team" communication concepts, such as ensuring all members of class had an equal voice and that work was evenly distributed. As a result they created web-based strategies for rapport-building. Personalizing email (e.g. font type, style, color; messages), sending web thank-you cards, and communicating cross-functionally to acquire more information, became extracurricular (non-graded) activities.

Oral presentations were conducted throughout the semester, for students in both course formats. For all students, one presentation occurred at the mandatory, first class meeting, and another at the mandatory, on-campus final meeting. The mid-semester presentation was an impromptu speech for all students; on-campus students gave their speeches in class, whereas online students gave their speeches via voicemail. All students were required to create a PowerPoint presentation, as an asynchronous "virtual" presentation, and share it with classmates.

Career preparation assignments blended both oral and written components. Students exchanged resumes and created interview questions in preparation, and then conducted interviews with each other. Each student conducted an interview, and was interviewed. Students made their own arrangements to conduct interviews with each other, and most students conducted them in person. A few interviews were conducted over the phone, and one interview was conducted via instant messaging with an on-campus student who was traveling and an online teammate. Such interaction creativity allowed the "conversation" to be expanded (Mann, 2003) beyond the traditional scope of classroom interaction, and resulted in the development of "discourse communities" (Cook, 2000).

Assignments allowed students to apply theoretical business communication concepts presented in class and to acquire competency using a variety of communication tools, techniques, and formats they would not have used in a the standard (non-combined) class format. Because students could not rely on ad-hoc, impromptu decision-making tactics, they developed relationships with a broader range of students. Accomplishing weekly tasks required students to interact with more of their peers, and with more frequency, than if every student in class utilized the same communication channels. In addition, course theory about audience and

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communication channels was explicitly discussed and applied to meet different communication goals throughout the semester.

Results

The course design met written, oral, and team communication learning objectives for students in both course formats because the same grading standards were used and all students completed the same assignments. In other words, passing one of these business communication courses signified the same level of mastery of written, oral, and team communication skills, regardless of course format. Such results suggest that combining online and on-campus courses can successfully address the first ethical dilemma by *mitigating media limitations of online instruction for mastery of business communication skills*. Students in both course formats gained insight into creating relationships (building rapport) with peers, without utilizing non-verbal communication cues, yet were able to practice oral communication skills, engage in synchronous discussions, and have a voice in team planning and decision-making.

The second ethical dilemma, equity, is harder to address. Although students met the same learning objectives and course expectations, there were differences in their exposure to communication scenarios occurring in the classroom. For example, during the "all hands" chat meetings, the on-campus students experienced concepts of facilitation differently than the online students. Both groups experienced the importance of effective facilitation in a manner they would not have, if learning about facilitation had been relegated to theory presented in a book, and the online students were exposed to a concept that would have been virtually impossible to experience if they had not had a combined class structure. Yet, discrepancy does exist between the level of students' experiential learning in the two course formats; the online learning environment is simply, not as "rich" in communication styles.

In the classroom, team-meeting and facilitation issues such as conversation intensity, volume, participation protocols (i.e. raising hands), and alternative conversations must be managed; these issues do not exist for the online students attending the meeting. However, combining the courses minimizes this discrepancy when compared to completely separate classes, because all the students participate in the outcomes – the decisions that are made and changed; the lengthy, sometimes irrelevant issues discussed. While the online students may not feel the intensity of the discussion or may miss the community- and rapport-building comments (jokes, affirmations), the online conversation did address process and task issues, which did provide the online students with learning opportunities regarding facilitation and meeting management, they would not have otherwise.

Because of the success of this course pedagogy in addressing the two ethical dilemmas, others may be interested in trying to replicate the results. To aid in this process, a brief discussion about strengths and limitations is warranted, and there are a few factors of success that must be present.

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Success Factors

This course was successful because it provided an opportunity for students to build relationships, and "experiment" with different communication strategies. If students were responsible for concrete deliverables each week, there would be no time for new strategies to be developed if communication broke down. If student teams changed membership throughout the semester, existing communication channels would be broken, and strong relationship would not be developed. The semester-long simulation and stable student teams are key factors for success in this model.

One strength of the combined class was the variety of communication channels and methods for communication. Communication flowed freely at both intra- and inter-team levels. Limits on the types of communication methods available would have severely inhibited information exchange and relationship-building. Students were able to use multiple methods of communication simultaneously, and experience their effectiveness in different situations. Students' critical thinking skills were enhanced as they experimented with different communication options.

Limitations

The biggest obstacle was trying to manage the division of teams within the initial structure. Because online students have more difficulty creating classroom communities (Stephenson, 2001), online students were initially kept as intact functional teams, versus distributing them across the teams, for all four autonomous classes. To aid in communication they were the "overseas branch" of an in-class department. In hindsight, one online student should have been placed in each on-campus team. The problem with the larger virtual team, was that the functional team with online members was twice the size of other functional teams, with an exponentially greater communication burden to manage; when the communication broke down the virtual department became a "shadow" team.

One class realized the structure could be improved and made a compelling proposal to alter the student distribution, early in the semester. Another class created a roving liaison strategy (where virtual team-members became "liaison *members*" of the other departments, attending both their adopted department meetings and their own department meetings), which significantly reduced the communication burden. Departments did not need to communicate to the five online members individually because one online member attended each department meeting and was able to exchange communication between his or her own department and the adopted department.

Another obstacle was getting students to initiate conversations between the online and on-campus department members; for the first four weeks of class the common comment was "they

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have not communicated with me/us". A suggestion is to make this correspondence part of the grade. Many students did a significant amount of extracurricular communication (email, chats, phone calls, out-of-class face-to-face meetings) for which they got "no credit". Although the "credit" came implicitly as better relationships, greater theoretical understanding and practical communication skills, students deserve tangible rewards for their efforts, especially at the beginning of the class, before the relationships have been established and taking the initiative is harder.

Conclusion

Combining online and on-campus courses is an effective strategy for bridging the interaction gap in business communication distance learning. The course structure and interactive assignments provide opportunity for students in both course formats to utilize a broader range of communication channels and methods, as well as to experiment with theory, in "real-time". By bridging this interaction gap, a combined course addresses ethical dilemmas regarding ensuring the quality and effectiveness of instruction (for accreditation and student marketability) and providing equitable learning opportunity for students in the two different course formats, to a much larger degree than have been accomplished in non-combined classes. In addressing the two ethical dilemmas, the credibility of online courses is increased because pedagogical reliability and validity can be established to demonstrate that students in both formats can master the broad range of business communication skills taught.

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When Conversational Styles Collide: Bringing Awareness to Problem-solving Team Talk & Listening

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When problem-solving writing teams encounter difficulties, some familiar complaints are heard:

> *He never contributes, but just sits like a bump on a log.*
> *I can't get a word in edgewise.*
> *I give my opinion, but they act as though they never heard me.*
> *When I talk, she always interrupts.*

These and other communication roadblocks often occur as students struggle to adapt their conversational styles to an unfamiliar format: outside the familiar structure of family and friends, and focused particularly on problem-solving related to writing. Magnifying the difficulty of this transition are individuals' tendencies to default to a favored conversational style, typically one influenced by family cultural influences and gender.

In self-defense, students often resort to blaming and shaming around conversational styles, which can just worsen unproductive group behaviors, limiting idea exchanges and deflecting attention off substantive issues and onto what is often labeled "personality conflict." With the best of intentions and abilities, problem-solving writing teams may fail to produce their best work. Even worse, student team members may retreat to their corners—conversational styles and prejudices intact—without learning how to make writing team problem-solving more effective in future groups when in the workplace. Fortunately, research demonstrates that training in teamwork skills can improve team success (e.g., Bacon, Stewart, & Silver, 1999; Schullery & Gibson, 2001). And research also shows that classroom discourse can help to develop professional attitudes in students that can later help them on the job (Dannels, 2000).

Talking with students about how we talk together

In more than a dozen years of teaching professional communication courses that require students to work together in problem-solving writing teams, I have learned to bring the problem of conflicting conversational styles out in the open in my classes. Drawing on the simple distinctions first popularized by linguist Deborah Tannen (1991), I ask students to discuss their opinions about and experiences with both turn-taking and overlapping conversational styles. To start the discussion off in a balanced way, I usually begin by describing two recent conversations that I've observed among students in the class, both conversations positive and successful in solving some kind of problem, but one conversation exemplifying a turn-taking style, the other an overlapping style.

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For example, a recent overlapping style conversation that I used in this way involved three students helping a fourth to collect notes and assemble handouts from a class that she had missed. On that same occasion, I also reminded students of a turn-taking example from a recent class discussion about determining the deadline and precise deliverables for a course project. These examples make the point that both styles can be comfortable and effective for all involved, and also that one style can more appropriate and/or helpful for a given situation than another. In other words, I make the point that neither style is either universally right or universally wrong, but rather that both can demonstrate the qualities of "high considerateness" and "high involvement" that Tannen (1991, p. 196) uses to discriminate between them.

Also, after each of my examples, I call on students to remember and describe recent (and constructive) problem-solving conversations (ideally outside of the classroom) that they have had and that exhibited a similar conversational style. These examples point out to students their own flexibility in using different conversational styles, based not solely on their personalities, but rather on the social context and collaborative purpose of different discussions. These exchanges then lead to our discussion of the different advantages of both overlapping and turn-taking conversational styles, as summarized in Table 1.

Table 1
Advantages of Conversational Styles

Overlapping	**Turn-taking**
• Intimate, impulsive, spontaneous • Sharing, supportive, engaged • Energetic, enthusiastic, encouraging • Ideal for brainstorming	• Formal, sequential, deliberate • Individualistic, thoughtful, complete • Calming, focused, respectful • Ideal for polling

Having established the positive potential for both conversational styles, and thereby reducing the likelihood for blaming and shaming around a preference for either style, I ask students to talk about when they most frequently encounter each of the two styles. The overlapping conversational style is typically identified with close and trusting relationships, the turn-taking style typically with more distant and hierarchical relationships, such as those common to classrooms and courts. However, we also talk about different styles used at family dinner tables, on sports teams, and at a variety of workplaces, to tease out how culture, gender, status, and other context elements influence our choice of conversational styles and, sometimes, our personal tendencies to favor one style over another, and perhaps to even fear or judge a differing style. Often this discussion produces some striking "aha" moments, when students recognize, sually with some surprise, how their assumptions about how conversations "should" take place

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are not always shared by others, and how those assumptions can harden into prejudices and cause reactions that could be especially damaging when problem-solving is the goal.

From such recognitions, I can easily turn our class discussion to the issues of dominance and control that Tannen (1991, pp. 181-215) raises with regard to conversational styles and how they can come into conflict. Here, again, I ask students to recall examples from their own problem-solving conversations with others, this time to identify occasions in which they felt that one party's conversational style caused difficulties for at least one other person in the conversation. At this point in our class discussion, the quotations in my introduction frequently are raised. So, next, I ask students to identify the conversational style that each expression is in reaction to and why it leads to the negative comment, as summarized in Table 2.

Table 2
Examples of negative reactions to conversational styles

Overlapping	**Turn-taking**
• *When I talk, she always interrupts.* —when an interrupter has her own agenda • *He never contributes, but just sits like a bump on a log.* —because the pace of idea exchange does not give him time to respond	• *I can't get a word in edgewise.* —when a monologist controls the floor • *I give my opinion, but they act as though they never heard me.* —because the idea exchange is sequential, not synergistic

By analyzing these examples, together the students and I can more systematically clarify the potential disadvantages of each of the two opposed conversational styles, as summarized in Table 3.

Table 3
Disadvantages of Conversational Styles

Overlapping	**Turn-taking**
• Selfish, distracting interruptions • Individual ideas lost or undervalued • Incomplete thoughts • Outcomes: frustration & domination	• Selfish, serial monologs • Individual ideas not connected together • Repetitions • Outcomes: withdrawal & domination

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This discussion of disadvantages leads to the realization that when problems arise with overlapping and turntaking styles those problems are often less due to how people talk, and more due to how poorly at least some of them are listening. Discussing and practicing effective listening techniques then becomes a welcome and useful topic. One approach that I have used is to have students pair up, asking each pair to discuss for several minutes a topic relevant to their team projects. The other partner must listen to the speaker carefully enough (and with only clarifying questions, no other comments) to be able to summarize what the speaker says, then report that back to the class. This exercise demonstrates how much attention true listening requires, and how if the listening partner distracts the other by an unsupportive interruption, or distracts himself or herself by thinking about what to say on the next turn, that can limit the expression of the speaker. As research has shown, practicing silence in this way can be difficult for students, but also useful as a tool for developing better listening skills (Johnson, Pearce, Tuten, & Sinclair, 2003, pp. 34-36).

Once the students have reached some consensus about the pros and cons of different conversational styles, recognized their potentially serious consequences and power implications, and practiced resisting their own self-involved conversational style habits through active listening, I then turn our discussion to the goal of practicing with conversational styles in the collaborative work required for the students' team writing projects, which work presents complications and challenges. The student teams are writing community service learning projects: The student teams develop documents for external non-profit clients. So students must hone their problem-solving conversational skills both within their teams and when their teams meet with their client supervisors and informants (often in group sessions). Sometimes, of course, potentially contentious differences of opinion arise in both internal and external team meetings, regarding project scope, design, and execution. To help students be most effective in such discussions, I recommend a series of practices.

Self-awareness practices

These techniques are designed to keep students paying attention to the issues raised in our class discussion, because being aware of how their conversational styles are affecting a team problem-solving activity can help them to exercise more constructive control. Rather than have the first impulse be to change the conversational styles of others, these practices ask students to start by monitoring their own behaviors.

Recognize the sources of your own conversational style habits
Often, of course, these are family-based or school-based. Someone may recognize, for example, how he was rewarded with attention for being able to think on his feet, to generate quick answers, to offer the first opinion, and to raise his hand before others, making him feel that jumping in conversationally will make others value his participation most. Or someone may realize that she was reprimanded for interruptions, but praised for careful articulation of ideas, and so may be expecting her ideas to resonate before someone else chimes in with a new point of

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view. Recognizing when and why habits arise can make it easier to rein those habits in, when appropriate.

Monitor yourself to avoid the downsides of the conversational style that you habitually use with your project team
The first and best step that I recommend to students is that they ask for feedback from their peers about the pros and cons of their conversational styles in team meetings. Some students' habits vary depending on whether the team conversation is internal or external, which also is worth noting. Acknowledging what others see in their behaviors helps students to notice when their conversational style habits turn, usually under stress, from being constructive to being damaging to group dynamics and effective decision-making.

Apply everyday ethics to your conversational behaviors
Most people accept that it is wrong to take something that is not given. Grabbing a conversational turn by means of a selfish agenda-driven interruption is an example of that kind of unethical behavior. Similarly, holding onto one's turn by means of selfish monologing is possessive and violates the ethical value of sharing.

Flex your own style to adapt more to others
As our initial discussion of examples usually illustrates to students, people are not stuck even in styles that are heavily favored by culture, gender, and other context influences. Everyone can recognize how different circumstances bring out different behaviors: No one talks to a judge the same way as he or she talks to a lover! From that recognition follows the opportunity to make some choices about conversational styles to adapt to different situations and others' styles.

Other-awareness practices

These techniques ask students to develop their understanding of others' conversational styles and to have some compassion for how difficult conversational style clashes can be.

Recognize how others, too, express their backgrounds through their conversational styles
Without stereotyping, it still can be possible to be sensitive to how gender, culture, occupational history, and other influences predispose individuals to conversational styles that may seem counter-productive for the team as whole, yet still be very comfortable for those individuals. Also, accepting that it may be more difficult for others to change may make it easier to decide to take on the burden of conversational style-flexing on one's own, for the good of the group.

Recognize others' preferred conversational styles without judging
The blaming and shaming language that often accompanies conversational styles can be very damaging to team cohesiveness and decision-making. For example, it is worth noting the unnecessarily self-righteous sting behind the all-too-common snappish response to someone with an overlapping style: "Could you just let me finish, *please*?" followed by a sarcastically exaggerated, "Thank you!" that implies the interrupter was rude. In the same way, many a turn-

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taker has been crushed to hear from a teammate, "Well, obviously you have nothing to contribute"—the quality of deliberate thoughtfulness misread as vacuity, or, even worse, stupidity. Such reactions can be de-motivating, leading to the major problem for academic teams that Daniel Levi has labeled "social loafing" (2001, pp. 59-61).

Identify how others define the group or occasion to choose between conversational styles
Some students view team meetings as more social in nature, while others may view them more as an extension of the classroom. Clarifying these differences, and deciding upon a useful way to acknowledge them, can go a long way towards a team's arriving at a conversational style that is comfortable for all of its members. For example, a team may decide deliberately to shift styles between the opening phase of each meeting, when base-touching is the focus, to a later phase of the meeting that is more directed toward decision-making.

Practice actively listening to others
This may be the most important suggestion of all. While it may seem paradoxical, if everyone in a discussion focuses on truly listening, rather than on talking, and responds only out of that listening context, the talk of a team can be richer and both more efficient and more effective for team problem-solving. Active listening prevents selfish interruptions and also prevents monologs, so it provides a one-size fits all solution to many team conversational style communication problems.

All of these awareness techniques can help students in problem-solving writing teams to be more ethically sensitive to and understanding about the conversational styles of others. Such awareness also can encourage students to flex their conversational styles to adapt to different people and situations: a useful tool for encouraging effective writing collaborations inside and outside the classroom.

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Disconnected Interactions: Challenges in Teaching Online

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Students approach the classroom with a mixture of curiosity, trepidation and excitement. The teacher approaches the classroom with that same mix: curiosity about the current crop of students, trepidation about the proceeding of the course, excitement about the potential for learning and the possibilities of making a connection between student and their discipline. As teachers we hope that at the end of the semester we have imparted equal parts of information, knowledge, wisdom and passion for out subject to our students. In part, the task of the teacher is to persuade the learners that the course of study in which they are involved will profit them in their personal and professional life. At the same time, teachers hope they have created a persuasive argument for the validity of both the content of the course and the methods employed to transmit that content to the student. In short, teaching at the college level becomes a process of equal parts of challenging the learner to engage the course content while at the same time persuading the learner that the challenge is worth the effort.

Engaging the learner in any course is facilitated by course content that the student finds relevant to his or her personal or professional life. However, engagement is best facilitated by creating opportunities for the student to try out new information and participate in the usage of that information in a real-world (or artfully simulated) environment. Creating these conditions for learning is the craft of the expert teacher. Creating these conditions is hard work, requiring patience, thoughtful reflection, research and support.

The dual tasks of engaging and persuading learners in the classroom informed the course redesign process undertaken during the past year at the University of St. Thomas. The course in question is a communication technology course designed for students in the Masters of Business Communication (MBC) program at the University of St. Thomas in Minneapolis. The course is a required course, often taken early in the student's graduate program. It is a course that students often take reluctantly, as the relevance of a technology course is not readily apparent to students with interests in marketing, internal communication and public relations. However, the course has endured in the curriculum since the inception of the MBC program in 1985 and has evolved from a simple hands-on skills course to a deeper examination of the role of technology in our society and its impact on our lives.

Students in the MBC program come from a variety of backgrounds with a wide range of experience levels. Students must have a minimum of two years of work experience in a communication-related position. As is the nature of most evening part-time graduate programs, relative beginners and those with decades of experience at Fortune 500 companies attend class together. Their experience in the use of technology varies as widely as their work experience.

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The MBC program is designed to prepare the student as a team leader and decision-maker in communication roles.

Online learning: with and about technology

In addition to the challenges of engaging and persuading the learner, the challenge of teaching a course with the word "new" in its title is a daunting one. It speaks to the necessity of reinventing the course each time it is presented and working diligently before, during and after the course to scan for the "new" and make sure it appears in the course content the next time that course is offered. Such is the case of the course titled "New Communication Technology" offered within the Master of Business Communication program. The necessity of keeping the content fresh and new parallels the simultaneous quest to keep the methodology employed within this course fresh and innovative as well.

The experience of teaching this course over the past several years has made clear the complexity of attempting to adequately address the rapidly evolving state of technology in the business world. Textbooks used in previous versions of the course would seem hopelessly out of date within six months. Current "best practices" and "state of the art" were moving targets that could, at best be addressed only with the caveat that "all this could change tomorrow". More significantly, during early offerings of the course it became very clear that students seemed overwhelmed with the amount of material to be covered and came away with what could best be described as a "brush" with technology. While the course was intended to be a survey of the technology of business, the assessment was that this survey was occurring, for the students, from a very remote vantage point, and the engagement of the students in the content was momentary and superficial. New approaches to the course that would provide students with a much deeper engagement of course content needed to be developed.

The process of developing a new approach to the course was formed around three distinct objectives and inspired by three very different sources. The first of these objectives is the notion that business communicators must be active evaluators of the information they create and receive, as well as savvy evaluators of the channels through which messages are sent. This course must explore both the messages created as well as the channels and media employed in business communication. Inspiration for this objective was provided by Laura J. Gurak (2001) in her book *Cyberliteracy: Navigating the Internet with Awareness.* In it Gurak defines cyberliteracy as the ability not only to navigate new information channels, but also to evaluate critically what is found there. Gurak calls for awareness not only of the power and potential of the Internet, but also for an awareness of the need for ethical communication and social responsibility over this channel. Gurak expands the definition of digital literacy beyond the tool-using stage. Gurak's greater awareness of the breadth and depth of literacy in the digital age informed a significant number of the content decisions of the course.

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The second objective of the course is for business communicators to recognize the new roles that are opening to them as a result of new communication technology. The first of the 95 Theses from the *The Cluetrain Manifesto* (2000) states, "Markets are conversations" (Levine, Locke, Searle & Weinberger, p. xxii). This statement perfectly frames the challenge business communicators will confront to an increasingly greater degree in the years to come. Technology has opened new pathways for two-way communication between businesses and their stakeholders, and the existence of these new pathways present awesome possibilities and frightening pitfalls. If markets and marketing do indeed revolve around two-way conversations, business communicators are likely to find themselves in the midst of these conversations and must be prepared to capitalize on the many communication channels available to them while managing the message at the same time. Placing the business communicator at the nexus of this communication is a novel concept for some.

The third objective for the course is that the student should participate in the communication (learning) of the course through the use of many of the communication technologies that comprised the course content. This notion was inspired directly by Marshall McLuhan (1964) who wrote, "…the medium is the message" (p.24). Since that notion was applied to a course exploring technology and channels for communication it seemed somewhat hypocritical to stand in front of a classroom for fourteen weeks and lecture about the virtues of communicating with technology. If the medium is the message, that style of teaching contradicted the message the course was intended to send. The bromide of "walking the talk" seemed an appropriate challenge: if technology can be used for effective communication, this course needed to model that stance.

The redesign of the course, then, needed to recognize that technology is changing the role of the communicator in the organization. The course needed to expose the learner to a more complex set of issues around the use of technology. And, the course needed to put into practice the fundamental belief that technology can be an effective communication and learning tool.

New tools for learning

The exploration of a new approach to this course occurred at about the same time our campus was involved in a significant expansion of technology resources for teaching and learning. Each member of the St. Thomas community (faculty, students and staff) is provided a university login I.D., password and e-mail address. In addition, each person is provided space on a shared file server that allows students to store electronic documents in a safe and secure manner. The advantage to having such documents on a network is that they may be accessed from anywhere, either on-campus or from off campus. In addition each person has access to storage space on a web server. This allows the posting of web pages on the Internet and provides for easy access to such documents from anywhere in the world. Both server spaces above can be accessed from both on-campus and off-campus locations through Internet browser software.

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St Thomas adopted a commercially developed course management system (Blackboard™ [http://www.blackboard.com]). This system (described in greater depth below) provides an Internet-based repository for course materials, as well as a number of communication and collaboration tools. With these and other resources in hand, a new methodology evolved for preparing students of business communication to capitalize on new technology.

Course redesign

The guiding tenants of this course redesign were that students should more closely engage course content, and that through this engagement they would recognize the significance of the course content in their personal and professional lives. Also guiding the design was the decision that (a) students will become adept at assessing the quality of information created and transmitted through technology channels, (b) students will recognize that the traditional role of the business communicator has been dramatically affected by new technology, and (c) the methodologies for teaching and learning in this course should model best practices for use of technology for communication and learning

Technology resources

A variety of technology tools were employed in delivering course materials and in the collaborative work of student in the class. However, a conscious effort was made to use only tools that most students would likely be able to access at their places of work. The basic course structure utilized the Blackboard™ Course Management System, which provided an online, easily accessible environment for the posting of all course related materials. In addition to posting the course syllabus, class schedules and grading criteria, Blackboard also provides collaboration tools for faculty and students. An asynchronous discussion forum allowed for the creation of discussion sites for issues of course content. Students were required to post comments, ideas, and questions to the discussion forum on a regular basis throughout the semester. Blackboard also provides group space for student collaborative work. These private spaces create an online environment within which students can discussion group project plans, share files and even "chat" in a real-time mode with each other. Finally, Blackboard provides a "Digital Drop Box" for the submission of assignments (and, after grading, their return to the student).

Students were expected to have Internet access and access to an e-mail account, either their own or one provided by the university. Basic skills in the use of e-mail were expected (creating, reading, replying, forwarding and adding attachments). Ability to create documents in a word processing program was required and it was strongly suggested that the word processing program of choice have the capability to output documents in the .html format (standard language for web page creation). These course documents could then be stored in the student's network file folder and web server storage space.

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The on-site class meetings were held in a technology-enriched classroom, with each student having access to a networked computer. The Microsoft Office Suite was available, including FrontPage, a web page design program.

Course content and teaching/learning tactics
As this course evolved, it became apparent that course content and teaching/learning methodologies were intricately intertwined. If the discussion was to center on issues of personal privacy, how might the student use technology to explore the publicly available information about them? If the guest lecturer was speaking of videoconferencing, why not use that technology to save him the trip to our campus? If the subject is technology-based collaboration tools, use these tools for the purpose of developing a group project. Carefully exploring the connection between the medium (and its technology) and the message (or task) promoted a rich, involving learning experience.

One of the objectives of the course was to provide students an opportunity to write for and publish on the Internet. So each student created his or her own personal homepage and posted on the personal web server on the Internet. From that point onward every piece of written work students created in response to class content was authored in their word processing document, saved as a web page and uploaded to their personal web server space. Their home page provided links to each assignment they posted throughout the semester, essentially making their written work available to anyone with Internet access. This upload process was very low-tech, requiring only an Internet connection and a browser.

Information literacy and facility in doing research on the Internet was another objective of the course. Students were required to explore deeply and evaluate closely the information they discovered through Internet searching. Two assignments readily engaged the students in this process. The first of these was a "vanity" search. This assignment simply required the student to type his or her name into a search engine, follow the links that were revealed through the search process and develop a reaction paper to the discoveries. For many, this was a revelatory experience and a suitable introduction to a class discussion on confidentiality, privacy and cyber-laws.

Another assignment which students ultimately found most satisfying was the "competitor" search. In this assignment students were required to access the online presence of their companies' major competitors. They were given a set of criteria to use in assessing each site ("Is content current and engaging, is it a brochureware, do they engage in online commerce?") and after carefully examining the competition, they were asked to assess their own companies' sites and compare them to the competition. This assignment was an eye-opener for many, and formed the basis for classroom discussion about the importance of online presences and reputation.

The ability of technology to connect people and facilitate collaboration is one of the major themes of the course. To test this notion, multiple opportunities to use collaborative work

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environments in the process of accomplishing group projects were designed into the course. As mentioned earlier, the Blackboard system provides private, online group workspace. Assignments and activities were designed which required students to use this space to plan work. Specifically, one of the major assignments of the class is a group project in which the students explore a chosen technology or technology application. The product of this work is (usually) a set of documents posted on the Internet as well as an in-class group presentation. Because of the nature of the class schedule (the class meets in the classroom only about six times between the date of the assignment and the due date for group presentations) their best choice is to plan their work using the group workspace in Blackboard. This process demonstrated the potential for online collaborations tools, as well as some of the deficiencies and pitfalls of online work groups.

If technology has promoted the notion that business communication is all about conversation, it stands to reason that one of the objectives of this course should be to engage the learner in ongoing conversations about course content. This was accomplished in a number of ways:

1. Each week students were required to post a comment, question or reaction to a class reading on the electronic discussion forum. Different rules applied to different posting assignments: one week they could post only a comment that builds on the comment of those that posted before them, another week they could post only a new or novel approach to the subject. The instructor or one of the students moderated some weekly discussions, while others were unstructured. In any case, students were required to read into previous postings in that forum and build on the thoughts of others.
2. As student assignments were posted in their personal web space, activities were arranged so that students were required to read the work of others and engage then authors of the original work in conversation about their writing. Discussions about some topics in particular began fairly early in the class and continued well past the end of the semester. One of the unexpected outcomes of this assignment was that many of the students gained the reputation of being the local expert on a particular technology, and were often referred to as sources of information in discussions of that particular technology.
3. An ongoing course assessment forum was available for students to react to course content, assignments, methodology, etc. These sometimes-lively exchanges were of great assistance in monitoring the course content, the course workload and the expectations for assignments.

The instructor took part to a greater or lesser extent in all of these conversations.

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A community of online learners

In courses with significant online components students often feel they to not have the usual opportunities to make solid acquaintances with their fellow students (acquaintances which students tell us they value greatly during their graduate program as well as after completion of the program). The nature of online courses is that these relationships can become "disconnected"; the much-valued "human connection" is missing. However, previous research does show that a sense of group community can develop in an online class environment (Herrmann, 1998; McDonald & Gibson, 1998). A few tactics were developed to address this concern:

1. A web page with a photo roster was developed on the first night of class. This was linked from the class Blackboard site and students were encouraged to print it or to bring it up on their classroom computers so as to be able to put names and faces together.
2. Students introduced themselves both in class and then electronically on the class discussion forum.
3. A special emphasis was placed on small group discussion in class to allow students to engage each other face-to-face. Group members were rotated so that most students had a chance to meet each other student in the class.

If students hold certain expectations about the kinds and amount of interactions they may have with classmates they may resent the relative lack of face-to-face interactions in an online course. In previous offerings of this course more than one student reflected that "…I felt like I was sitting in a class room with total strangers". The end of term assessment for this revised course seemed to indicate much less concern about levels of interaction. An end of term assessment provided students an opportunity to comment on the quality of interactions with their fellow students. While not all remarks were positive, the majority who chose to comment noted how well they felt they had come to know their colleagues through their online writing. I also noted that at the end of the class that students seemed very familiar and comfortable with one another.

Course assessment

The Communication Technology class has been offered three times in its new form and the first thing that can be said about the class is that it is still very much in the process of development (and always will be). It is very clear that the course requires constant attention, and the students expect quick and ready access to course materials and to the instructor. The course will continue to evolve, both in terms of its content and its methodology.

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Student observations gathered at the end of each offering of the course indicate that significant progress has been made toward the two primary goals of the course redesign: engagement in the content and persuasion toward a belief in the importance and relevancy of the course. Multiple students echoed the comment of one who said, "This course has really opened my eyes to the importance of technology in my career. " Another common thread on evaluation was that the course required them to use technology to complete the course work, and while that was not necessarily always easy for them, it was excellent experience for their future professional growth.

A number of students mentioned the excitement they felt on creating and publishing their own web site, one student saying that "…when I was able to show it [personal web site] to my grandma in Phoenix I was struck by how powerful a communication instrument the web has become." Finally, more than one student mentioned that, even with the lack of face-to-face contact with other students he felt like he got to know more about this fellow students (through online discussion) than he did in his "normal" classes.

The instructors' assessment is equally positive. The design of the course and the logistics of its offering are daunting and far more time consuming than a traditional course. There are the inevitable technology glitches that always accompany this type of course. There is also the necessity of working with students to help them understand the nature and objectives of this course. For many students the methodology of this course is a new experience and they proceed cautiously until the expectations and goals of the course are made crystal clear.

Do all students come away from this course as unequivocal advocates of technology? No, and that is not an expectation of the course. What they do come away with is a language to understand technology and to engage others in discussions about the best and most appropriate uses of technology. Does student performance suffer in this course because of the methodology and the significant use of technology? No, in fact the work students produce for this class far exceeds both the quantity and quality I have ever experienced in this course before this redesign. Is this course easy to develop and teach? No, definitely not. Students have great expectations of access to the instructor and have higher maintenance needs (not only around content, but also around technology and with their group work).

Does this course meet the objectives set for it? It's getting there. Students do come away with a greater understanding of the methods used to communicate using technology. They also come away with a new set of tools to assess and evaluate communication via new technology channels. Clearly, students also are exposed to the notion of learning as conversation: they discuss, describe, debate, cajole and collaborate using electronic channels throughout the course. Finally, in this course, is the medium the message? In large part, I think it is. It requires students to engage technology in a number of ways and to determine their own attitudes towards its use. Through this semester-long immersion in technology students are better equipped to make decisions about the role of technology in their business and in their lives.

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Selling Peace in a Time of War:
The Challenges and Benefits of a Graduate-Level Service-Learning Project

Kathryn Rentz, Ashley Mattingly
University of Cincinnati

This past spring at the University of Cincinnati, we ran our first-ever capstone course for graduating MA students in our Professional Writing and Editing program. The English Department had voted the year before to eliminate the master's exam, which had been based on a reading list for each of the department's MA tracks, and, instead, to require students to take a capstone course in their particular track. In planning this course for the professional writing track, the instructor, Dr. Rentz, decided to arrange a service-learning (SL) partnership with a local nonprofit organization. It would enable the class to combine real-world projects with extensive discussion and reflection, thereby serving as an appropriate review of skills and concepts learned in the program.

As it turned out, this inaugural capstone course was a humdinger. The professor and students had agreed several weeks before the start of spring quarter that we would partner with Cincinnati's Center for Peace Education (CPE), which we'd discovered on a list of volunteer opportunities provided by UC's Center for Community Engagement. Cincinnati was in a healing mode after race riots two years earlier, and we anticipated being able to contribute something to this effort. But two weeks before the course began, the US, with the support of the majority of its citizens, bombed Iraq. The students thus found themselves in the situation of having to advance the mission of a peace organization in a pro-war environment.

In this paper, Dr. Rentz and one of the students, Ms. Mattingly, describe how the class addressed this challenge. Along the way, we also assess the course as an SL experience. We hope others will be encouraged to consider using service-learning courses for their advanced professional writing students, especially as capstone courses.

Course Set-up (Rentz)

The most significant step in preparing the course was meeting with the Executive Director and Development Director of CPE to work out our collaborative arrangement. I described our program, our students, and the particular gains we wanted from the capstone course. While I couldn't promise that the materials we'd prepare would be immediately usable, I could be more confident of this possibility than if I had been arranging a SL partnership for undergraduates. The two CPE executives were, thankfully, thrilled to receive our offer of help. Even better, they were already well established as an organization, having been teaching conflict resolution and related skills in the Cincinnati area, mostly to school-age children, for over 20 years. They were well

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prepared to teach us about their programs and give us a range of writing tasks to choose from. Since our course was to last only one quarter, or 10 weeks, this kind of efficiency was important.

With the partnership established, I turned to developing the course syllabus. I could not plan specific assignments or even know in advance what readings might be relevant, but I did know that I wanted to maximize students' learning from each other while also enabling the capstone grade to reflect each student's knowledge and skill. The syllabus therefore consisted largely of the following guidelines (with the percentages indicating percent of the overall course grade):

- Each student would have primary responsibility for at least one major writing-related task for CPE, to be evaluated both by the instructor and by CPE. (30%)

- Each student would help others in the class by providing information/advice, by giving feedback on written work, and by finding and making available readings relevant to each person's project. (20%)

- Each student would keep a project/class journal in which she would reflect on her work for CPE and make connections between the course/program readings and this professional practice. (30%)

- Students would complete a take-home final exam drawing on their class projects, their reflections/dialog on these, and their two years of learning in the program. (20%)

The course met for one three-hour block each week. Jill Yungbluth, CPE's Executive Director, spent two hours of our first class meeting getting us acquainted with CPE, which included providing us each with a notebook of materials and showing us a video of their training in action. She distributed a list of goals that CPE's board had recently set for the organization, as well as a list of tasks that our students could perform in order to help CPE reach those goals. She continued to be this generous and available throughout the quarter.

By the second class meeting, each student had chosen her major project, and we had agreed as a group to start our class discussions with CPE's website, which one student had chosen to revise as her primary task. The service-learning adventure was underway.

A Student's Viewpoint (Mattingly)

At the beginning of the course, I dreaded the obstacles we would face writing for a peace organization in conservative Cincinnati, a city that for the most part, supported the war in Iraq. Once we learned that CPE was not just a pro-peace organization but instead one that taught conflict resolution and social-emotional skills to students of all kinds, these imagined obstacles became interesting rhetorical challenges. We strove to produce professional written material that promoted CPE in a conservative city but did not violate the organization's values.

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In the end, these challenges contributed to a successful service-learning experience. Below I evaluate the capstone course according to four criteria defined by the Commission on National and Community Service (paraphrased from Waterman, 1997, p. 2). Although this graduate-level course essentially met all of the criteria, we tended to focus less on serving the community and more on developing professional material that improved the organization.

Criterion #1: Students learn through service experiences that meet actual community needs. In our first class, Jill Yungbluth said that extending their reach into area schools and increasing their donor base were CPE's top goals. As we began assessing their materials to help them address these objectives, we realized that that we couldn't just enhance their current documents. The image CPE conveyed in their current material was that of an organization that worked mainly with inner-city children. For CPE to increase their influence in and support from Cincinnati, we felt that they would need to change that image.

To be able to speak for CPE, we first studied the organization. We spent several weeks reading their curricula, reading grants and marketing materials, interviewing the key founder, and essentially immersing ourselves in the appropriate discourse for this community. Although we acquired the community's vocabulary quickly, it took longer to understand the philosophy behind the organization's language and goals. By the middle of the course, we could evaluate what language and marketing strategies were appropriate. For example, when revising language for CPE's material, we chose the word "influence" over the more combative word "impact" and vetoed the suggestion to use the phrase "best in the tri-state" because it conveyed a competitiveness inappropriate to CPE's ethos.

Although we avoided terms and strategies we felt clashed with CPE's philosophy, we also felt we had to make deliberate changes to its public identity. We chose to begin with the center's name, and when we met with Jill Yungbluth and founder Louise Gomer-Bangel, we broached the topic. We feared that an emphasis on "peace" in the current political environment would deter schools from working with the organization. Although Yungbluth and Gomer-Bangel agreed to consider changing the organization's name, we decided that CPE had too much history invested in the name for us to change it without radically changing their identity. Not only would every document and almost every program name change, but also the center would adopt the new associations connected to their new name, and the original mission of the organization—to address schoolchildren's behavior problems with peace training, not military school—would be lost. Opting to make more subtle changes, we performed a balancing act; we built an updated identity for CPE, one that would not violate their history but would appeal to their audience in the current social context.

Appendices A and B, the "before" and "after" homepages for CPE, illustrate the strategies we used. To retain CPE's sense of history and yet still cut across political lines, we emphasized that CPE was more of an educational and less of a peace organization. One subtle yet fundamental change we made along these lines was to revise their logo and use a lighter stroke on "peace" and a heavier stroke for "education." We also revised the opening text to focus on benefits to

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students, schools, and Cincinnati rather than on the mission to spread peace. A third way we emphasized education was that we directly addressed school principals, CPE's primary "customers," by providing a special link on the homepage for them and adding evidence of CPE's likely effectiveness in their schools.

To further increase CPE's appeal, we showed with graphics and text that CPE training could benefit all kinds of students at all kinds of schools. Their web site and promotional videos had shown trainers working predominantly with African-American students, and their current tagline had said, "Building safer schools and communities." The projected message was that CPE worked primarily with inner-city schools troubled by violence. To make the organization more widely appealing, we chose pictures of children from different backgrounds for CPE's homepage and also created a more inclusive tagline, "building better schools for a better world."

As we began shaping CPE's new identity, we wrestled with the ethics of our determining an organization's identity and future goals. We also felt ourselves to be in the midst of a discursive conflict, which one student summarized by writing, "I found that throughout the 10-week course, the tension between the realities of capitalistic marketing and the ideals of a mission-driven organization did not subside." We discussed using popular buzzwords like "conflict management" and "emotional intelligence" to make CPE more marketable to suburban schools and even the business community. However, imagining that Herbert Marcuse would suggest that we were flattening these terms, eliminating the history of the words, and applying them in a superficial manner, we chose to create a professional image without this jargon. By inserting these terms into CPE documents, we would have pushed CPE in an unwanted direction, promised a kind of business training that didn't match CPE's objectives, and ultimately created an unsuitable identity for CPE.

Ultimately, meeting the needs of this nonprofit organization meant looking beyond its immediate needs to strategies for a viable future. This challenge required not only writing and design skills but also well-informed judgment.

Criterion #2: The service experience provides structured time for the students to think, talk, or write about their service activities.
Virtually all our class time was used for sharing weekly journal entries, reflecting on our work, and refining our writing choices. Within this workshop environment, we could agree on the identity we were building for CPE.

The key project that focused this discussion was critiquing the web site. When we began to revise the site and choose language for the text, the collaborative problem-solving process gave everyone a sense of what language was appropriate for the new image, what benefits we would stress, who are target audience was, and what evidence supported our claims. After these discussions, everyone could accurately incorporate these elements into their individual projects.

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We also used the electronic classroom tool Blackboard to exchange ideas and drafts. We posted links to sources on the Internet, distributed information that would help other students with their projects, and maintained a running discussion about joint projects, like rewriting the mission statement and deciding on a tagline. The online discussion was not as productive as the in-class sessions because students checked and responded at different times and to different "threads" of the discussion; it often took a week to resolve minor questions. However, all the students were committed to editing their peers' work, and we all posted drafts of our separate projects and received comments back from other students within days. This commitment to helping each other made the in-class and online discussion productive and made this SL-oriented class different from traditional courses. Rather than competing, we worked together to produce professional work.

Criterion #3: The service experience provides students with opportunities to use newly acquired skills and knowledge in real-life situations in their community.
The professional writing program at UC includes classes in such areas as journalism, promotional writing, grant and report writing, document design, design software, and professional writing theory. We certainly applied our "newly acquired skills and knowledge" to our work for CPE. Here is a list of our projects and the special skills and knowledge that each drew upon:

- **Redesigned homepage.** Primarily used document design skills and audience analysis/theory, including the Aristotelian concepts of *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos*.

- **Revised web site.** Relied heavily on Jakob Nielsen's (2000) principles of usability for web sites; also tapped into Aristotelian precepts to present the information logically, improve CPE's credibility, and connect emotionally with the audience.

- **Formal report assessing CPE's program-evaluation methods.** Drew on our knowledge of this genre and on research skills and an understanding of different types of evidence (e.g., quantitative vs. qualitative).

- **Principals' Package, Donor Materials (consisted of brochures paired with different letters for different audiences).** Used genre theory, persuasion theory/strategies, and document design principles.

Throughout these projects, concepts gained from readings on ethics and discourse informed our work.

In addition, most of the students in the course, being graduate students, had come from professional backgrounds or had already begun their careers. We therefore could synthesize old and new knowledge and skills in this course, which enabled us to strive for a high degree of professionalism.

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Criterion #4: The service experience extends student learning beyond the classroom and helps to foster a sense of caring for others.
The capstone course successfully extended our learning "beyond the classroom." As we practiced and applied our skills, we also interacted with a real client. This situation stretched our analytical skills as we worked to find an image that accurately represented the organization. The political environment at the time also made the projects more complicated. In contrast to in-class projects, where you generally work with a fairly simple scenario or make one up to fit the final product, we wrote within the constraints of an ever-changing context.

This project, however, probably did not do much to "foster the development of a sense of caring for others." Although we interacted with a few people at CPE, we were not involved in their community and school projects. Perhaps if we had interacted more with the students and had been more engaged in the social service of the organization, we would have developed a community-generated "sense of caring."

In a way, though, we did develop a sense of caring—for our peers. We had to value our fellow students' work enough to take the time to carefully critique multiple drafts. As we scrutinized our peers' writing, we also learned to express our suggestions tactfully and respond to critiques gracefully. To maintain the collaborative spirit essential to producing professional work, we had to respect our colleagues' writing and editing.

Overall, our collaboration with CPE succeeded as a capstone course for graduate students largely because of its SL elements. We learned a great deal from our field experience and from each other. Especially valuable was the challenge of having to wrestle with profound issues as we helped CPE plan how to navigate politically treacherous waters. Experience of this kind is excellent preparation for graduate students who want to assume leadership positions in their future careers.

The Instructor's Viewpoint (Rentz)

I share all of Ashley's observations. Here, I'll just offer a few more assessments, drawing on criteria for successful SL proffered by Eyler and Giles (1999).

First, finding an appropriate partner organization is key to any successful SL experience. Eyler and Giles define a quality placement as one in which students "are challenged, feel that they are making a positive contribution, have important levels of responsibility, and receive input and appreciation from supervisors in the field" (p. 33). Certainly the Center for Peace Education met these criteria. I'd add that it is probably easier to arrange a quality placement when one is preparing an SL experience for advanced students, when one can be relatively confident that they will produce high-quality work for the organization.

In describing the intellectual benefits of SL, Eyler and Giles point out that the great advantage of good SL is that it forces students to contend with "ill-structured problems"—that is, problems

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that “are complicated and are embedded in a complex social context.” SL helps students to recognize such problems, to develop the “ability to evaluate conflicting information and expert views,” and to understand “that there is no simple or definitive solution” (p. 16). In her Outstanding Researcher address at ABC’s 2002 meeting, Charlotte Thralls made much the same point, commenting that SL gives students a “fully articulated” situation to contend with—one that “deeply immerse[s]” them in “actual situations” that defy codification.

As it turned out, the tricky political environment for our course really pushed the students to extend their problem-solving ability and draw upon the resources they’d gained in the program, both theoretical and applied. And, in the end, we had to accept that our solutions were likely to be temporary and only partially successful. I’d advise other teachers thinking of arranging SL for advanced students to embrace situations that present serious rhetorical difficulties, both to give students challenging projects and to allow them to experience the realization that ill-structured problems are always only provisionally solved.

Like virtually every other SL expert, Eyler and Giles (1999) stress the critical importance of reflection to the students’ learning (see chap. 4 in particular). I was thrilled with the kind of insights that the reflective components of the course drew from these students. Their final exams turned out to be just as comprehensive in nature as the old exams had been, but with better thinking and better use of the program’s contents.

Eyler and Giles also point out that “doing real work” leads students to develop more “collegial” relations with their teacher and other adults (p. 42). This was certainly the case for us; I was often just as challenged as the students were, and I offered my ideas in the same spirit they did—which is to say, with the preface “What if we did this?” I found this kind of problem-solving with advanced students to be extremely enjoyable and rewarding.

As Ashley has suggested, though, our SL experience yielded only minimal gains in terms of “civic responsibility” (Eyler & Giles, 1999, p. 12), and the students also can’t be said to have experienced the kind of personal “transformation” often associated with successful SL (pp. 129-50). Perhaps our specific SL arrangement accounts for these results, but I suspect that any advanced students in professional writing would tend to see an SL course as a rehearsal more for being a professional writer than for being a good citizen or well-developed human being. Almost none of the presented or published work on SL in professional writing recounts experiences with graduate students (see, for example, Dubinsky, 2000, 2002; Graves, 2001; Rehling, 2000; Stevens, 2001; Tucker, McCarthy, Hoxmeier, & Lenk, 1998). The one article that does, by Sapp and Crabtree (2002), refers to individual internships, not a whole SL-based course. It could be that, on the graduate level, especially in a capstone course, SL will of necessity yield more professional/intellectual than social/personal benefits.

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Conclusion

Here are Jill Yungbluth's concluding words on our project (personal communication, 6 June 2003):

> This partnership was a productive experience. CPE gained fresh language and professional material that have already been successful at drawing attention to our program. The class took an honest look from the outside into CPE and dedicated themselves to our areas of need. Each student expressed a genuine commitment to creating a project that CPE could easily implement. I am extremely impressed with the quality of each project.

The students evaluated the course positively as well, one student commenting that it was the "perfect bridge" from graduate school to the professional world. We encourage those of you with advanced professional-writing programs to consider implementing SL on the graduate level, particularly as the capstone experience. And don't shy away from seemingly intractable communication problems—they might just provide the best learning experiences of all.

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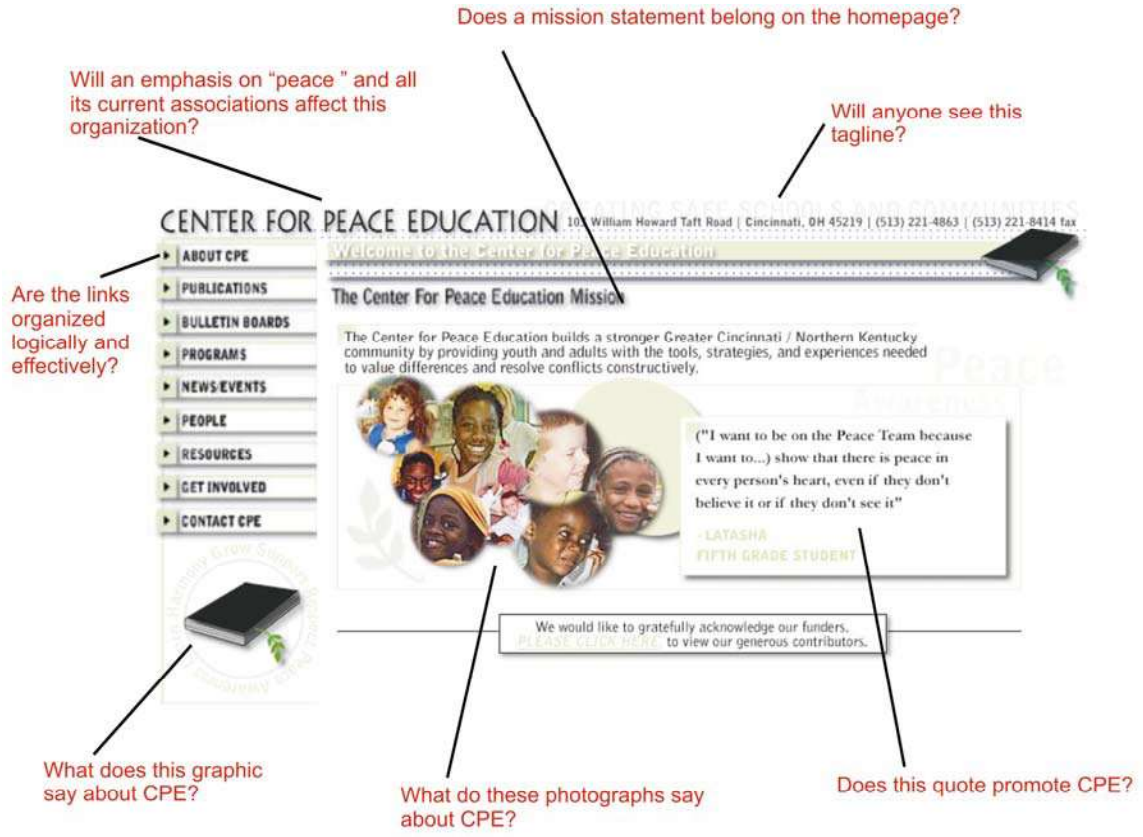
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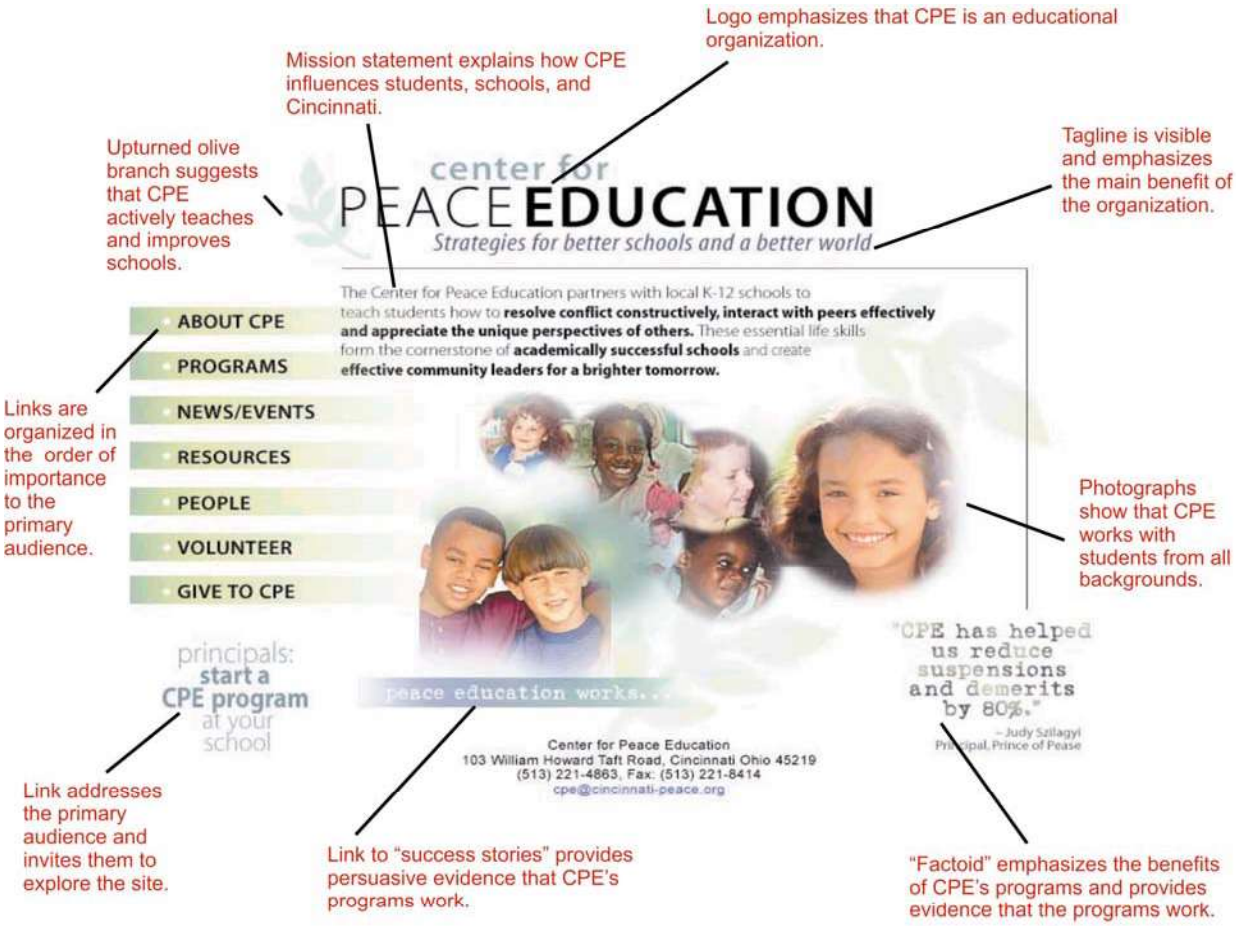
Appendix A
Original CPE Homepage



Central Question: Will this homepage make the target audience, school principals, search the rest of CPE's Web site?

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Appendix B
Revised CPE Homepage



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Course Evaluations vs. Assessment in Business Communication: Insights into Teaching Effectiveness

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Introduction

In the last two decades, American higher education has embraced student evaluation as a crucial criterion when evaluating teaching. Although the manner in which teachers are evaluated varies across disciplines, departments throughout higher education—from humanities to hard sciences—include student evaluation as a means of critiquing teaching ability. However, despite dozens of research studies on the validity and benefits of student evaluations, there remains little agreement on whether evaluations adequately measure teaching effectiveness.

More recently, assessment tools such as Flashlight provide ongoing feedback to faculty both to change behavior and to guide assignment structure by establishing links between instructional objectives, best practices, classroom activities, and expected outcomes.

This paper addresses questions about the validity of student evaluations of teachers, the effectiveness of the evaluations in promoting improved teaching, and Flashlight as an alternative to improving teaching. The methodology used consists of a review of the evaluation literature and an introduction to Flashlight, a new assessment tool. Findings include a discussion of the validity of student evaluations and their impact on improving teaching effectiveness. Flashlight is then introduced as an instrument of feedback to teachers to improve their teaching effectiveness. This paper argues that measurements of learning that go beyond graded assignments and focus on the learning process should be gathered *along with* student evaluations (perceptions).

Types of student evaluations and their purpose

Evaluations provide feedback to faculty members when students offer their interpretations of teaching effectiveness (d'Appollonia & Abrami, 1997). Virtually every educational institution in America uses these evaluations as a means to improve teaching. In addition, these evaluations play an integral role in decisions about which professors receive promotions and tenure. In general, a volunteer administers the evaluation instead of the instructor. Evaluation can be done at different stages during the semester.

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Early evaluation
This type of evaluation is usually performed after first two or three weeks of the semester. Students may be asked about some points they like about a course and course changes they would recommend. Anonymity is maintained, demonstrating the teacher's interest in improving the course.

Summative evaluation
The widely-accepted and most-used form of student evaluation, summative evaluation usually occurs at the end of the semester. It provides quantitative and qualitative data about the course. A scaled response is recommended to ensure precision of the evaluation. This is generally performed prior to a final examination or before a final paper is graded. Students usually have 20 to 30 minutes to complete the anonymous evaluation.

Student perceptions of the instructor and the course content can vary widely between the early and the summative evaluation leading to validity and effectiveness issues.

Evaluation history

Since the 1920s, American universities and colleges have incorporated student evaluations of teachers (SET) into their academic review process. (Apollonia & Abrami, 1997) The practice initiated an outpouring of books and research on the subject, examining the validity and effectiveness of student response to a teacher and a course. The research on SETs reached a fever pitch in the 1970s and '80s when student ratings endured extensive scrutiny. After exhaustive studies on the effectiveness and validity of evaluations, researchers generally agreed that student evaluations were a valid tool for measuring teaching ability and worthy of widespread use (Greenwald 1997). The decline in publication of student-evaluation articles would appear to prove that the debate over student evaluations ended; after a high of 71 articles on student ratings validity between 1976 and 1980, the number of SET-related articles dropped to eight between 1991 and 1995 (Greenwald). However, researchers and academicians remain at odds over the general efficacy of student evaluation of teachers (McKeachie, 1997).

Different statistical analyses of past studies on student evaluation generated diametrically different conclusions (McKeachie, 1997). Some analyses concluded that evaluations favored certain teachers who possessed specific traits, including charisma and organization. Alternative analyses determined that evaluations offered a valid measure of global teaching abilities. Others questioned how valid SETs could be if biasing variables—ranging from course size, grading leniency and how an educational institution defines teaching effectiveness—were not accounted for (Greenwald, 1997). Conversely, other studies dismissed these variables as statistically insignificant, having little impact on the evaluation process.

The disparity in research conclusions makes it difficult to ascertain the best ways to administer student evaluations and interpret results.

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Variables in the evaluation process

The overall benefits of student evaluations depend on how different variables are interpreted by researchers. Some analyses determined that the validity and relevance of student evaluations are important despite the influence of variables. Other studies suggest that variables impact the validity of student evaluations and, in turn, the benefit evaluations can provide teachers. The following discussion reviews the significant variables in the evaluation process and reviews different research studies and interpretations of research data.

Grading leniency

The most prominent bias in student ratings of teaching effectiveness is the evaluation the student receives from the teacher in the form of grade (Schwab, 1975). Numerous studies have attempted to examine the effects of grades on student evaluations of instructor effectiveness. Some of them found a negative relationship or no relationship between grades and ratings, whereas others have found positive relationships. In multiple studies based on the same data, researchers agreed that student ratings are valid but that contextual variables such as grading leniency biases student evaluation levels; it is the level of bias that is debated. Some researchers believe that leniency biases student evaluations to the degree where validity is compromised (Greenwald & Gillmore, 1997). On the other hand, researchers like Abrami and d'Apollonia (1997) argue that, to an extent, grades reflect how well students master a subject since higher grades correlate to higher understanding by students. The direct correlation between higher grades and teaching effectiveness offsets minor biases in grading leniency; therefore, easier grading by professors has minimal impact on evaluation validity. The only time grading leniency could play a significantly biasing role in student evaluations is if student learning and good grades do not causally affect one another. Only in extreme cases, McKeachie argues, where a professor intentionally inflates grades to garner the good-will of students, would a statistical correction be in order. These disparate opinions are based on alternate interpretations of the same evaluation research.

Teacher personality traits

An analysis by Wilbert J. McKeachie questioned the detail involved in student ratings: whether evaluations form an overall impression of teaching quality or if they are limited to measuring certain traits which influence how well students perceive their teaching. Some researchers believe that evaluation of teachers — like the art of teaching itself — inherently measures individual traits that professors own that make them more or less effective teachers; others believe that evaluations tend to provide a global picture of teaching effectiveness, with individual teaching traits serving as secondary indicators to the overall quality of being a good teacher (Greenwald, 1997).

Colleague ratings of teacher personality have been shown to relate to student evaluations of teaching, with an effective teacher perceived as showing leadership, objectivity, low anxiety, and

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extraversion (Murray, 1978). Murray also identified specific behaviors such as enthusiasm, clarity, and rapport, which were positively related to student evaluations of overall teaching effectiveness.

The way academic institutions use evaluations impacts how they would interpret and implement student evaluations of teachers. For example, most academic committees merely choose to promote or not promote a faculty member. McKeachie (1997) argues that committees should emphasize a more information-rich approach to using evaluations to better incorporate the nuances of teaching in the evaluative process and provide additional feedback from evaluations to faculty.

Course size

Research has repeatedly proven that the smaller the class, the higher a student rates a teacher (Greenwald & Gillmore, 1997). Although researchers agree that course size influences how students evaluate teachers, it is unclear whether student evaluation results should be modified to accommodate the statistically significant bias. Some researchers believe that adjusting results based on course size could create unwanted results, including lowered professor morale (d'Apollonia & Abrami, 1997). Professors who teach larger lecture courses might feel inferior knowing their evaluations are adjusted when compared to other professors. McKeachie (1997) argues that there is no need to norm evaluations based on course size since the goal is to measure teaching effectiveness, not compare teachers.

Discipline

Academic discipline influences how students evaluate teachers. Art students repeatedly rate instructors higher than science students, and science student evaluations own a higher validity, according to many 1970s studies (Centra & Creech, 1976; Feldman, 1978; Neumann & Neumann, 1985). The reasons for the disparity, however, remain unclear. The art students may give teachers undeservedly high ratings; however art achievement tests might be under-evaluating what the students have learned (d'Apollonia & Abrami, 1997). In the science case, student evaluations may truly reflect teaching effectiveness. Also, if the goal is to measure and assess teaching effectiveness, then comparing and contrasting courses across disciplines is a moot point (McKeachie, 1997).

Student mindset

The initial attitude a student takes to a course clearly influences how he or she evaluates teachers. Students who feel challenged by a course and who have interest in the course topic tend to rate teachers higher in evaluations (Marsh & Rocche, 1997). The many variables associated with evaluations clearly influence the derived benefits.

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Evaluation benefits, limitations, and validity

Both students and faculty agree that student evaluations provide an important and irreplaceable function in the evaluation of instructors (Sojka, Gupta, & Deeter-Schmelz, 2002). Several professors from a mid-sized Midwestern university noted that teaching methods and course content changed as a direct result of student evaluations (Sojka et al., 2002).

However, researchers disagree over student evaluations as a reliable and beneficial teaching assessment tool. According to McKeachie (1997), student evaluations specifically target teacher effectiveness based on student outcomes — whether students learn what was expected of them in the course. The *process* of learning is overlooked in student evaluations since the educational approach is overlooked in summative evaluations.

Whether a teacher adheres to the traditional lecture-based classroom or attempts alternative learning devices is not measurable by student evaluations (McKeachie, 1997). Further, traditional, passive teaching methods like lecturing tend to profit from student evaluations. More effective alternative forms of education, like group activities and student-led exercises, receive poorer scores on student evaluations because they are not preferred by students. Thus traditional instructors "get high ratings for teaching in less than ideal ways," McKeachie noted.

Alternative evaluation/assessment methods

Amid the controversies over the validity of student evaluations, additional criteria are being implemented to assess courses. At Arizona State University, the Business School generated a new course based predominantly on intermittent student assessment. Student abilities in various areas were assessed through testing. Faculty then developed a personalized course curriculum based on a student's abilities. Mastery of a given academic skill depended on assessment tests administered throughout the semester (Murranka, 1999). Grambling University's College of Business required faculty to generate an objective-based syllabus. By clarifying learning objectives, overall college curriculum could be more easily evaluated and streamlined (Cunningham, 1998). California State University, Northridge, surveyed business and economics department faculty to assess writing across curricula. Many teachers expressed concern over how student writing was taught, assessed and graded. Some reported assigning easier writing standards to accommodate poor student skills. Others expressed concern over an inability to teach writing adequately and instead focused on course content. Recommendations based on the survey included creating interdisciplinary, team-taught courses, developing writing and assessment standards for upper-division courses, and training faculty to integrate writing into coursework (Plutsky, 2001).

In each of these cases, administrators sought out assessment means other than student evaluations. The recent trend should serve as a caveat to those who believe student evaluations can be used to meet assessment goals. Despite an overall support for student evaluations by

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faculty and students (Sujka, et al., 2002), recent research indicates that they are inappropriate as a course assessment tool. Individual teachers, then, are left in a quandary: research on student evaluations remains split over its effectiveness as an assessment tool but the research into beneficial and cost-effective assessment procedures is relatively new and limited is scope .

Flashlight assessment

To develop and expand assessment procedures, Steve Ehermann, Director, The Flashlight Program and Vice President, The TLT Group developed the Flashlight assessment process to assess the benefits of technology in education ("Learn about the TLT Group", 2003). It soon became obvious that the process had enormous value to faculty who wished to learn more about the operation of their own courses and how effective various practices were in achieving planned outcomes. The Flashlight process involves a series of standard surveys and interview forms administered to students throughout a course. The forms are short, non-intimidating and focus on the process of learning. Specifically, the questions determine whether a teaching process or practice generates a desirable outcome. In addition to determining whether an educational outcome *occurred*, Flashlight gathers data to determine *how* and *why* the outcome occurred i.e., did the practices used in class elicit the desired outcomes.

Flashlight offers many appealing features of interest to those in the assessment and program evaluation field since it focuses attention on choices about learning and teaching and the cost effectiveness of technology. Furthermore, Flashlight focuses attention on practices that tend to foster the achievement of learning outcomes rather than the near impossible task of directly measuring changes in learning. The examination of how a learning outcome occurs is significant at a time when higher education is examining ways to incorporating active learning strategies that deviate from the traditional lecture format. Finally, Flashlight offers an evaluation tool kit that is easy to understand and use by faculty and staff.

The Flashlight assessment process

Flashlight combines assessment of student abilities with brief questionnaires seeking a response to the educational process or task. Short questionnaires can be administered to students while a specific educational technique is being administered. As few as four or five questions can be asked to students on a given Flashlight survey. Students can comment on whether a given technique truly attains its educational goal. Further, students must explain why a technique helps or hinders them in attaining a given educational goal. Students can be asked whether they had experience with a given educational technique, if they had adequate time to complete the expected task and how a given technique compared to either alternative or traditional practices. These inquiries allow a more complex investigation into a teaching practice. In addition to student surveys, Flashlight can further incorporate the learning process into assessment through instructor observation and student focus groups. ("Flashlight Program for the Study and Improvement of Educational Uses of Technology", 2003)

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Flashlight allows instructors to focus on a specific educational technique by querying students on the task at hand and how such a task serves a course objective. Furthermore, surveys make students feel as if they are part of the educational process; instead of working under the seemingly authoritarian decisions made by professors, students are empowered by participation in the learning process.

Consider the following hypothetical example: A professor teaches a business writing course. In the past, her course required students to complete a business report individually. She decides to incorporate group learning into her curriculum, requiring students to collaborate and interact with one another to generate a group-based business report. Student surveys could assist this professor in learning how effective group work can be. Through observation and assessment, she can determine whether group-written reports are better than individually written reports of past years. Further, post-course student evaluations would describe whether students perceived that group work helped students obtain the necessary skills to write a quality business report.

Given the instruments of coursework assessment and student evaluations, the professor would have a clear idea of whether the educational outcome of improved business writing occurred. However, the reasons for the outcome — whether successful or unsuccessful — remain unknown. For this example, consider a class that fails to significantly improve its business writing after an in-class emphasis on group work; report grades and student assessment both should confirm this result.

By incorporating Flashlight into the course, the professor would gain a better understanding of why such an outcome occurred. Assessment during the process of group work could help determine why students did not improve. Specifically, it would determine whether the technique proved problematic or if other variables generated such a result. Surveys of students could garner vital information that would offer insight into the process of group work. Students can comment on their familiarity with group work, if they enjoyed group work, whether they had adequate time to complete the task (and the achieve the learning outcome), and compare group learning with more traditional learning techniques like individually completed reports.

Flashlight results could unequivocally influence a professor's decision to embrace or reject an alternative mode of teaching. Consider a teacher who drastically changes a course to focus on group-based learning only to receive mediocre scores and lukewarm reaction on student evaluations. This instructor might abandon the alternative instruction based on the outcome. However, a Flashlight assessment could offer additional data that could significantly alter an instructor's mindset. Imagine in-class surveys that revealed students enjoyed and benefited from collaborative assignments, but students reported a lack of time needed to complete a satisfactory report. A teacher would be far more likely to embrace group work if she knew why students appeared to be failing to meet a learning outcome.

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Summary comparison of Flashlight and student evaluations

1. Unlike student evaluations, which commonly occur at the end of a course, Flashlight assessment is an ongoing process, developing continually as a course progresses. Because of its fluid nature, it offers many benefits compared to the static, one-time use of student evaluations.

2. Unlike student evaluations, which attempt to determine student satisfaction, Flashlight focuses attention on *choices* about learning and teaching that generate favorably received outcomes. The assessment moves beyond whether a learning outcome is attained; it examines how an outcome is attained or not attained. By examining process versus product, Flashlight can be implemented to study new and evolving technologies used in learning in addition to traditional in-class practices. The example argues in favor of including more and better formative assessments in the teaching process as a supplement to, or as an offset to, course evaluations.

3. The examination of student responses to alternative educational techniques and approaches allows students to evaluate curriculum in concert with a teacher's characteristics. Research reveals that alternative active learning tends to be more beneficial to students. However, the personality traits of some teachers are arguably more conducive to lecture-based education; some educators are gifted lecturers. In Flashlight, teachers can compare and contrast styles to determine which **mode** of learning best serves the objectives of the course and the needs of the student.

4. Lastly, Flashlight surveys shift the focus from a teacher's abilities to a mode of learning. When students evaluate a course, they are inherently viewed as evaluating the teacher. In many ways, this is true; the evaluations serve as a critical deciding factor when universities promote faculty (McKeachie, 1997). By shifting the focus away from the instructor and toward learning, Flashlight vastly reduces the potential of variables like teacher style and grading leniency to influence student reaction.

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Online Business Communication: Activity Systems and Conflict Resolution

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When students encounter conflict in a classroom setting, they have the benefit of seeing the discussion participants, hearing their tone of voice, and sensing the atmosphere within the room. If the conflict cannot be handled by the students, the professor may enter the conversation and attempt to resolve the conflict through some type of mediation. By contrast, when communicating online, writers can have difficulty managing conflict because all the sensory activities mentioned above are absent; instead, students are left with a diminished set of familiar strategies for negotiating solutions to often-complex discussion questions.

When conflict arises in an online classroom, the activity system of the course has to be kept in some sort of balance in order for it to continue functioning. According to David Russell (1997), an activity system is

> any ongoing, object-directed, historically conditioned, dialectically structured, tool-mediated human interaction. Some examples are a family, a religious organization, an advocacy group, a political movement, a course of study, a school, a discipline, a research laboratory, and a profession. These activity systems are mutually (re)constructed by participants historically, using certain tools and not others, including discursive tools such as speech sounds and inscriptions. The activity system is the basic unit of analysis for both groups' and individuals' behavior, in that it analyzes the way concrete tools are used to mediate the motive (direction, trajectory) and the object (the *problem space* or the *focus*) of behavior and changes in it. (p. 510)

By the time conflict occurs, ideally the activity system has been established by the students and professor and ensures order: for example, the discussions involve a certain pattern of turn taking among the students and the professor, assignments are released and discussed based on a hyper-linked calendar, and peer interaction takes place using particular codes of conduct. Despite these patterns of order, instances take place during the course that affect the activity system and potentially throw it off balance; when that happens, participants within the system, recognizing

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certain patterns of communication as somewhat abnormal to the system, may attempt to stabilize the activity through normalizing discourse.

This paper (1) analyzes the use of normalizing discourse in an online business communication course within the context of distributed learning theory and activity theory and (2) proposes that such strategies can be analyzed and taught to students to facilitate conflict resolution when sensitive topics, such as ethics, are being discussed online. Such study is necessary because, even though such "informal problem solving" might seem relatively insignificant when compared to the context of the entire course's operations, studying even small problem solving strategies is important to understanding how problem solving occurs in general (Mangrum, Fairley, & Wieder, 2001, p. 317), a valuable skill for business communicators. These types of strategies have typically been "unnoticed and unexplored" (Mangrum, Fairley, & Wieder, 2001, p. 317), particularly in online environments. In addition, I propose that the normalizing discourse plays a role in stabilizing a course's activity system that may have been upset by "inappropriate" responses made by students when discussing ethical issues.

Both activity theory and distributed learning theory are useful for analyzing communication in online courses because they allow for discussion of technology tools, characteristics of distance education (such as computers mediating instruction for students who may never meet each other or the teacher face to face), and holistic approaches for addressing complicated learning environments. The holistic nature of the theories encourages an analysis of various dynamics within social learning environments and the way in which those dynamics work together, rather than a focus on only a few aspects of those environments. Here, although the main focus will be on normalizing discourse strategies that students use, those strategies will be contextualized within the larger domain of the course and reveal how normalizing discourse as a tool in itself can facilitate inquiry within an activity system. What follows is a literature review that focuses on activity theory and distributed learning theory, an analysis of students' responses to other students' comments that threaten to upset the course's activity system, and then recommendations for improving conflict resolution strategies in online communication.

Literature Review

Whether we teach an online class or communicate virtually in the workplace, promoting effective communication strategies is essential for successful communities to develop. While activity systems evolve and change over time as groups develop and maintain identities, we can promote more positive communication by teaching effective strategies early. Winsor writes that "in systems of distributed cognition, knowledge is communally maintained and unstable so that communication is central to its ongoing creation and maintenance" (2001, p. 8). Studying activity

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systems and the tools used to maintain them is the first step in ensuring that effective communication takes place.

Activity Theory

The value of using activity theory for this analysis is that activity theory allows for a flexible definition of an activity system based on researchers' purposes, it explains motivation for participants' learning the norms of the system, and it encompasses tool use and analysis. Within this discussion, normalizing discourse becomes a specific focus for tool analysis within the activity system of the course. Researchers can define activity systems based on the researchers' goals and focuses for study; therefore, an entire course could be considered an activity system, as could simply a small group's interactions, depending on what the researcher wants to analyze. The system is not static but evolves and changes over time, based on participants' needs and reactions to other stimuli within the system. The evolution might be seen as having varying degrees of positive and negative outcomes. Often, studying the problems and negative outcomes within an activity system can yield information that allows corrections to be made so that the system can run more smoothly and be reshaped (Spinuzzi, 1999; Winsor, 1999). Other times, "negative" outcomes might not be corrected but simply move toward a different type of activity or "paradigm shift." From the researcher's perspective, it might be difficult to perceive, at first, which outcome might be more desirable, a "corrected" system, or simply a different one. The two may be, in effect, very similar, depending on the activities being accomplished. An awareness of the evolving nature of activity systems allows researchers to study specifically what social actions cause changes to take place. The changes themselves reveal important characteristics of communication, for example, that are important enough to accomplish change. Studying these changes allows researchers to distill concepts for future application to other environments for facilitating positive change. In this case, the study of normalizing discourse resulted in strategies that can be more explicitly taught to online business communication students.

Because activity systems involve interaction that is tool-mediated (Russell, 1997; Cole & Engestrom, 1997; Winsor, 2001; Winsor, 1999; Russell, 2002), tools themselves can become the focus of inquiry within analysis of activity systems. Studying the tools and the way actors interact with them can highlight ways communication may or may not be working within a system. For example, in the present analysis, the students used the computer-mediated tool of the online discussion board to communicate about certain ethical issues. The students' communication through this tool enabled certain students to stabilize the course's activity system when comments were made that did not contribute effectively to the class discussion. At another level, the normalizing students' postings themselves could be studied as tools that helped accomplish the goal of allowing communication to continue regarding the ethical issues in the course. And the disruptive postings can be considered tools as well, tools which were used to

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disrupt the discussion and thus turn the system of communication toward a more negative outcome.

Participants' facility with tools contributes to the degree to which students become assimilated to the culture of the course. Activity systems connect closely with concepts of culture that develop along with them (Cole, Engestrom, & Vasquez, 1997; Chaiklin & Lave, 1996; Lave & Wenger, 1993); sometimes, particular cultural concepts may have been in place before the system developed. In the process of learning to communicate with their online classroom peers, students have to learn (and create, to some degree) the structure of what is considered appropriate dialogue within the course (Tullar & Kaiser, 2000). The instructor of the course, in setting the stage for communication by providing discussion questions and guidelines for communication, participates in creating a "cognitive map" (Tullar & Kaiser, 2000, p. 409) for discussion within the course. Lave and Wenger call these concepts a "culture of practice" that any participants have to learn in order to participate within a particular group (1993). Without this cultural knowledge and practice, membership in an activity system cannot occur, and disidentification can take place (Hodges, 1998). Because there is such a close connection between culture and participation in activity, the learning that results can be called "situated" (Lave & Wenger, 1993; Chaiklin & Lave, 1996; Freedman & Adam, 1996): the learning is contextualized within the environment in which it takes place, and the environment can be broadly defined to include physical, social, and individual aspects. In the analysis of student postings that follow, students invented normalizing discourse strategies as tools that enabled them to participate in the culture of the course. Refusing to implement these cultural tools resulted in less effective communication and therefore less effective participation.

Distributed Learning Theory

Activity theory relates well to distributed learning theory, which Winsor emphasizes when she states her belief, based on her research, that distributed cognition is " . . .the rule rather than the exception in human activity" (2001, p. 5). The connection between activity and distributed cognition occurs because

> [d]istributed cognition treats thinking not as an action that takes place wholly inside an individual's head but rather as an activity that is distributed among the individual, other people, the physical environment, and the tools the person uses, including language and such language structures as genres. Distributed cognition thus includes collaboration . . . . (p. 6)

Distributed cognition encompasses both the individual and the social, so it provides for a broader span of study than social constructionist theories might (Murphy, 2001). The following

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characteristics of distributed cognition—focus on physical environments, tools, and the individual as well as the social environment—compose a theory that works well when trying to analyze and explain the communication phenomena that occur in online courses—a distributed learning environment (Lea & Nicoll, 2002; Walker, 2003). The variety of physical environments involved (such as student locations during participation in the course, computer interfaces), the tools used (assignments, virtual libraries, communication tools for collaborating with others in the class), and individual and social learning processes (a student attempting to respond individually to a discussion board message that addresses students in the entire class) create a complex learning environment that provides rich research opportunities for the field of business communication.

Normalizing Discourse within an Online Business Communication Course

Applying the theories of distributed cognition and activity theory to the analysis of specific discussion messages emphasizes the ways students implement normalizing discourse to stabilize a course's activity system. I define "normalizing discourse" here as a type of language repair[1] (Crystal, 1997) that several students used in the online class to help stabilize online discussion messages that contributed tension to the class. "Tension" is defined as the expression of opinions in overly harsh ways that would hinder the free expression of ideas from other students. This normalizing discourse appeared in response to controversial opinions voiced about ethical issues; it served to steer the course's activity back to a more positive state where other students could feel free to voice more moderate opinions that helped facilitate academic discussion, rather than stifle it.

In addition, the discussion board itself is an activity system within the larger activity system of the course. Here, each individual student acts as a social participant constructing knowledge through discussing the questions posted for each unit. No one correct answer exists for the questions, so the students construct knowledge through their dialogues. While the knowledge "product" is important, the process of constructing the knowledge is important, as well. The normalizing discourse strategies students employ while communicating on the discussion board are tools of distributed learning: each student individually constructs a message, but the messages collectively construct meaning through the discussion board. How that meaning is constructed and how well it is received and responded to by the discussion board participants affect the activity of constructing knowledge in the course; the process determines whether and how meaningfully knowledge is constructed.

The title of the course under discussion is Professional Communication I, a junior-level course taught as part of the Regents Online Degree Program, a statewide program that requires asynchronous learning. Most students taking the online course are taking it as a requirement for a non-professional/non-business communication degree. The only means of communication that

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students have is online communication, unless students agree to call or meet outside the realm of the class. The main means of communication through the course interface are email or online discussions. Students are required each week to respond to discussion questions from each unit via the discussion board, and students are encouraged to enter into dialogue with each other's postings to imitate, in some form, a face-to-face discussion that would take place in a classroom. The volume of these postings and the quality of them contributed to my decision to analyze the postings as a qualitative research strategy for this analysis. The discussions are the closest approximation to oral, classroom discourse that occurs during the semester, and the students' responses to the course's concepts are captured in this recordable, transcript-like format, making them convenient to analyze. In addition, because the discussion postings are the place where various ideas from the course converge, it is an ideal place to analyze the shifting perspectives and dialogue that comprise this class as an activity system. The tool of normalizing discourse emerges most effectively in the online discussion board environment.

When I taught this course in the spring of 2003, the course included 12 weeks and 12 units. Unit 2 focused on ethics. At this time in the semester, students did not know each other very well at all: the class, as a type of large team working together to accomplish the goals of the course, had not had a chance to go through the stages of team formation basics (Vik, 2001, p. 115), a fact which made the use of the normalizing discourse more awkward, as conflict was ensuing among participants who didn't know each other very well. Several discussion questions were posted at the end of each unit to help generate discussion, such as questions about relative ethics and ways ethics apply in the workplace. In addition, because recent business news had provided many opportunities to discuss ethical issues, more questions usually came up spontaneously on the discussion board, and students responded to them.

During this particular semester, two discussions occurred that began to conflict with the course's activity system in particularly relevant ways. The "norm" for the course's activity is for a student to post a question or opinion, followed by other students' responses. The goal of the responses is to generate more discussion in a collaborative, academic context, not to stifle the activity of the discussion. The postings that disrupted the activity of the course received normalizing responses from other students that accomplished the task of re-orienting the discussion back to the collaborative, academic discussion, rather than the somewhat harsh communication of overly personal opinion.

I am categorizing the normalizing discourse that occurred during these two discussions into three types, based on my observations: complimentary, generalizing, and agreeing with part or all of the controversial comment. Below is an analysis of the two discussions and the students' normalizing responses that followed, contextualized within the theories of distributed cognition and activity theory. Both of these theories illustrate the importance of tool use and its place within a developing culture of practice, a development illustrated in the analysis of students'

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postings. In addition, the theories support tool use as a mode of inquiry for analyzing a particular activity system. The purpose of this analysis was to discover what strategies students use to stabilize online course discussions so that the purpose of the activity (in this case, answering the discussion questions) could continue. Identifying strategies for facilitating online communication can benefit researchers, teachers, and online communicators who have vested interests in productive online communication from their various perspectives.

Discussion 1—Relative Ethics and the Workplace

The question under discussion was "Are ethical principles relative, based on the [workplace] situation?" Part of the history behind this question involved the connections between religion and ethics, since one of the supplementary readings from the class textbook (Reep, 2002) discussed that connection.

"Dan" made one of the first responses to this question. Below is a transcript of his response, as well as several other students' responses[2]:

> *Dan:* Religion and ethics go hand in hand for me. I cannot do things [at work] if they are not right. I think they [people who do not practice the same religion as Dan's] can go play in the traffic and deal with it. I am not changing my beliefs, nor am I going to keep them quiet.
>
> *Ted:* You're right, Dan, in your description. I have stepped into conversations [at work] where family issues, not religion, have been the key. Religion is a focal point in many people's lives, and they can become quite upset when something is taken out of context. So careful picking of words and intended message is important to one's gaining receptive understanding.
>
> *Sara:* I have found this ethics and religion discussion to be very interesting and thought provoking. I tend to be very black and white in the area of religion, and so I hold some pretty strong views. I found an interesting website on this topic that I wanted to bring into the discussion. The website article is entitled, "Why Study Ethics in the Context of Technical Writing?" The article details two different ways that ethics is utilized in the writing of technical documents. In essence, there are different arenas of thought that govern the use of ethics in writing. This article addresses many of the concepts brought up in this particular discussion. I don't believe that a person's ethics and religion can be separated from their writings.
>
> I know that we each hold different views about right and wrong and ethics, and I am thankful that we are each able to discuss them in an open format. It helps me to

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understand why different viewpoints are held when I can read the opinions and beliefs of others.

We can probably all recall a time when someone who was in the right spoke or wrote in such a way as to alienate those who even agreed with them. This is when the three parts of rhetoric [ethos, pathos, and logos] become important. Not only is it important to be credible and say credible things; it is also important to know your audience when saying them.

Jane: While I agree with Sara that the concept of ethics should be taught, I disagree that ethics and religion are totally dependent on one another. I am not a religious person; I don't go to church, and I do not subscribe to any organized religious doctrine. I do, however, think of myself as an ethical person. It is entirely possible to be a good human being, to interact honestly and sincerely with other people, and live an honorable life without practicing religion. I have no quarrel with anyone who finds their peace of mind and happiness through organized religion; if that works for you, great. But I believe it's my right as an American to tend to my own spiritual health as I see fit.

Ted: This seems like one of those good discussions where people get into deep feelings without leaving being mad at each other. You both have spoke on topics that you feel quite strong about, and that is great. I agree with both of you. I feel that religion supports and builds strong ethics and those who are not involved in an organized religion may also be strengthening themselves. I like these open forum discussions when you can learn more about people and still be friends.

Jane: I agree, Ted. It's fun to engage in an exchange of ideas without becoming combative. We can agree or disagree; it's interesting to hear other points of view in a positive constructive dialogue.

Sara: Hey, Jane. I totally agree with you that you have a right to tend to your spiritual health any way that you want to. Your freedom to believe as you wish ensures my freedom.

Dan and Jane's first comments express their personal opinions very clearly without inviting any comments or opinions from others. While such expression is admirable, it doesn't really accomplish the purpose of the discussion board, which is to engage in a dialogue and construct knowledge through that activity system. In addition, the responses don't really address the discussion questions, which were designed to generate dialogue by being intentionally general and focusing on work environments. Because these two students' responses don't invite interaction

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or disagreement from other students, they threaten the activity system of the course by potentially disrupting the discussions.

Ted uses the tool of the discussion board to bring these students' responses back in line with the goal of discussion through the use of agreement and generalizing. In Ted's first response to Dan, he agrees with Dan's connection of ethics and religion and then goes on to connect family issues and ethics. Ted also discusses generally the concept of context to a discussion, indicating that word choice is very important when trying to convey a message. This tool of word choice lets Dan know that some of his words may not have been as constructive as they could have been, and Ted attempts to steer the discussion to another issue that some people might connect to ethics (family influences).

Similarly, Sara generalizes in her discussion posting by referring to a website that connects ethics and technical communication. While agreeing with Dan to some degree by saying that a person's ethics and religion should not be separate from their writing, that belief does not become the focus of her message. Instead, she focuses on the website to bring in a concept that would facilitate the discussion, rather than stifle it. In addition, she compliments the discussion forum in general by pointing out that it is a place to discuss issues in an open format, and she is glad to see that happening. In the last two paragraphs of her response, she uses "we," and "all" to connect with the other students in the class to create a positive sense of community that was disrupted a bit by Dan's response.

Jane begins her discussion agreeing with Sara, and then offers her disagreement that ethics and religion are dependent on each other. Jane continues her response by focusing on her strongly held opinion that "it's my right as an American to tend to my own spiritual health as I see fit." This comment does not offer much of an opportunity for discussion, so it might disrupt the course's activity system, much like Dan's response could have. However, Ted's strategies of agreeing and complimenting adjust this possible disruption and attempt to move the discussion in more positive directions. He expresses his own opinion in his final message while also agreeing with the other students and complimenting everyone on the discussion process. Jane and Sara then imitate Ted's strategy of agreement: Jane agrees with Ted and compliments the discussion process, and Sara agrees with Jane's desire to believe as she wants.

In this discussion board example, the strategies of complimenting, generalizing, and agreeing help to reorient the discussion board environment after two students' responses threaten to disrupt the discussion by expressing strong opinions that don't invite responses from the other students. While Dan doesn't take the cues and imitate those strategies during this discussion, Jane does. The activity system of the course (and the discussion board, more specifically) has become restabilized so that more discussion can occur: the cognitive process of discussing this sensitive issue was altered by means of a computer-mediated tool, although the language strategies

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themselves are the mechanism of change. As a result of applying the positive communication strategies, the activity system of the discussion board has evolved positively to re-establish an environment conducive to knowledge creation for the course.

Discussion 2—Discrimination in the Workplace

Another topic that surfaced in response to the ethics-and-workplace discussion was discrimination in general and gay discrimination in particular. Once again, Dan begins the discussion of this issue by introducing the topic of gay discrimination:

> *Dan*: I have a major problem with the practice of having to hire gays at any place of employment. This is morally wrong in my book. It goes against all religious beliefs that I hold. Take a stand for what is morally right like the Boy Scouts of America. There is no one in the U.S. that can tell me that I have to hire a gay even though I think it is wrong. There just won't be an employer there to hire them.
>
> *Ted*: I agree with you in several areas and do not support the "alternate lifestyle." This is a choice like any other decision we make as humans, and with those choices come rewards or consequences. However, there should be no discrimination towards a person for what they practice, so long as they do not interfere with others' ability to function in accordance with requirements of the position they are holding.
>
> Discrimination is wrong in any aspect, but there should not be laws forcing people to go against their beliefs. There are laws that protect people from being discriminated because of their beliefs, but what about protecting a private employer in support of their religious/personal beliefs?
>
> We are getting into an area that really should be discussed in person to avoid misguided emotions and tone. So to avoid being misinterpreted, I will stop.
>
> *Teacher*: It does seem that the private/public distinction would allow a private employer, for example, to be discriminatory about whom he/she would hire, based on this issue and the organization's philosophies. That employer could also discriminate based on other issues, too.
>
> I also started wondering about hiring preferences, based on what people did in the past or were doing currently in a variety of life's areas. I could think of a bunch of areas that all of us might want our children and ourselves to avoid (or be able to choose to avoid). These issues are very complicated, and I'm being intentionally abstract for tolerance purposes.

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Emily: I am impressed. This group has tackled some REALLY sensitive issues over the past couple of days. Isn't it wonderful that we can all express how we feel openly and honestly and without malice!?!

I have to agree with Ted on the gay rights thing. I disapprove of this lifestyle myself, but as it has been ingrained in me as long as I can remember, you hate the sin and love the sinner.

Teacher: I, too, am impressed with the discussions on the sensitive issues. Our practicing with responding to different ideas definitely transfers to our work situations, as some of you have pointed out, and practicing our responses through email (with its absence of body language and voice tone) is very noteworthy!

Kathy: This is my fourth semester in RODP, and the one thing that I have found out concerning virtual communication is that it normally comes across as being "politically correct." It appears that even when diverse people have very differing points of view, short of exchanging virtual blows, the parties will normally "bow out" nicely. After all, most people know that what they write in this virtual environment can and probably will be read by many people, so most will usually respond in a very non-barbaric fashion.

Sara: Hey, Ted. You touched on what I think are some real fundamental issues with computerized communication. You are exactly right that the intent and messages that are conveyed are generally sent with much more thought and decisiveness. The printed word can be scrutinized and re-read over and over, giving more emphasis and sometimes pain with their message to the reader. They are words that are not easily taken back because the sender knows that they were not only thought but were written and probably read as well before they were sent. They carry a lot of weight.

Another area that you touched on that I know speaks directly to my own boldness with computerized communication is in the area of anonymity. There is no personal confrontation or sense of obligation. It is only the person typing and the impersonal computer screen. There is no sense of obligation to another person directly in front of you. The words can be typed, edited and retyped to convey exactly how we feel. Inhibitions and fear are minimal because there is no immediate fear of rebuttal. While there is a strong sense of anonymity with discussion formats of this type, I totally agree that there is a need for etiquette and personal responsibility in these writing formats. Words can be very painful and powerful tools.

Jane: As a staunch civil rights advocate, I have to speak up on the topic of gay discrimination, or any discrimination for that matter. Obviously, a private employer can

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hire anyone they feel is qualified for a job and does not have to give justification for not hiring someone. Something as trivial as a hair style or a body piercing can be enough to deter a potential employer. So I don't think the issue is so much about forcing businesses to hire gays as it is preventing employers from firing someone based on their personal life. As long as your personal life does not cause your work to suffer, it is really not an issue for your employment status.

Teacher: I agree with this characterization of computerized discussion. What I try to do, too (and I know I screw up here also), is try to imagine the other person reading what I'm writing and the reactions that person might have to what I'm writing. But still, it can be very hard to communicate the tone you're intending.

Paula: I agree with the analysis as well. When writing an email, there can still be a negative tone, and the receiver can read the message the wrong way.

When in the classroom setting, students are usually more sensitive to what they say because everyone is together and is hearing what is being said. Many feel that in a "classroom setting" such as ours, they can use it as a chance to say what they want to say, how they want to say it and not take the composer of the messages feelings on the subject into consideration.

Once again, in this discussion, Dan begins with inflammatory comments that threaten to disrupt further interaction. The comments are too personal and don't invite response. Ted and Emily agree with Dan but then offer opinions that are more accepting of different points of view on the issue: Ted states that discrimination should not occur and then refers to possible misinterpretation and concludes his message to ensure that his viewpoints won't be misunderstood. Ted shows awareness of the communication medium and the necessity of facilitating communication by avoiding communicating negative emotions or tone. Emily implements a complimenting communication strategy by stating that the group is doing well with such sensitive issues. Her comments are positive, build up the sense of community of the course, and are all-inclusive (she uses the words "we" and "all"). The teacher discusses discrimination briefly in response to Dan but generalizes the discussion to more abstract issues. She also refers to the fact that the general nature of the discussion is important so that one view doesn't dominate the discussion and that tolerance is promoted. The teacher and Kathy also contribute meta comments about how well the class responds to the sensitive issues, encouraging more of the same type of responses.

While Jane disagrees with Dan, she implements the strategy of generalizing to discuss topics of hair style and body piercing as other possible discrimination areas. She also turns the issue away

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from hiring gays to employers firing employees based on personal lifestyles in general. Her generalizing strategies take the consideration of employees' personal lifestyles and hiring out of the workplace discussion altogether.

Although this discussion began as a result of Dan's very opinionated and controversial posting, the discussion ends with several postings about effective communication about writing email messages and emotions. The comments have taken a general turn to focus on communication strategies and technology. This type of abstraction represents an even larger generalization than Jane's posting, accomplished, for example, because the meta comments on the communication itself are highlighting the impact that the communication tool has on the discussion process. The students, at this point, have been able to abstract from the issue itself and recognize that the communication medium (tool) impacts the discussion in unique and important ways. This realization may explain why the students have more to say about the communication processes themselves, rather than about the discrimination issues. While the students may not have consciously realized what was happening, they seem to be understanding more about the communication tools for discussion and attempting to resolve the conflict by discussing the communication tools/processes themselves before continuing with discussion of controversial topics.

This process is noteworthy because the students seem to be more aware of the discussion board's activity and purposes; their meta comments about the tools themselves appear to be ways to promote awareness of the activity itself and means to control it to emphasize the production of knowledge within the discussion board. While such purposes may not have been consciously devised, the result was a heightened awareness of the effective communication strategies and their effects on the knowledge-constructing dialogue, as illustrated by the critical thinking surrounding the students' own messages.

Discussion/Implications

These online discussion examples offer a brief look at the ways this course as an activity system evolved and changed over a period of a few days. While the teacher attempted to control the development of the discussions by setting a collaborative tone and clarifying the purpose of the discussions at the beginning of the course, the issues discussed elicited overly personal and somewhat controversial responses that attempted to disrupt the course's activity system. In the first discussion, the students seemed to effectively stabilize the activity system of the course by generalizing mainly about the topic of ethics itself, and the positive compliments about how well everyone was dealing with the issues could have been a first step towards discussing the communication tool of email specifically, although discussion of email did not occur in detail during the first discussion.

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During the second discussion, while a few complimentary comments still occur, the discussion moved to a greater depth concerning the process itself. When considering a hierarchy of generalization, the students accomplished a higher level of critical thinking by the second discussion that they did not have during the first discussion. During the second discussion, the students seemed much more aware of the communication tool they were using and ways it impacted how their opinions came across to others. In fact, during the second discussion, the teacher and Ted both expressed reluctance to state opinions in such a way that they may be misunderstood or viewed as intolerant. In this second example, the students gained not only knowledge of conflict management tools but also conscious awareness of the communication tools mediating the discussion. Both skills were essential for students to practice in order to participate, rather than "disidentify" with the activity system of the course.

The strategies of complimenting, generalizing, and agreeing became part of the culture of practice, and therefore of the activity system, for communicating in this Professional Communication course. These strategies were "cultural knowledge" for the course, necessary knowledge that was constructed by the participants. These strategies did not exist when the course began, and the students learned/created them by the second and third weeks of the course. While most students emulated these strategies, others, such as Dan, did not, and he participated less and less as the semester continued. This lack of participation may correlate with Lave and Wenger's (1993) research that emphasizes the need for participants in activity to learn the rules and the tools for functioning within a culture of practice, although more research would need to be conducted to determine the exact reasons for Dan's lack of participation.

This brief look at conflict management in an online course suggests several implications for continued research and application, both in the classroom and in the business world in general as online communication continues to become more prevalent. One implication is the need to teach students and professionals strategies for managing conflict online and continue to evaluate the results/practices of that process. While the students in this particular course accomplished conflict management very well, more explicit training at the beginning of the course could have minimized tension and facilitated a more time-efficient process for stabilizing the course's culture of practice. Tullar and Kaiser (2000) recommend that training for online communication (in their case, teams) be done by video and "should also handle successful interpersonal processes: listening, supporting other group members, differing in a constructive manner, and encouraging everyone's participation" (p. 411). In addition, such training can "make group members engage in more maintenance behaviors such as encouraging and supporting, harmonizing, gatekeeping, process observing, following, and setting standards" (p. 412). The result of such training was more satisfied group members, who participated more fully in group processes. In addition, Tullar and Kaiser state that these effects are possible even when the participants are distant geographically and communicate asynchronously (p. 423), just as the students in the online course communicated.

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Another implication of this discussion is that because students are creating their own culture of practice within a course and adapting to it, strategies that help writers communicate within intercultural virtual teams could also help students in online classes, even though the students may be from similar cultural backgrounds. The students are still striving to bring elements of their own learning backgrounds and lives to the online classroom, where a unique culture is being created among all of the students. Students' having common goals and working toward them together through continuing dialog have proven to be effective for communicating within intercultural teams, along with principles such as practicing "patience, respect and listening skills" (Grosse, 2002, p. 34). Just as intercultural teams need time to adjust to different communication styles (Grosse, 2002, p. 34), students and professionals in general also need time to adapt to each other when communicating virtually.

Finally, communicators in online environments might consider themselves to be negotiators, ones that need to implement negotiation strategies, such as seeking common ground and "developing a supportive communication climate" (Lawrence, 2002, p. 60); these were strategies that the students in the online Professional Communication course demonstrated. Lawrence suggests implementing such strategies as these: "Find a way to reach all members' goals"; "View the team members as partners"; "Help the members"; "Develop and examine alternatives"; "Accept other ways of doing things"; and "Realize the necessity to be receptive and non-threatening" (p. 60). As this class's interactions indicated, even the act of simply answering discussion questions online can necessitate effective communication strategies for negotiation and conflict management.

Conclusion

Activity theory and distributed cognition allow researchers to look more closely at cultures of communication, their goals, and the specific technological tools used to promote and stabilize them. Even though these systems evolve and change over time, we can help them to stabilize by promoting communication strategies that have proven effective for particular cultures of practice. The strategies of complimenting, generalizing, and agreeing, along with other principles for negotiating and managing conflict among different cultures, can promote effective conflict management with diverse online audiences in multiple business communication environments, from the online course to virtual teams in the workplace.

Notes

[1.] While the term "repair" has linguistic connotations, the focus of this discussion will be on the social aspects of the online discussion as they relate to activity systems and distributed cognition, rather than on the linguistic characteristics of the discourse.

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[2.] All students' names have been changed. Students understood that posting messages to the discussion board allowed their responses to become "public," equivalent to oral discussions that take place in face-to-face classrooms.

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True Stories and Effective Application Letters

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To cover or not to cover? That is the question regularly faced by countless applicants in today's tough job market. In an age of scanning software and online bulletin boards, it is easy to overlook the dynamic power of an effective cover letter to "sell" a resume to a prospective employer. In addition, some career consultants point to the occasional "resume-only" position posting in order to downplay the importance of the cover letter in the job application process.

Experts who have carefully studied this topic, however, often hold the opposite viewpoint. For instance, JobWeb (2003) reports:

> In a recent survey of 150 executives from the nation's 1000 largest companies, 60 percent of the respondents said that when they screen applications, the cover letter is either as important as or more critical than the resume. Your cover letter really does matter.

Specifically the cover letter functions as a connection between the factual background of the applicant and the core requirements for any given position.

Rationale for the storytelling approach

The problem, though, is that too many jobseekers—especially new graduates—just don't get it. That is, even when they recognize the potential value of the application letter, they are unable to develop documents that make this vital connection. Instead, they merely concentrate their efforts on presenting only the most obvious factual information and relying on that presentation to prompt further attention to the accompanying resume. This simplistic approach creates two problems. First, improperly trained application-letter writers often see the pertinent facts thusly: I'm about to receive a bachelor's degree. That degree is in a business-related field. My GPA exceeds the traditional 3.0 cutoff level. Second, these writers fail to realize how lifeless and inadequate this bare bones recitation of superficial data appears to sophisticated recruiters.

What these writers need to do, of course, is to tap the suasory power of storytelling techniques. While the facts of one's background are inert and static, storytelling techniques allow the writer to shape and sequence these facts, to personalize them and put them in motion and thereby make the connections that can lead to an interview. Storytelling techniques allow the writer to engage and elicit both strong emotional and rational responses on the part of the reader.

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In terms of positioning these brief, but pointed stories, the writer's options are rather clear. Some textbooks like Bovee/Thill (2003) recommend a three-paragraph arrangement scheme for application letters. Others like Guffey (1994) suggest a four-paragraph or longer format. Either option affords the writer plenty of space in the middle section of the cover letter to introduce one or perhaps two concise, carefully selected and prepared stories to drive home the applicant's key qualifications for the targeted position.

A rich heuristic for creating effective stories

What is clearly missing from traditional business writing textbooks is a heuristic for generating the content for these stories. That is where Simmons' (2001) remarkable guidebook, The Story Factor, comes in to play. Simmons maintains that stories are indispensable tools for influencing other people and that six basic stories are critical for establishing and promoting persuasive communication (pp. 4-26). Here are her six stories:

1. "Who I Am" Stories
2. "Why I Am Here" Stories
3. "The Vision" Stories
4. "Teaching" Stories
5. "Values-in-Action" Stories
6. "I Know What You Are Thinking" Stories (p. 4)

My purpose, then, in the cases described below is to show how these six stories can focus and enrich application letters in a truly unique way and can give them a rhetorical thrust that cannot be achieved by any other means. (The only notable alteration I've made, as you will see, is to convert the teaching story to a learning story.)

Story one: Telling "Who I Am"
A "Who I Am" story is intended to reveal a salient trait or characteristic about the storyteller that is not readily apparent to the reader.

Amy applied to a small, multi-tasking marketing firm in Denver. Her prospects seemed limited because after graduation she was prevented from entering a strong job market by the death of her father, who headed the family appliance/hardware business. Moreover, six months after her return home, a Super Wal-Mart, which of course sold appliances, opened nearby. Amy persuaded her brother, now her partner, to shift to an upscale brand of appliances, expand the

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hardware offering, and focus on the repair business. Her story (retold in her cover letter) said in essence: I am a tough, savvy marketer who can solve difficult problems. This "Who I Am" story put a new perspective on Amy's resume for the recruiter, and landed her the prized position in Denver.

Story two: Explaining "Why I Am Here"
A "Why I Am Here" story candidly discloses how the storyteller himself or herself will benefit if the reader complies with the storyteller's request.

Through his networking efforts, Curtis learned of a choice sales job at one of the Southwest's largest heavy equipment dealerships. Naturally this opening attracted hundreds of qualified applicants. In his application letter, Curtis told two stories. In the first, he told how his group produced a marketing plan that finished in the top three of the prestigious Edward D. Jones New Venture Collegiate Challenge. Most importantly, in the second, he told of his experience in the army of being promoted to supervisor of the maintenance crew of an elite M1-A1 Abrams tank company—vehicles that cost about five million dollars apiece in today's dollars. Basically his brief (five total sentences) stories said this: To me one of the most gratifying rewards of all is to be a part of the winning team. Curtis was one of only five to interview, and he was offered the job.

Story three: Delivering "The Vision"
A "Vision" story provides the reader with a compelling mental image of the benefits that come from complying with the storyteller's request.

Janice, an honor student and general business major, had just completed an internship for an area Ford dealership where she developed a new, Internet-based customer service program. Her target job was with a large regional movie theater chain based in Dallas. In her application letter, she detailed her academic credentials and her internship. That, in turn, led her to describe her vision of how a new, Internet-based customer service program would reach the typical young moviegoer in Texas and give the entire corporation a sleek, attractive presence in cyberspace. As a result of her ability to deliver "the vision," her "movie career" was soon on its way.

Story four: Demonstrating "Learning"
A "Learning" story graphically demonstrates for the reader that the storyteller can acquire the skill set needed to perform a task or series of tasks.

Glenn, an outstanding defensive lineman, was seeking an IT position with an international energy corporation headquartered in Houston. In his cover letter, he outlined his success in his 30+ hours of IT coursework. He then recounted how his diligent film study led to the biggest game of his college career. Through his film study, he detected a tendency for the opposing

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center to hold the football one way on running plays and another on passing downs. The result of Glenn's account of his analytical prowess was a stunning win on the field and ultimately a terrific job opportunity.

Story five: Showing "Values In Action"
A "Values in Action" story vividly illustrates how the storyteller has made an important value part of his or her own ethical code.

Brandon was committed to making the transition from track star to corporate trainer. To begin with, his cover letter outlined his academic achievements as a double management/business education major. It went on to quickly relate how he volunteered over two hundred clock hours each academic year for four straight years to a local youth center for homeless children. Brandon explained that he didn't just lead push-ups; he taught these young people about nutritional choices, exercise regimens, and lifestyle issues. Brandon's story revealed how much he valued the idea of service, a quality that—combined with his work ethic and professionalism--led a Big Five consulting firm to offer him what many would consider a gold medal job.

Story six: Proving "I Know What You Are Thinking"
An "I Know What You Are Thinking" story allows the storyteller to anticipate and to deal preemptively with negative preconceptions or stereotypes that the reader may have about the storyteller.

Sarah and her husband planned to move to Austin so that both could eventually pursue graduate degrees at the University of Texas. The problem was that—superficially at least—her psychology major/business minor wasn't a good fit with the job she was aiming for: the chief assistant to one of the state's principal legislative lobbyists. At first glance, the lobbyist may have wondered just how a typical psychology major could ever fit into his organization. What finally clinched the job for Sarah? It was the story she included in her application letter regarding her part in completing an award-winning sociological study on minority school drop-out rates in Central Texas. Sarah, who was a student worker for an on-campus research institute, devoted part of her cover letter to describing her role in conducting telephone surveys, combing through federal census data, and building a bibliography for the project. Because such informational studies are the stock in trade of nearly all lobbyists, Sarah turned out to be a perfect fit after all and found a well-paying job awaiting her when she moved to the state capital that fall and joined one of the state's premier lobbying firms.

Conclusion

The enormous potential of the storytelling approach reflected in the six cases presented above should not mislead anyone into thinking that success will come instantly or easily. It does not;

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instead, storytelling challenges the writer to scrutinize the skills and capabilities he or she truly possesses. Just listing a degree, a GPA, and duties performed in an internship will not do. Neither will making exaggerated, unsupported predications of future job performance. This approach demands that a writer research a perspective employer in depth to determine what the employer is really seeking in a new hire. Even the best story will fail to hit the mark if the target qualifications are not accurately identified in advance. The writer must also be committed to an extensive brainstorming process that will yield exactly the right story line. Finally, the writer must be dedicated to sharpening the writing (especially the verbs), selecting the most telling details, and improving the pace of the narrative for maximum impact on the intended audience. The intervention of a writing professional can be quite helpful, indeed critical, but all in all, the storytelling approach to the application letter involves active learning at its very best.

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Will the Real Author Please Stand Up: Preventing Plagiarism

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Study after study has finally convinced the whole world that communication skill is vital for success; the writing-across-the-curriculum focus and the new-found ease of writing with the Internet, however, have actually encouraged bad writing assignments and the proliferation of plagiarism, making the task of the communications teacher much harder. Indeed, the two most popular current trends—Distance Learning and plagiarism--go hand in hand; as colleges offer Internet courses to help students expand their horizons, students use the Internet to produce plagiarized papers in order to get the credit without expanding their horizons (except, of course, in the use of Internet search engines).

Every time a student gets credit for writing (from a phrase to a whole paper) that has been simply downloaded--rather than composed by the student--it reinforces the mentality that writing consists of nothing more than cutting and pasting somebody else's words and attaching a fine cover page. It has become such a big issue, in fact, that writing instructors, already burdened with hours of grading, must spend even more often-unproductive (and uncompensated!) time on detective work, rather than on developing communication skills in their students. (An interesting side issue is that the Internet has contributed extensively to the need for ethics instructional units and even entire ethics courses.)

Problem

The problem of academic dishonesty is not new. In the 1960s, William Bowers discovered that about half of the 5,000 students he surveyed on 99 campuses had cheated (Hamilton, 2003). The problem, however, is now so severe that a community college in Kansas has created a new grade—the *XF*. This grade designation is reported on a student's transcript with a note that it was given as a result of academic dishonesty (College gives first 'XF' grade, 2002).

The emphasis on writing across the curriculum has also promoted the proliferation of plagiarism in instructional areas other than those specifically dedicated to writing. Instructors assign reports and essays with little intention of offering useful instruction in writing to improve the student's writing skills. The teacher often simply skims the paper to ensure that the student has at least made an attempt to complete the assignment correctly.

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Purpose

Because of the emphasis on writing across the curriculum and the ease of plagiarism, there is a need to identify ways to combat plagiarism without adding to the burden of the teacher and without requiring so much busy work (Internet searches) of the student that he/she feels the compulsion to cheat to complete required course work. The term "plagiarism" is used in this paper to refer to both a student's begging, borrowing, or stealing an entire paper and to a writer's use of another's ideas or words without giving due credit.

Review of the literature

It is useful to consider who cheats and why, as well as how the cheating occurs and how to combat it efficiently. A review of literature and surveys of our own students reveal student reasons for plagiarism.

Who cheats and why

Surveys by the Center for Academic Integrity at Duke University report that from 25 percent to 67 percent of students admit to cheating at least once in the previous year (College gives first 'XF' grade, 2002). As a side note, studies suggest that high school students are more likely to cheat than college students are (Scribner, 2003); and younger students and males are more likely to cheat than older students and females (Winter et al., 2003).

More importantly, for the purposes of this paper, according to a 1995 report by Brown in the *Journal of Education for Business* (Campbell, et al., 2000), academic dishonesty is more likely to occur in assignments completed outside the classroom. This finding suggests that plagiarism is a bigger problem than cheating on tests.

Today's students have become so used to downloading music and printing out product specifications, etc., that many think that everything on the Internet is free for the taking (Young, 2001). With such a culture, it is no wonder that plagiarism is rampant. Students, of course, also cheat because they don't care, because they do care but have run out of time, because they care more about major-course grades than General-Education grades, because scholarship money is dependent upon good grades, because parents like good grades, because they feel that their writing skills are inadequate, and even because they need the feeling of power that foiling the system affords.

Another reason student cheating has escalated is the pressure on teachers to raise test scores (Cizek, 2001). Without administrative support, however, teachers are reluctant to risk the consequences of accusing students of plagiarism—assault, battery, censure, time-consuming appeals, and unemployment (Heberling, 2002).

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Some cultures have no concept of plagiarism and encourage plagiarism. In a few cultures, plagiarism is even seen as a form of flattering imitation and certainly not as a crime (Willems, 2003). Indeed, some countries don't recognize copyright laws because they value the propagation of the written word as a means to achieving literacy.

Many students cheat without even realizing that they are cheating, but the fact remains that cheating is fraud (Standler, 2000). Indeed, "any work created in the USA after 1 Mar 1989 is automatically protected by copyright, even if there is no copyright notice attached to the work [17 USC §§102, 401, and 405]" (p. 5). Term-paper mills are specifically targeted. In at least fourteen states from California to New York, such firm may be fined $1,000 or receive a six-month jail sentence for each offense (Standler, 2000, p. 6). The seriousness of the problem is illustrated by the case of Alsabti, a physician practicing in Massachusetts. His license was revoked because he had fraudulently obtained his Ph.D. and medical degree by plagiarizing as many as 60 articles to complete his academic programs (Standler, 2000, p. 11).

Because the law doesn't make allowances for intent, both intentional and inadvertent plagiarism are treated the same in our paper because they are combated by generally the same techniques.

How students feel about cheating

The literature and our own surveys (Winter, et al., 2003) reveal that many students would like to see more control and integrity in the classroom (and assignment of grades). In the Winter study in 2003 (p. 1684), almost half of the students reported that they didn't care if someone else cheated—it wasn't their business. A little over a third, however, indicated that they would be disgusted with cheaters. Another third were evenly divided between feeling proud of themselves for not having cheated and wanting to report it (students were able to identify more than one response).

Many students choose schools because of their honor codes; but even in these schools, cheating is prevalent. For example, after discovering 100 incidences of plagiarism in one class at an honor-code school (the University of Virginia), one professor decided to crack down on students who plagiarized. Many of his students agreed that "plagiarism is a big deal," and one student stated, "I am proud of Professor Bloomfield for catching those students" (Young, 2001, p. A27).

Some experts agree that the best way to combat plagiarism is simply to emphasize ethical standards by instituting a code of ethics, by requiring students to submit an affidavit of originality with each paper, or by encouraging a culture of whistle-blowing (Pearson, 2003; Caruana, et al., 2002; McCabe, 2001). Such discussions of ethicality do take time, unfortunately—and time is a valuable commodity for most academic programs. Most of us have only 150 minutes a week for one semester to affect a lifetime of learning.

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How Teachers Can Combat Plagiarism

In dealing with plagiarism, instructors have three options: to trust their students (i.e., ignore it), to detect it after work has been turned in, or to prevent it.

Detecting Plagiarism
One instructor reports holding a frustrating conference with a student to discuss how to improve a piece of writing (7 paragraphs that didn't fit the assignment). Finding the student to be unresponsive, the instructor decided to check the paper using a search engine. When the program revealed that the paper was perfectly plagiarized and all the teaching efforts wasted, the teacher's response was to cry (College gives first 'XF' grade, 2002)!

Detection after the fact has become very popular, and many institutions are hoping that subscriptions to search engines will be the answer to student plagiarism. Although services like Turnitin.com are used by many teachers (Royce, 2003, reports that this service investigates over 10,000 papers a day and flags about 30 percent as being plagiarized), they are very limited. The programs cannot check unpublished sources, some unorthodox sites, and sites that are updated frequently (i.e., news sources); but the papers that are submitted to them are added to the data base, so a student paper cannot be passed along without detection. Another problem is that term-paper mills usually do not place their papers on the Web, but instead E-mail or fax them to purchasers. Besides these shortcomings, the time to police each student's paper is insupportable, and gives the teacher the unenviable role of spy.

Prevention through instruction
A paper should not be assigned if it is not necessary for student learning. In many cases, the instructor's motive is to get the student to read more about a particular topic and make some judgments about the theories and opinions presented. In such cases, it would probably be more useful for a teacher to ask students to find and read a few articles and note their bibliographic citations. The writing assignment then could be a simple response to a few questions such as the following:

1. Why did you go to the source that you selected?
2. Why did you choose this article?
3. In three sentences, summarize the article.
4. Complete one of these sentences:
   "The author makes a valid point because [or "in that"] . . . ."
   "The theory doesn't hold water because . . . ."

With this kind of assignment, both of the instructor's goals would be met—the student would do some outside research and would also be required to engage in some analytical thinking, with the

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side benefit of practicing a few writing skills . . . and the instructor might even have time to respond to these few sentences.

When a paper is required, better than detecting plagiarism, however, is preventing it. In the long term, this requires on-target teaching strategies; in the short term, it can be accomplished by controlling the writing situation. The former is time-consuming but very rewarding, especially for the student; the latter is a relatively quick fix that will virtually eliminate the problem in any particular class.

Helping students understand, shun, and avoid plagiarism requires direct teaching of the topic. Class time devoted to discussing academic honesty is well spent. This is not like sex education where maybe some subjects shouldn't be introduced because, as some reasoning goes, they might not try it if they don't know about it; students are experts at discovering every kind of plagiarism as a way of compensating for poor skills in writing, time management, or applying themselves. Besides, most students don't know how broadly plagiarism can be interpreted. An instructor who demonstrates wide-ranging knowledge of plagiarism is more likely to deter intentional offenders and has a better chance of becoming a wise guide to the inadvertent ones.

Instructor and course policies on plagiarism need to be written down, explained, and publicized. What constitutes plagiarism in the context of a particular course, how intentional and inadvertent infractions are treated, the specific penalties than can be incurred, and any kind of grace or amnesty need to be included. These policies also need to be adhered to. A little recent history on how they have been applied doesn't hurt. It is also valuable to take time to review institutional policies. A strong and clear institutional policy is the individual instructor's best support. (If no institutional policy exists, it might be time to volunteer to serve on a task force to write one, and let students know about that.) The larger world also currently offers salient examples of how dishonesty in reporting and giving credit for ideas is viewed by the legal system and the public at large. Because of the effects of the act of plagiarism and the hurt sustained by various parties, the following consequences are almost always upheld by the courts:

1. Expulsion by universities
2. Civil suits by the owners of the copyrights,
3. Criminal charges for fraud,
4. Revocation of licenses (Standler, 2000, p. 23)

A foundation for understanding plagiarism as it relates to incorporating material other than one's own thoughts has to be laid through the teaching of the difference between fact and opinion. Students need to be able to discern the difference (between fact and opinion) in the words of others and to indicate the difference in their own writing. Having classmates discuss (anonymous) samples of each other's writing can be illuminating for the students. The more wrong examples they see, the less the chance that they will make these same mistakes in their own writing.

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Students need to know how to document. It is not enough simply to tell them that they must document. A multitude of styles exist, not all of which may be appropriate. Students begin any course with a whole spectrum of preparation from none to mastery. Undirected students access all kinds of assistance in this area (My high school English teacher always . . . My dad gave me this book he used . . . The librarian said . . . I went online . . .). Besides, no instructor is master of all documentation styles, so it's easier for the instructor to control and help the student get it right if there is a clear guideline about what style/s may be used.

Incorporating information from other sources takes many forms. For students, it is helpful to have the various types defined and to be provided with examples of where it has been done correctly. Other than directly quoting one or more sentences (which is primarily an exercise in punctuating), representing the words, ideas, and style of another requires sophisticated thinking and composing skills. Students need to practice these tasks individually before being expected to incorporate them into synthesized and cohesive writing. Summarizing a one-page article could take one sentence, a few sentences, or a number of paragraphs. It could be a simple summary that stands alone, a summary followed by comment, a careful analysis, or a small segment of a much longer document. Paraphrasing is a very difficult thing to do without becoming extremely wordy or altering the sense of the original. Students need to practice it and be shown where they are erring. Sometimes all that is required from the outside source is a bibliographic mention of it, or the inclusion of a number. Students will plagiarize less in a long document if they have a clear of understanding of what they are doing and they have mastered the requisite skills individually.

One of the most important things for students to grasp is that their communications are going to be evaluated—not just graded by an instructor for some eventual grade report, but scrutinized and assessed as a reflection of their ability and sometimes even their character. This is subject matter that needs to be evaluated publicly. Examining errors and understanding them is more efficient than looking at reams of good models; the more examples the students see, the sooner the errors will be revealed. (When teaching these skills, it's worth fighting for the classroom with a document camera. The whole class can look at the same text at the same time and receive immediate feedback about what is acceptable and why.)

If the end goal is a lengthy document, it is a good idea to have students submit mini versions of that document, or particular sections of it in advance. Some of these things can be done in groups, even if it will ultimately be an individual project, to make it more efficient for the teacher. If students have accomplished stages of the project successfully in advance, the whole project will be less daunting for them to approach and for the instructor to grade.

Prevention through control of the environment

When you can't devote so much of your class time to teaching them the principles they need to live by for the rest of their communicating lives, but you don't want to spend your out-of-class hours searching for evidence of plagiarism, controlling the situation offers the best option. While creative and research writing offer somewhat different challenges, the best methods of

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prevention fall into two broad strategies: controlling the writing context and controlling the writing task.

The most rigid and cheat-proof context is the in-class writing. While a few students do have superior memorization skills and can regurgitate a whole essay written by someone else, it is uncommon for students to go to that length to avoid doing their own work, and even those students can be foiled if the topic is not provided in advance.

Unfortunately, the kind of writing that can be assessed in this way is quite limited, particularly in an upper level class. Furthermore, the writing produced under these conditions is generally the worst possible text a writer could produce. Still, this kind of relatively short, completely controlled essay is worth doing in every course that will require more extensive writing from the students. It need not be graded, but can be scored very quickly to provide a quick reference guide to the general skill level of the writer. Kept on file by the instructor, the paper serves as a baseline example of each student's individual ability and can be used as a control document for comparisons with subsequent (perhaps suspect) less controlled efforts. Compared with the hours of Internet searching it takes to identify a repeated series of words, pulling the control essay out of a file to compare diction and syntax takes only a few minutes.

More sophisticated and extensive writing can also be accomplished while maintaining a degree of control. Requiring students, in a controlled setting, to write a cover letter explaining either their process for producing that particular assignment or how they would go about revising it given the chance demonstrates the degree to which they understand what they have done and are in control of both the material and its presentation—a good indicator of whether it is their own.

If students are in the habit of revising their work and have been taught to utilize revision opportunities, an out-of-class assignment can be collected, students given a processing period of a day or more, and then assignments returned so that the authors—in a controlled setting—can improve their documents. Again, students' ability to re-work and improve a text without disturbing its content or coherence speaks to their ownership of that text.

One of the biggest difficulties with controlled writing situations is the amount of time it takes from class time. Few courses have the luxury of devoting more than a period or two to a single controlled writing assessment, so longer documents and those that require outside sources might seem to be impossible to control, but with a few modifications, the instructor can still achieve some measure of confidence that it is the students' own work without spending hours on detective work. When an assignment requires the inclusion of outside source material, students can be given time beforehand to find their sources. Those sources can be brought into the writing setting and checked before or during the session. Drafts or outlines can be prepared beforehand, verified somehow by the instructor, and then brought back to the writing setting, which can be controlled.

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Prevention through control of the task

When it comes to controlling the writing task, the instructor has many more options. In research writing, it generally comes down to somehow controlling the resources. For at least one assignment, giving students the sources that they must use to analyze, expound upon, or document their ideas can prevent them from simply lifting papers from the Internet. This prevents the desperate or unprincipled student from cleverly (or clumsily) modifying a plagiarized paper on a similar topic. It also simplifies the task of the instructor who wants to check the students' facility at incorporating outside material ethically and correctly.

Limiting the sources (maybe to what is available on certain kinds of sites or in the local library) or requiring particular local or current sources also makes it difficult for students to find a pre-written document that they can use. (A generally fluent text with clumsy references to a local newspaper probably deserves closer scrutiny.) Requiring local and original research also forces students to put at least some of their own writing into the assignment, which again creates obvious and abrupt transitions when they are patched into someone else's document.

When the writing does not require external sources, the problem to prevent is students' borrowing, buying or lifting work not their own. Controlling for this demands that the instructor use unique themes or approaches, and modifies assignments every semester. (It might be a little harder to come up with these than to use tried-and-true or textbook prompts, but it will pay off in more interesting reading and less detective work.) Local topics are always good for this (not Sonic's personnel policies but the personnel policies of the Sonic on South Elm in Happy Town). The class can get in on the fun by creating their own simulation scenario with unexpected details that have to be incorporated.

As always, prevention requires more preliminary work. In this case, the more hands-on the teaching, the less opportunity students have for plagiarizing. Even out-of-class writing can be made relatively transparent. Collaboration rarely leads to collusion. Planning writing projects so that they are completed in stages and requiring that they be checked along the way is a good deterrent. Having all the stages turned in with the final project also makes it difficult for a student to substitute some not-original text at the last minute. Handwritten drafts or printed drafts with handwritten revisions and comments are another good thing to require as proof of originality. Any of these is easily accomplished by establishing the policy that all work will always be turned in with all of its supporting versions; if suspicions arise, comparison texts are immediately available.

If—in spite of your focused instruction, creative assignments, and strict controls—a paper still reeks of plagiarism, there are a few ways to check whether it is a student's own work without spending time or money on the Internet. Some methods are quite onerous for the students and warning about them early is a great deterrent. To check for originality, a student might be asked—under controlled conditions, with no access to the text, and without warning--to write out an outline of the text in question, reproduce a particular paragraph (introduction or conclusion are obvious choices), or summarize one of the sources used in the document. Less aggressive

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tactics include questioning the "author" about some of the vocabulary choices, asking for an explanation or amplification of one of the sources used, questioning some of the information or discussion put forward in the document

In many business communications contexts, the issues of originality and ownership become much more complicated than in a composition or speech class where student authors are generally dealing with copyrighted sources and plagiarism can be clearly seen. At the same time, business students need to understand the value of citing sources, even when giving price quotes or outlining services for potential customers, and to know that "borrowing" ideas, styles, layouts, or words without the express permission of the original authors could create problems for them or their employers.

Business students also do a great deal of their reporting on research in oral situations. Here the control can take the form of a baseline videotape of an impromptu speech, instructor-controlled sources, submission of all source material before a speech is given, and changing and creative topics. In the context of an oral presentation, the after-the-fact questioning described above to check authenticity can be part of any classroom situation, even attached to every speech as part of an audience-response segment.

Conclusion

The Internet is both a help and a hindrance to teachers and students in the advancement of education. Employing methods of preventing plagiarism in writing will be useful for teachers and students alike. Such techniques allow the teacher to maintain better control of the writing assignment and provide more focused feedback to improve the student's communication skills. In addition, these controls promote fairness and quality. While there is a certain thrill in the detection adventure itself and even more in nailing a plagiarized source, prevention has a greater positive byproduct--the reduction in time spent grading the ability of the ghost writers and in worrying about or detecting plagiarism.

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