

# JOURNAL OF THE NORTH AMERICAN MANAGEMENT SOCIETY

# NAMS

NORTH AMERICAN MANAGEMENT SOCIETY

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## Journal of the North American Management Society Editor's Preface

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The *Journal of the North American Management Society [JNAMS]* is an online journal published by the North American Management Society [NAMS]. NAMS is a scholarly organization that focuses on management scholars and practitioners, primarily in North America—the United States and Canada—but also from other nations in the global economy. Most members are from smaller educational institutions and from practitioners in for-profit and not-for-profit organizations.

In support of the NAMS mission, the *Journal of the North American Management Society* is a multidisciplinary, online journal of interest to scholars, professionals, students, and practitioners in a broad range of management thinking. The fields of study that *JNAMS* encompasses include human resources, general management, organizational, ethics, leadership, entrepreneurship, global strategy, nonprofit, and public administration. *JNAMS* is committed to the development of theoretical and practical knowledge about management in all its forms. *JNAMS* has been accepted for listing in the 12<sup>th</sup> edition of the Management Directory by Cabell's, and is currently listed in the electronic edition.

In this issue, the 2009 Conference issue, are published six of the papers that were determined through double-or-triple blind review to be the recipients of the distinguished or best track paper awards.

The premier article by Sharon Kendrick and Melody L. Wollan received the award from MBAA International as the 2009 Distinguished Paper on the Conference Theme, Managing an Aging Workforce. Kendrick and Wollan's paper, "Identifying Pre-Retirees for Bridge Employment: Factors That Influence Post-Retirement Employment Decisions," is based on a study of 387 pre-retirees. Four factors are demonstrated to be important tools to aid human resource managers and others in management in predicting and influencing employees to participate in bridge employment education: the education levels of pre-retirees, training opportunities offered, role support from supervisors and coworkers, and work family balance issues. Their findings identify the importance of part-time versus full-time employment status and the number of years to retirement in predicting pre-retirees intentions to work in bridge employment.

The 2009 Distinguished Paper Award by the North American Management Society was made to Mary K. Foster for "From Micro to Meso: Overuse of Strengths—A Framework for Assessing and Improving Organization Effectiveness." Her exploratory theoretical paper adapts an individual level concept from executive coaching—the overuse of strengths—to explore its potential at the organizational level as a framework for assessing and improving organizational effectiveness, positing a multilevel homologous relationship between overuse of strengths and performance at the individual and organizational levels. She finds that the overuse of strengths framework along with a curvilinear "amount" scale may be useful for further research and theory development in the field of organizational effectiveness.

The North American's Management Society's 2009 Distinguished Paper Award for Human Resources went to David M. Savino for "The Shifting Paradigm of Baby Boomer Retirement Planning." For years the predominant assumption was that there would be a significant labor shortage created as the baby boomers hit Social Security Age. Savino finds that the opposite may be true in that many organizations provide incentives for older workers to stay in employment while many older workers themselves have come to the stark conclusion that they cannot afford to retire, and therefore will not do so into the near future.

Kenneth Baylor received the joint award from the North American Management Society and the American National Business Hall of Fame for the 2009 Distinguished Paper for Leadership. Baylor's qualitative study engages the narrative method and concerns the interplay of Situational and Transformational Leadership and its influence on successful crisis management. The subjects of the study are two former World War II fighter squadron commanders who participated in lead roles during the invasion of Europe. The results demonstrate that Situational and Transformational Leadership have an influence on successful crisis outcomes in terms of both preparation and response, and that the application is equally appropriate in both historical and contemporary environments.

The paper by Russ Urness and Perry Hahn receive the North American Management Society awards for the 2009 Best Paper in Ethics and in Global Management. "Guanxi and Ethical Decision Making" looks at gift giving in an international business context. They suggest that the analysis of gift giving indicates economic, cultural, judicial, and ethical differences between the United States and China, finding that the expected outcome in terms of ethical behavior should be consistent with the established company protocol and at the same time honor the commitment to U.S. law and at the same time be culturally sensitive to the business practices of China.

The 2009 award by the North American Management Society for the Best Paper in Teaching went to Robert M. Ballenger and Dennis M. Garvis for "Instructional Technology in Business Education: An Examination of Online Learning Styles." Noting that management education has rapidly adapted to recent technological advances with initiatives ranged from Web-based degrees conferred by online schools to hybrid courses offered on traditional campuses, Ballenger and Garvis adopt a comprehensive model of student learning to guide the pursuit of two research questions: 1) How do students use online instructional technologies? And 1) What effect does usage have on student learning? Their findings indicate that distinct usage patterns are reflected in how students actually use instructional technologies and that there are gender differences in these patterns.

On a personal note, I am leaving the role of the editor of *JNAMS*. I take a great deal of pride in bringing to fruition a long sought goal of the North American Management Society of having its own journal to serve primarily the faculty at teaching colleges and universities. It has been a distinct pleasure and honor to serve as the founding editor. However, it is time to turn over the editorship of this journal to someone who is more skilled and knowledgeable about the management and editorship of a journal than I am, Dr. Julia Teahen of Baker College Online who has been serving as the host and technical editor of this online journal. I will look forward, as I hope you will as the reader of this journal, to future issues of the *Journal of the North American Management Society*.

Edward Heler, Ph.D.

Journal and Proceedings Editor

2009 Conference Issue

## **Identifying Pre-Retirees for Bridge Employment: Factors That Influence Post-Retirement Employment Decisions**

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*Abstract: In a field study of 387 pre-retirees, four factors are demonstrated to be important as tools to aid Human Resource Managers and managers in predicting and influencing employees to consider participation in bridge employment: education levels of pre-retirees, training opportunities offered, role support from others (of particular importance supervisors and coworkers), and work family balance issues. Additionally, our findings draw attention to the importance of employment status (part-time versus full-time) and the number of years to retirement in predicting pre-retirees' intentions to work in bridge employment.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

For the first time in history, four generations are impacting the workforce (Poindexter 2008). In the middle of this employment activity, baby boomers are breaking from the full-time workforce to engage in either second careers or part-time employment ventures that could encompass the next ten to fifteen years with the year 2026 seeing a rapid increase in the employable group of people aged 65 and older (Poindexter 2008; Wilson and Palha 2007). At least 80 percent of baby boomers will consider working past the traditional retirement age in the form of part-time work (Smyer and Pitt-Catsoupes 2007). Some workers will be forced to delay retirements, while others who are engaged in career jobs may find that they have the option to retire gradually on their own terms.

Fully half of pre-retirees in their 50s are interested in second careers where shortages currently exist and where shortages are projected into the future, to include areas such as education, healthcare, government work, and human services (Freedman 2007). Individuals falling into this category are focusing in on early retirement and are proactively pursuing full-fledged second careers with the intention of focusing on work that matters most to them and to the larger society (Freedman 2007). In this scenario, "bridge employment" (Feldman 1994; Feldman and Kim 2000) serves as a buffer job for a pre-retiree who is transitioning from a career job and describes the jobs people take after leaving full-time employment and before engaging in full-time retirement. Participation in bridge jobs from these pre-retirees is common among high-wage pre-retirees who accept bridge employment for quality-of-life reasons (Cahill, Giandrea, and Quinn 2006).

For many pre-retirees contemplating bridge employment (Feldman 1994), the traditional meaning of retirement (from an economic and age-related standpoint) is being reinvented as people age and consider heightened dilemmas such as training, education, social support, and work/family conflicts as influential factors on participation in bridge employment. As this trend becomes a reality, new employment deals will need to be struck between employers and bridge employees as innovative ways to continue productivity by filling the skill gap (Smyer and Pitt-Catsoupes 2007). In this sense, providing bridge jobs for older Americans enables not only the company to thrive by retaining knowledgeable and experienced workers, but also gives the retiree a chance to stay active, experience a different line of work, be productive, earn income, and remain socially engaged (Cahill et al., 2006). Areas such as job-sharing, flex schedules, and use of retirees as contract workers will allow employers and pre-retirees to creatively plan ahead for changes on the employment horizon (Alford, Farnen, and Schachet 2004). In doing so, the firm gains a better understanding of how and why older workers choose to leave the labor force, and how

best to guide the desire of many pre-retirees to continue working beyond traditional retirement ages (Cahill et al. 2006).

## LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES

While an obvious and realistic perspective on motivations to work include the necessity of earning a wage to support living standards (mortgage, utilities, food), with the pre-retiree population, economic need is not a consistent predictor (Dychtwald, Erickson, and Morison 2004; Herzog, House, and Morgan 1991; Schulte 2008; Weston 2008). Certainly there are retirees that return to the workforce because they are motivated by a hierarchy of needs such as Maslow's (1943) physiological and safety needs. However, theory such as Maslow's (1943) social, esteem, and self-actualization needs and Herzberg's (with colleagues Mausner and Snyderman 1959) motivators as well as anecdotal evidence also predict that there are other motives for continuing to work after completing a career and not entering immediately into full-time retirement. The challenge for managers is to effectively direct pre-retiree activities and essentially "socialize" pre-retirees for bridge employment similar to preparing new employees to develop early stages of their career (Louis 1980; Super 1980). In doing so, we suggest four categories of factors that appear to be related to the likelihood to participate in bridge employment.

### Education

Older workers and pre-retirees continue to rely on skills and experiences that have served them well in their careers when they consider bridge jobs (Ulrich and Brott 2005). Higher levels of education in pre-retirees produce in-demand skills for employers seeking to fill openings. In some examples, the job actually comes to the pre-retiree versus having to seek out employment opportunities. Conversely, lack of education during career life can produce absence of job options when approaching retirement. After working in one field, pre-retirees considering bridge employment found that even though they had acquired transferable skills, they lacked the confidence to continue education and acquire new skills in order to find a niche in the changing career environment (Ulrich and Brott 2005).

For those lacking tenure or education and who find themselves at the lower end of the socioeconomic scale, bridge jobs provide some financial security; albeit an unfortunate and undesirable finale to pre-retirees who might have hoped for a more stable retirement scenario (Cahill et al. 2006). Women, for example, were shown to benefit from postsecondary education in a study conducted by Zhan and Pandey (2002) in which retirement choices were either expanded or limited, as influenced by advanced educational opportunities. Pre-retirees with advanced education were afforded more selective employment choices (following retirement) when compared to the working poor (women) whose job experiences were seen as adequate and less costly alternatives to education. In the latter instance, the working poor (pre-retirees) were forced to search for quick employment even after receiving vocational training to further their knowledge and/or job skills when attempting to secure employment into their retirement years (Zhan and Pandey 2002).

Disengagement theory (Atchley 1975, 1976) suggests that employees with more education will have a broader skill set to continue to use in post-retirement employment. As a pre-retiree begins to make a conscious decision to remove him/herself from the workforce, highly prioritized work-related involvement begins to take a back seat to more self-focused involvement. In addition to having more time to allocate to personal pursuits, education opens the door to more selective use of free time associated with life after retirement (Atchley 1975). Blue collar/laborers have less education on average when it comes to post-employment choices and because they do more manual labor, they are not as likely to be able to use their skill set in retirement, compared to those that do more office/cognitive work. The resulting stress and strain in losing this 'safety net' (the only job they know how to do in the form of manual labor) may lead to feelings of despair and disengagement, predominately more so among blue-collar workers versus non-blue collar retirees. This leads to the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: Intentions to participate in bridge employment will increase with advancing levels of education.

## **Training Opportunities**

Training continues to remain a priority to some pre-retirees. The very thought of becoming disengaged with the workforce and losing ground to technology is enough to keep some workers engaged into what once would have been considered the golden years of leisure. As the current financial crisis continues to multiply, the ability to remain involved with the workforce beyond the traditional retirement age remains a vital issue of concern with pre-retirees. Accessing updated training is vital to survival and staying up-to-date on trends allows aging workers to continue work involvement into the future; a necessary component in attempting to better balance financial upheavals (Greene 2008).

Providing training opportunities for workers has a strong relationship to participating in bridge employment. Many organizations can better help pre-retirees prepare for a retirement or bridge employment decision by providing basic training sessions to engage the aging worker throughout his/her career (Bradford 1979). Such training serves to create awareness by seeking to improve or upgrade employees' productivity through self-awareness, acceptance of emotional reactions, ways to cope with stress and change, life-planning issues, and interest tracking. Other programs address defining goals for remaining years of employment and acknowledging personal interests through engaging both pre-retiree and spouse or significant other in discussion sessions that entail matters such as actual retirement expectations, to include working after retirement (Bradford 1979).

Assisting in the transfer of knowledge from experienced to less experienced workers can engage pre-retirees in formal mentoring programs that pair new employees with seasoned workers (Giroux 2008). A bold move such as formal/informal mentoring programs helps to nurture and build confidence, and works to create a rewarding experience that benefits both pre-retiree and mentee (Giroux 2008). Employers who can tap into existing knowledge potential can potentially see a boosting of knowledge-sharing with colleagues and eventual reception of the pre-retiree to learning from others.

Pre-retirees who felt good about themselves and who viewed themselves as competent workers whose jobs have enabled them to continue learning, were found to be adaptable to new experiences and skill-building sessions (Ulrich and Brott 2005). Older workers desiring to remain connected to the workforce following retirement welcome the chance to use skills and experience and maintain social connections (Smyer and Pitt-Catsouphes 2007). Being able to tap into previous knowledge and abilities prompt pre-retirees to stay with current employers; for examples, key indicators of success in recruiting and retaining older workers included the inclusion of job autonomy, learning opportunities made available, decision-making involvement with managers, and inherent variability that comes with age.

On the other end of the spectrum, many pre-retirees had a challenging time moving into bridge jobs after retirement if job titles did not match long-term career titles or if occupations were defined too narrowly. In this instance, many did not fully investigate a job opportunity because they lacked the appropriate technology skills or questioned their ability to learn new skills (Ulrich and Brott 2005). The thought of taking pre-employment tests were viewed as unpleasant by some of these pre-retirees, while others picked up on subtle age discrimination when younger workers questioned their capabilities, or failed to hire or promote older workers. Consequently, rather than deal with developing new career strategies to cope with these changes, Ulrich and Brott (2005) found many pre-retirees selected retirement over remaining engaged in part-time or bridge employment. This leads to the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2: Intentions to participate in bridge employment will increase when a pre-retiree has more training and development opportunities.

## Role Support

Support for a pre-retiree's personal and professional development was found to be associated with the degree to which a professional network was maintained (Greller and Richtermeyer 2006). Also relevant to a pre-retiree's decision to remain involved with the workforce was personal career insight as enhanced by coworker and managerial support. The qualitative social support from coworkers received in these instances was stable, and increased the satisfaction felt by older workers who opted to remain engaged in the workforce in a full-time status following a pending retirement decision. In this scenario, pre-retirees who opted to continue working did so with the perception that support from coworkers did not decline over time (Bosse et al. 1993). This is important in that social support is important in maintaining a way of extending the working life of a pre-retiree by preserving contacts and networks necessary for career longevity (Greller and Richtermeyer 2006). In these examples, role support from others seems to have had the biggest influence (even beyond economic dependency) on whether or not employees plan to participate in bridge employment. Those who select to participate in work after retirement receive social support and seem to have good working relationships with coworkers and supervisors (i.e., social information processing model) and thus are more willing to stay in the employment relationship.

On the other hand, some pre-retirees who are contemplating continued employment may not always have the support of supervisors in the workplace; this is deemed particularly important as supervisors tend to be the ones who define and influence the performance appraisal system (Henkens 1999). In this scenario, external conditions such as lack of coworker and supervisor support and lack of control in the job as experienced by pre-retirees inflict influence in the decision to participate in a bridge job (Van Solinge and Henkens 2007). External conditions can also influence pre-retirement decisions such as a strong tendency of companies to prune the workforce by offering early retirement programs as a more socially acceptable way to sidestep large-scale layoffs (Van Solinge and Henkens 2007). As such, older workers sometimes find themselves funneled into jobs that have become redundant due to technological advances or victims of job redundancy or organizational restructuring and the loss of status resulting from impending retirement can have adverse effects on pre-retirees who anticipate an intense loss of relations with coworkers (Bacharach et al. 2007). This leads to the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3: Intentions to participate in bridge employment will increase when a pre-retiree's perception of role support by others increases.

## Work Family Balance

With retirement lasting twenty years or longer for a pre-retiree, human resource managers are now faced with finding ways to engage the older worker for longer periods of time (Dorfman 2002). This includes not only preparing pre-retirees for continued engagement in work, but also being able to provide redefined counseling to aid pre-retirees in understanding non-economic issues (primarily family and spousal focused) that accompany prolonged employment decisions. Internal conditions such as home life and pressing family responsibilities (caregiving) and lack of spousal support play a role in influencing a pre-retiree's receptiveness to retirement and continued work involvement (Van Solinge and Henkens 2007).

Retirement decisions by married couples are often linked to a spouse's decision of when to retire (Smyer and Pitt-Catsouphes 2007). The issue of work family balance is indeed important, and those that report a balance are more likely to participate in bridge employment (Henkens 1999). In a study conducted by Henkens (1999), the extent to which partners influence each other in regards to early retirement and caregiving responsibilities established that early retirement was, to a certain extent, a household decision. Henkens (1999) found that partner or spousal support impacted the retirement decision-making process, and that partners gauged the effect of early retirement if they themselves were supportive of harmonious activities regarding home and work life in general. They were, therefore, more

inclined to support a pre-retirement decision if they expected fewer disruptions to marital life (i.e. division of housework, shared activities, and maintaining of social relations). Overall, a pre-retiree (whether male or female) who mutually supported a spouse's decision to remain engaged in the workforce (whether phased or partial) viewed work as a meaningful and productive investment of time and energy. (It is also important to note that men in the study scored lower than women on retirement adjustment if a spouse remained employed and adapted less easily to a spouse's absence from the home.)

As retirement decisions are pondered by pre-retirees, productivity in the workforce is often an issue with what one's personal life holds in retirement. Although the labor force in general is projected to increase with older worker involvement, a major burden facing pre-retirees as they approach retirement will be the challenge of whether or not to engage in bridge employment despite negative setbacks such as caregiving network issues or lack of support from others in their community (Lima et al. 2008). Geographical relocations, family life concerns such as caring for aging parents, adult children returning home, becoming 'parents again' to grandchildren, and health concerns (of the pre-retiree and spouse) will make it increasingly difficult for pre-retirees to combine these caregiving responsibilities with the decision of whether or not to continue labor force participation (Lima et al. 2008). Learning to set reasonable goals and boundaries for family members who are engaged both in the workforce and in caregiving is a meaningful and productive investment of time and energy (Dorfman 2002). As such, these non-economic influential factors provide 'pushes and pulls' in the decision of labor force involvement as coupled with sensitive issues such as care-giving responsibilities and personal obligation felt to family, and have the potential to negatively influence the ability to continue working after retirement. This leads to the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 4: Intentions to participate in bridge employment will increase when a pre-retiree perceives greater control over work and responsibility to family conflicts.

## **METHODS**

### **Overview**

#### **Sample**

Data was collected from 387 pre-retirees who anticipated retiring within ten years or less and were employed on a full-time (n=277) or part-time (n=110) basis. Average tenure at current employer for both groups was 4.95 years. The short tenure expressed by survey participants could be contributed to the transient nature of the population surveyed, and to the fact that participants were eligible to complete the survey if they anticipated retiring within ten years or less. Sixteen job categories were represented and the percentages of respondents in them were as follows: computer and related 20.2% (full-time 24.5%, part-time 9.1%), management or supervisory 16.5% (FT 16.2%, PT 17.3%), education or training 14.2% (FT 13.0%, PT 17.3%), healthcare practitioners and technical 9.3% (FT 9.4%, PT 9.1%), food preparation or serving related and building and ground cleaning/maintenance each in identical proportions at 7.8% (FT 6.9%, PT 10.0%), transportation or material moving 5.2% (FT 5.8%, PT 3.6%) with the following categories representing less than 5% of the total sample and less than 5% of either FT or PT workers: architecture or engineering (4.4%), production (3.9%), legal (2.6%), arts, design, entertainment, media (2.1%), financial services (1.6%), sales (1.6%), community or social services (1.6%), office, administrative or clerical support (0.8%), and construction, installation, or repair (0.8%).

There were larger numbers of women (59.7%) that participated in the study than men; of full-timers, 57.8% were women, but a larger percentage (64.5%) of part-time respondents were women. Age ranged from 41 to 74 years, with an average of 54.07. Full-time respondents were slightly younger and encompassed the entire range, with an average age of 53.51. Part-time respondents ranged from ages 44

to 65, with an average of 55.48. Most respondents were married at 67% (17% divorced, 9% never married). Education level varied: 18.6% received their high school diploma or GED, 26.9% had community college/AA degrees, 26.6% had 4-year university/college degrees, and 25.8% had masters or doctoral degrees.

### **Procedures**

A member of the research team presented the opportunity to participate in the study to members of a county-based Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) at one of their monthly meetings. This county has a population of approximately 300,000 residents, situated within an urban community in the southeastern United States. Participation by each company and respondent was voluntary. The research team was provided with a list of employee names from each company, and 1,100 names were selected at random from those lists. In total, 24 companies were utilized for data collection, representing a broad cross-section of industries and job categories. Respondents were provided (in an email or memo by their HR manager or research team member, or by personal visit by a member of the research team with a presentation at a staff meeting, depending on the company's preference) with a web-link that was maintained by the research team with an invitation to participate and an opportunity for a small nominal gift by drawing of participants. A pencil and paper option was also offered. The overall response rate was 35.2%.

### **Dependent Variable**

#### ***Intentions to participate in bridge employment (IPBE)***

The dependent variable, intentions to participate in bridge employment, was measured with a scale composed of twenty-items, as provided in Appendix 1 (all but five items are reverse coded). These items were derived from a number of existing scales (Atchley 1975, 1976; Bailey and Hansson 1995; Davis 2003; Feldman and Kim 2000a; Gee and Baillie 1999; Gray and Morse 1980) related to career and job change, and intentions of future behavior (specifically of leaving a job and modified to reflect entering a bridge employment position). Agreement with each item was indicated using a seven-point Likert scale from "1 = strongly agree" to "7 = strongly disagree". This scale had an acceptable Cronbach alpha reliability of .866 (.811 for full-time, .892 for part-time respondents).

Two pilot studies were conducted in the development of this scale. The first contained a sixteen item measure and was sent to 39 individuals ages 39-70. Analysis of the results and comments from the respondents indicated a concern between "part-time" and "full-time" intentions, and thus, this categorization was collected as an independent item and wording was adjusted on affected questions. Another concern of wording was with the construct and use of the term "identity" which was determined to be misinterpretable to the audience, and questions referring to identity were rephrased. Ultimately, it was determined that there were two different types of questions for bridge employment; those that addressed categorization (of part-time vs. full-time, current employer or different employer, current industry or different industry, volunteer or for money) and those that addressed behavior, motives, and the broader likelihood to participate in future employment after retirement from a "career job". The first group was a sub-scale of nine-items that were determined by the research team (eventually, one item was dropped from this scale). The second group of twelve questions received a second pilot study, in which 89 members of a local AARP chapter ranging in age from 50-67 and within two to five years of retirement were provided with the IPBE scale (50 responded, for a 56% response rate). Two questions related to identity again received revision prior to the full-study data collection. In the full-study data collection, categorical analysis of interactions (resulting in 6 categories of no bridge employment, part-time preferred, long-term preferred, long term and part-time, not sure, or not long-term and not sure part-time) between IPBE, part-time (vs. full-time) and long-term (vs. short-term bridge employment) indicated that 62.2% of the sample had some intention to work after retirement with the majority of these (38.1%)

preferring part-time bridge employment of a short-term nature, 24.6% had no intentions to participate in work after retirement, and 13.2% were uncertain about their plans.

## **Independent and Control Variables**

### ***Education***

Education level was measured with two items: “what is your highest level of education completed?”, and “have you received or attended any updated training, technical, or skill building seminar(s)?” Respondents could check one of eight categories as representing the highest level they had completed: grade school (grade 6) coded 1, junior high (grade 8) coded 2, high school or GED (3), AA/Community College (4), 4-year University/College (5), Masters Degree (6), Doctoral Degree (7), Other/specify (8). If they had received additional training, an additional 0.5 was added to their education level score.

### ***Training opportunities***

Training opportunities were measured using a seven-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree and not at all to 7 = strongly agree or a very large extent) adapted from Wayne, Shore, and Liden (1997). These items covered both formal and informal developmental experiences that the respondent may be encountering related to training (Fields 2002) such as “provides me with challenging assignments”, “projects to develop and strengthen new skills”, and “managers made a substantial investment in you recently by providing formal training and development opportunities”.

### ***Role support from others***

Role support was measured using a five-point Likert scale (1 = don't have such a person to 5 = very much) adapted from Caplan, Cobb, French, Van Harrison, and Pinneau (1980). This measure assessed work-based and social support an employee perceives that is available from their supervisor, coworkers, and spouse and/or family and friends. According to Lim (1996), this is one of the most widely used social support scales for a work context. Items were analyzed as a 12-item scale that is a composite of all social support (alpha of .918), and broken into three sub-scales to reflect source of role support for more in-depth analysis: supervisor (alpha of .951), coworkers (.939) and family/spouse (.941), and ranked such that family and spouse was the biggest source of role support (mean of 4.09), coworkers next (mean of 3.26) and supervisors last (mean of 3.17), a consistent pattern in both full-time and part-time respondents.

### ***Work family balance***

Work family balance was measured using a 14-item, five point Likert scale (1 = very little, 5 = very much) adapted from Thomas and Ganster (1995). This scale measures an employee's perception of control over demands and aspects of work and family responsibilities and allows for a reflection of multiple social roles (Fields 2002). It was adapted to reflect “senior” issues from the extant literature such as spousal interdependence, marriage, supporter dilemmas, and caring for an aging parent or other dependent relative. Reliability measures indicated an alpha of .844, and the scale had a mean score of 3.14, with no significant difference between full-time and part-time respondents.

### ***Control variables***

We controlled for several variables in our analyses. First, we controlled for years to retirement. Respondents were asked with an open-ended question “How many years until you retire from your current employer? The average time to retirement was 5.12 years for the overall sample, though full-time employees had much longer to retirement (6.43 years to retirement) compared to part-time employees at 1.85 years. Participating in bridge employment is becoming more common among younger retirees (62

years and younger) who are approaching retirement and who leave full-time career jobs are more likely than older workers (aged 62 and older) to participate in bridge jobs of a part-time status (Cahill et al. 2006). Out of this younger group, women are more likely than men their same age to accept a part-time bridge job. Not surprisingly, individuals under the age of 65 who are approaching retirement from a career job are more likely to engage in part-time bridge employment if company-related healthcare lacks portability, which holds true for both men and women (Cahill et al. 2006).

We also controlled for a number of demographic variables, including gender, age, tenure in the organization, and economic dependency. These have been demonstrated in previous research as factors associated with the acceptance of bridge employment (Adams and Rau 2004; Davis 2003; Doeringer 1990; Shultz 2001; Smyer and Pitt-Catsouphes 2007; Ulrich and Brott 2005; Weckerle and Shultz 1999). Gender was measured with the question “What is your gender?” (male was coded 1 and female, 2). Age was measured with an open-ended question “What is your age?” Tenure was measured with “How long you were employed or are currently employed at your ‘career job’?” with eight categories ranging from under 3 years (coded 1) to 30 years or longer (coded 8).

Economic dependency is an additive index based on four factors, following the approach that Brett, Clon, and Slocum (1995) suggested. In an effort to expand on economic dependency, a 4-item measure of number of dependents, marital status, amount the respondent’s income contributed to household income, and the perceived ease of being able to find a similar paying/benefits job was used and added together to get an economic dependency score to help control for issues of social mobility (Wollan 2002). These four factors are: to what extent does your income support your household (0-100%, then categorized such that 0-25% = 1, 26-50% = 2, 51-75% = 3, 76-100% = 4), number of dependents your household supports, how likely you could find a job with another employer that is similar to your current job (0-25% = 1, 26-75% = 0, 76-100% = -1), and do you receive benefits at your current job (coded yes = 1, no=0)? A range from 0 (little economic dependency on job) to 10 (high economic dependency on job) was realized, with 82.2% of respondents falling in the range of 2 to 6 (7.2% on 0 or 1, 10.6% on 7 to 10) and little differences in the dispersion between part-time and full-time respondents. Economic dependency has been shown in past research to be related to gender and income support, such that men showed greater economic dependency on their employment to provide for others (Wollan 2002). As the workforce continues to age, so does the need for an individual approaching retirement to have increased savings and an awareness of necessary financial planning (Alford, Farnen, and Schachet 2004; Schulte 2008; Weston 2008). Participation in bridge jobs by both men and women transitioning from full-time careers was common among low-wage individuals out of financial necessity; however, men approaching retirement from a full-time job were less likely than women to accept a bridge job if early retirement financial incentives were offered by the pre-retiree’s company (Cahill et al. 2006).

## RESULTS

The correlation matrix and descriptive statistics of our variables are presented in Table 1. To test all of the hypotheses, we performed hierarchical regression analyses. Table 2 presents these results. In the first step, control variables were entered. Control variables were employment status (full-time/part-time), years to retirement, gender, age, tenure with organization, economic dependency, and marital status. In the second step, the factor under consideration was added to the equation. As predicted, all hypotheses were supported. Hypothesis 1 predicted that intentions to participate in bridge employment will increase with advancing levels of education. Education significantly predicted intentions to participate in bridge employment ( $\beta = .209$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $F_{8,378} = 13.33$ ,  $p < .01$ ;  $R^2 = .220$ ). Thus, as predicted, education explained unique variance in the intentions to participate in bridge employment beyond that which was accounted for by the control variables.

Hypothesis 2 predicted that intentions to participate in bridge employment will increase with more training and development opportunities. Training and development opportunities significantly predicted

intentions to participate in bridge employment ( $\beta = .228$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $F_{8,378} = 14.09$ ,  $p < .01$ ;  $R^2 = .230$ ). Thus, as predicted, training and development opportunities explained unique variance in the intentions to participate in bridge employment beyond that which was accounted for by the control variables.

Hypothesis 3 predicted that intentions to participate in bridge employment will increase when a pre-retiree perceives that they are receiving role support from others. Role support from others significantly predicted intentions to participate in bridge employment ( $\beta = .217$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $F_{8,378} = 13.08$ ,  $p < .01$ ;  $R^2 = .217$ ). Thus, as predicted, role support explained unique variance in the intentions to participate in bridge employment beyond that which was accounted for by the control variables. In addition, further analysis of the source of this role support was explored given the nature of the role support scale. Of the three sources of role support tested, role support from coworkers had the greatest impact ( $\beta = .235$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $F_{8,378} = 13.59$ ,  $p < .01$ ;  $R^2 = .223$ ) followed by role support from supervisor ( $\beta = .168$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $F_{8,378} = 12.09$ ,  $p < .01$ ;  $R^2 = .204$ ). Interestingly, role support from family was not-significant ( $\beta = .076$ ,  $p = .126$ ).

Hypothesis 4 predicted that intentions to participate in bridge employment will increase when a pre-retiree perceives greater control over work and responsibility to family conflicts. Role support from others significantly predicted intentions to participate in bridge employment ( $\beta = .176$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $F_{8,378} = 12.80$ ,  $p < .01$ ;  $R^2 = .213$ ). Thus, as predicted, role support explained unique variance in the intentions to participate in bridge employment beyond that which was accounted for by the control variables.

## DISCUSSION

In this study, we explored the extent to which four factors influenced the intentions of pre-retirees to consider work after retirement (i.e., bridge employment). Even with numerous other explanatory variables controlled, more education, more opportunities for training and development, role support (specifically from supervisors and coworkers), and a reduction in work-family conflict were significant predictors of an individual's intentions to engage in bridge employment after retirement. These findings provide support for identifying and targeting human resource efforts of employing and retaining a trained post-retirement workforce for part-time or project management types of work.

The contribution of this work lies in its interdisciplinary nature and adding to the base of knowledge of managing an aging workforce in the human resource and management literature (Feldman 1994; Han and Moen 1999; Holland and Gottfredson 1992; Ruhm 1989). The study demonstrates the need for career transition support in later career stages (Super 1980), particularly from employers seeking a flexible workforce with flexible work arrangements. Our findings demonstrated consistency with previous studies that have examined non-economic reasons as to why older workers participate in bridge employment, such as fulfillment of personal goals (Atchley 1975, 1976), intensity of commitment to work (Meyer, Allen, and Smith 1993; Seibert, Kraimer, and Crant 2001), and social belongingness and contribution (Binstock 1998; Davis 2003).

The strength of the importance of work-family conflict for this population is also interesting. Traditionally, much of the work-family conflict literature has focused on childcare and dual career issues of spouses. While we anticipated that work-family conflict would be present for this population, our mean result of 3.14 (on a 5 point Likert scale where 5 indicates more control and a 1 indicates very little control) indicates that there remains less control of work-family balance activities than might be assumed by those preparing for retirement. In our sample, 33.1% of respondents indicated that they felt they had control over work-family conflicts (scoring 3.50 – 5.00), 22.7% reported little control (scoring 1.00 - 2.50) and the balance scoring the neutral mid-point. Anecdotally, pre-retirees have indicated to us that issues like changing expectations of housework of the now retiring spouse, conflicts over how to spend time and retirement funds, and generational management of aging parents and grown children resurface in providing fertile

TABLE 1  
CORRELATION MATRIX OF DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS AND INTER-SCALE RELIABILITIES [N=387]

	Mean (SD)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	
1	Intentions to Participate in Bridge Employment	4.28 (0.96)	.866												
2	Education	4.98 (1.32)	.244**	[n/a]											
3	Training Opportunities	4.40 (1.40)	.296**	.810											
4	Role Support from Others	3.51 (0.93)	.378**	.428**	.918										
5	Role Support Supervisor	3.17 (1.29)	.331**	.187**	.872**	.951									
6	Role Support Coworkers	3.26 (1.17)	.384**	.259**	.873**	.769**	.939								
7	Role Support Spouse/Family	4.09 (1.07)	.159**	.061	.584**	.210**	.238**	.941							
8	Work Family Balance	3.14 (0.82)	.180**	.097	.174**	.143**	.160**	.103*	.844						
9	Part/FullTime	0.72 (0.45)	.382**	.224**	.192**	.435**	.428**	.130*	.057						
10	Yrs to Retire	5.12 (4.18)	.310**	.040	.202**	.405**	.414**	.072	.014	.495**					
11	Gender	1.60 (.49)	.054	-.020	-.080	.054	.033	.113*	-.101*	-.062	-.051				
12	Age	54.07 (5.87)	-.115**	.177*	-.145**	-.130*	-.144**	.024	.014	-.152**	-.448**	-.083			
13	Tenure	4.95 (2.07)	-.060	.263**	.103*	-.006	.036	-.036	.079	.000	-.216**	-.098*	.374**		
14	Economic Dependency	3.97 (1.89)	.104*	-.086	.113*	.165**	.120*	.212**	-.047	.098	.066	-.129*	-.070	.018	

\* p < .05, \*\* p < .01

Note: Race was collected as a control variable, but was omitted from this correlation matrix when it was not significantly correlated with any of the non-control variables of interest listed above. Marital Status was collected as a control variable and included in further analysis because of its relationship to Role Support (.129\*) and with Role Support Family (.240\*\*).

**TABLE 2**  
**RESULTS OF HIERARCHICAL REGRESSION ANALYSIS EXAMINING INTENTIONS TO PARTICIPATE IN BRIDGE EMPLOYMENT ON**  
**FOUR FACTORS<sup>3</sup>**

Variable	Step 2: Independent Effect				
	Control	H1	H2	H3	H4
Employment Status (FT/PT)	.298**				
Years to Retirement	.175**				
Gender	.089				
Age	.025				
Tenure	-.025				
Economic Dependency	.061				
Marital Status	.069				
<b>Independent Effect</b>					
H1: Education		.209**			
H2: Training Opportunities			.228**		
H3: Role Support (overall)				.217**	
a) Role Support (supervisor)					.168**
b) Role Support (coworkers)					.235**
c) Role Support (family)					.076
H4: Work Family Balance					.176**
R <sup>2</sup>	.183	.220	.230	.217	.204
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.168	.204	.213	.200	.187
Change in R <sup>2</sup>		.037	.047	.034	.021
F	12.11**	13.33**	14.09**	13.08**	12.09**
Df	7,379	8,378	8,378	8,378	8,378

<sup>a</sup> Entries are betas.  
 \* p < .05, \*\* p < .01

ground for work family conflict. Thus, we suggest that future researchers continue to consider the pre-retiree's work family conflict in models, and that those who study work family conflict investigate career transition conflict, and that of an aging workforce.

Another interesting finding of this study relates to the nature of bridge employment and the importance of the pre-retiree's employment status (part-time versus full-time). We controlled for employment status in our models and testing of the four main factors hypothesized, but the results of the overall model warrant consideration as well. The regression model indicated an  $R^2$  value of .146 ( $p < .01$ ;  $\beta = .298$ ,  $p < .01$ ) for employment status and  $R^2$  value of .019 ( $p < .01$ ;  $\beta = .175$ ,  $p < .01$ ) for years to retirement (compared to  $R^2$  values ranging from .021 to .047 and  $\beta$  from .168 to .228 for hypothesized independent variables). One-way Anova analysis comparing the part-timer's intentions to full-timer's intentions to participate in bridge employment indicated a significant difference between these two groups ( $F_{1,385} = 65.68$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Our results indicate that part-time employment prior to retirement generally yielded fewer intentions to continue work in retirement. On the other hand, many of the full-time employed pre-retirees seemed willing to step into part-time employment after retiring from their career jobs. Thus, it appears that part-time employment is truly seen as a "bridge" between full-time and non-working status. The results suggest that in terms of years to retirement, the further an employee is from retirement, the more likely they are to have intentions to work after retirement, but have diminishing expectations and intentions to work after retirement as that decision looms closer. We suggest that this may be related to diminishing health standards as one ages, and the diminishing uncertainty about the costs of retirement and funds available (the economic dependency argument). In other words, an employee six to eight years from retirement may be concerned that their retirement funds will not be adequate and will necessitate some form of bridge employment, but nearer to retirement, it is not unusual for retirement counselors to meet with pre-retirees and provide them with the specifics of their expected income. Additionally, given disengagement theories, a respondent is likely to see themselves as part of a workgroup until they move closer to retirement, when coworkers and supervisors might start tapering off interactions and work assignments in anticipation of the pre-retiree's future absence. At that point closer to retirement, respondents are already disengaging and have less intentions to continue the employment relationship, while focusing on non-work activities in the future.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

One of the major implications for future research is the significance of the part-time versus full-time pre-retiree status in assessing future intentions to participate in bridge employment. More than just a control variable, we assert that this variable warrants further analysis and consideration as a moderating variable. Additionally, the importance of years to retirement draws attention to the need for researchers to consider this framing window when considering respondents and inclusion of their data, as accuracy of the predictions of intentions to participate in bridge employment appear to be different depending on the length time from actual retirement.

The findings also suggest that more attention is warranted on the source of role support and the actual impacts that coworkers and supervisors have when influencing employees. One can infer from this sample that while there is work-family balance concern, one statement being made is that "my family just doesn't understand my work-life" and provides much less of a supporting environment for working activities than comes from other sources. Are there ways to integrate family members more effectively to provide support for the working employee? Does it matter if family members are supportive or not?

## LIMITATIONS

Limitations in this study should be considered when interpreting the results. First, the design of the study was cross-sectional, and not longitudinal. Measuring intentions (of any nature) is an interesting

measure of a point in time, but as research in other areas such as turnover intentions has demonstrated, where intentions to quit accounts for less than 15% of turnover variance (Griffeth, Hom, and Gaertner 2000; Hom and Griffeth 1995), intentions are not the same as behavior. Further, the timing and limiting the sample to those closer to retirement should yield more accurate predictions of behavior, consistent with the timing of behavioral-intention theories (Ajzen and Fishbein 1980).

We were also cautious but unable to reduce the common method bias. All responses were from a self-reported survey. Finally, given the relatively low predictions of our four factors studied, taken in combination with the two significant control variables (employment status and years to retirement), there are most certainly additional variables that can be considered as having explanatory power in predicting intentions to participate in bridge employment.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study continues to build the base of knowledge in management literature on the phenomenon of “bridge employment” begun in earnest with Feldman’s (1994) work, and tied to numerous career models (i.e., Super 1980). While much has been done in the area of pre-employment and early employment socialization of newcomer employees, we suggest and demonstrate here that there is a career transition and socialization process, via role support, education, training and development, and work family balance issues, that arise again as employees near retirement and consider phasing out of career jobs and into part-time or project-based bridge retirement.

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### APPENDIX INTENTIONS TO PARTICIPATE IN BRIDGE EMPLOYMENT SCALE

<b>1 – Strongly agree</b>	<b>2 – Agree quite a lot</b>	<b>3 – Agree just a little</b>	<b>4 – I'm not sure</b>	<b>5 – Disagree just a little</b>	<b>6 – Disagree quite a lot</b>	<b>7 – Strongly disagree</b>
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**Using the scale above to answer the following questions, please choose the answer that fits you best:**

1. After I retire from my "career job", I would like to work in long-term employment.
2. After I retire from my "career job", I would like to work in part-time employment.
3. I do not want to work in any form of employment after I retire from my "career" job. \*
4. If I were to work after retirement, I am likely to work in the same/similar industry.
5. After I retire from my "career" job, I am likely to work for my current employer.
6. After I retire from my "career" job, I am likely to work for a former employer.
7. After I retire from my "career" job, I am likely to work for another employer.
8. If I were to work after retirement, I am likely to work for money.
9. If I were to work after retirement, I am likely to do volunteer work.

**When I think about working after retirement:**

10. I expect that I will have to seek some form of paid employment once I retire.
11. I intend to continue working in some capacity after I have retired from this job.
12. I plan to be fully retired and not engaged in work for wages or salary once I retire.\*
13. I fear that my past experiences would not be valued when I think about working again after retirement.  
\*
14. When I think about going back to work after I retire, I dread having to start a new career from the bottom. \*
15. The thought of having to compete with a younger generation would keep me from working after retirement. \*
16. I would like to continue working after I retire because I enjoy the chance to contribute productively to society.
17. I plan to keep working after retirement because I enjoy having contact with people.
18. The thought of being able to use my current knowledge, skills, and abilities in another job gives me reason to continue working after retirement.
19. I see myself continuing to work after retirement because I anticipate losing a part of who I am once I retire from my current career/job.
20. When I think about continuing to work after retirement and describing myself to someone I don't know, I can see myself talking primarily about my work.

\* All item responses except items 5, 12, 13, 14, 15 are reverse-coded.

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## **From Micro to Meso: Overuse of Strengths – A Framework for Assessing and Improving Organizational Effectiveness**

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*Abstract: This exploratory theoretical paper adapts an individual level concept from executive coaching – the overuse of strengths – to explore its potential at the organizational level as a framework for assessing and improving organizational effectiveness. This study posits a multilevel homologous relationship between overuse of strengths and performance at the individual and organizational levels. Specifically, the framework is used to explore the potential effects of overuse of strengths given a scientific management and high performance work system (HPWS) organization. This exploratory conceptualization suggests that the overuse of strengths framework and a curvilinear “amount” scale may indeed provide fruitful direction for further research and theory development in the field of organizational effectiveness.*

Organizational effectiveness is an important, yet elusive construct (Cameron, 1978; Cameron & Whetten, 1983; Hubbard, 2009; Pfeffer, 1982; Reed, 2006; Rojas, 2000). Researchers and academics have made many attempts to define and model the construct, however there is no consensus in the field (Argyris, 1990; Cameron, 1986; Connolly, Conlon, & Deutsch, 1980; Lewin & Minton, 1986; Scott & Davis, 2007; Steers, 1975). Due to the lack of consensus on definitions and models, some have called for abandoning the field due to the intellectual disarray (Goodman, Atkin, & Schoorman, 1983). Others have advocated pursuit of a single best model, arguing the advantages of a particular perspective (Cameron & Whetten, 1983; Pfeffer, 1982; Reed, 2006). Others call for the development of multiple models, arguing that each unique point of view adds value and has a contribution to make to the field (Cameron & Whetten, 1983; Pfeffer, 1982; Reed, 2006). They suggest that each approach to assessing organizational effectiveness (e.g., profit, goals, process, systems, scorecards, multiple bottom lines) represents a perspective that can be valuable depending upon one’s purpose and conceptualization of organizations. A number of authors have noted that the presence and acceptance of paradoxes appears to be a characteristic of effective organizations (Cameron, 1986; Fredberg, Beer, Eisenstat, Foote, & Norrgren, 2008; Peters & Waterman, 1982; VandeVen, 1983). This paper builds on these authors’ work, applying an individual level model for evaluating performance paradoxes to explore the relationship between performance and overuse of strengths – a paradox – at the organizational level.

The purpose of this paper is to adapt an individual level concept from executive coaching, performance management, and leadership development – the overuse of strengths (Arthur, Hall, & Lawrence, 1989; Eichinger & Lombardo, 2003, 2004; Goldsmith, 2007; Goldsmith & Reiter, 2007; Lombardo & Eichinger, 2000; Thomas, 1977) – and to explore its potential as an organizational level framework for assessing and improving organizational effectiveness. Consistent with Klein and Kozlowski’s (2000) theoretical foundation for micro to meso analytical work, this study posits a multilevel homologous relationship between overuse of strengths and performance at the individual and organizational levels. First a brief overview of relevant literature in the field of organizational effectiveness will be reviewed, then the concept of overuse of strengths will be defined and its theoretical underpinnings explored. Next, an organizational level framework is outlined and used to analyze different types of organizations. Finally, future research directions are discussed.

### **ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS**

In 1986, building on the work of his colleagues (Campbell, 1977; Lewin & Minton, 1986; Quinn & Cameron, 1983; Quinn & Rohrbaugh, 1983; Steers, 1975) Cameron summarized areas of consensus in organizational effectiveness and areas of conflict, and then he introduced a discussion of the inherently

paradoxical nature of effectiveness in organizations. Cameron and others (Fredberg et al., 2008) recommend that instead of regarding the disagreement about effectiveness attributes as chaotic and confusing, researchers and practitioners should embrace the notion of paradox. He claims, “organizational effectiveness is inherently paradoxical. To be effective an organization must possess attributes that are simultaneously contradictory and mutually exclusive” (Cameron, 1986, pp. 544-545). “Simultaneous, equally compelling, contradictory attributes exist which create both balance and dynamism” (Cameron, 1986, p. 546) or, in other words, organizational effectiveness.

Additionally, Peters and Waterman note “if there is one striking feature of the excellent companies, it is this ability to manage ambiguity and paradox” (1982, p. xxiv). Van de Ven notes a growing appreciation of the paradoxes inherent in the nature of man and the organization (1983). “There is a growing realization that a dynamic theory that can explain both stability and change should begin with and directly address the tensions and conflicts inherent in human institutions” (VandeVen, 1983, p. 622). Cameron concludes that because “effectiveness is inherently tied to paradox, the construct of effectiveness can be understood in only a limited way without considering simultaneous contradictions” (1986, p. 549). The presence of mutually exclusive opposites yields the creativity, flexibility, and unity that leads to excellence (Cameron, 1986; Fredberg et al., 2008). Cameron summarizes the three principles that characterize the relationship between organizational effectiveness and paradox:

“Extremity in any criterion of effectiveness creates linearity and dysfunction; Synthesis is desirable but not required for excellence; paradox need not be resolved to be adaptive; and Paradoxes are paradoxical (contradictions and nonlinearity)” (1986, p. 549).

To summarize, Fredberg et al. (2008), Cameron (1986), Van de Ven (1983), and Peters and Waterman (1982) all introduce the concept of paradox as a critical component of organizational excellence or effectiveness. They suggest that taking any criterion of success to an extreme may lead to dysfunction and that modulation of criteria and adaptability to opposites (or paradoxes) are critical to success. This concept – the paradox of modulating strengths and embracing contradictions – has implications for organizational effectiveness theory building and research.

Modulating strengths and accepting contradictions may be important to effectiveness, at both an organizational level, as noted above, and at an individual level. For example, Becker (Peters & Waterman, 1982) argues that people are motivated by a “dualism” - a need to be part of something and a need to be special. When IBM rented Meadowlands Stadium for an evening to celebrate a sale’s team’s accomplishments, they were addressing individual needs for personal recognition and individual needs to be part of something great – thus managing a paradox or dualism (Peters & Waterman, 1982). Another example is when a high performing executive jeopardizes her performance by over reliance on a strength (e.g., she is known for coolness under pressure; but when close colleagues die in a airplane crash, her coolness is perceived as a lack of caring). Essentially by using a strength less, she may become even more effective in this situation. These examples illustrate that embracing paradoxes – modulating strengths and accepting contradictions – at the individual level may provide paths to improving individual effectiveness. These findings and those noted above suggest that embracing paradoxes may contribute to effectiveness at both the micro and meso level. This analysis also suggests the possibility that a particular paradox, the overuse of strengths (i.e., your greatest strength may be your greatest weakness) may operate at both the individual and organizational levels of an organization.

## **OVERUSE OF STRENGTHS – A PARADOX**

In the fields of executive coaching, performance management, and leadership development, research indicates that the behavior that an individual is most comfortable with and most associates with his/her success is also the behavior the individual is most likely to overuse, resulting in ineffectiveness or failure (Eichinger & Lombardo, 2003, 2004 ; Goldsmith, 2007; Goldsmith & Reiter, 2007; Kaplan & Kaiser, 2003; Kaplan & Kaiser, 2006). This overuse of strengths, the reflexive or thoughtless, habitual use of

behaviors associated with success even when they are inappropriate to the situation, can turn a strength into a weakness (i.e., your greatest strength becomes your greatest weakness).

There are a number of theoretical foundations for this concept. Learning theories, classical conditioning (Pavlov & Thompson, 1997; Windholz, 1997), operant conditioning (Skinner, 1971), and social learning (Pfeffer, 1982), all suggest that people may learn to favor or repeat certain behaviors. Individuals who are successful may come to associate how they act with success, even if their success was in spite of some of their behaviors. However, they have been conditioned to believe that who they are/what they do has made them successful, so they believe that if they keep on doing what they have been doing, they will continue to be successful (Kaplan & Kaiser, 2006). Individuals who are successful may get positive reinforcement for their accomplishments, thus they may become more likely to repeat the behavior that triggered the positive reinforcement. Goldsmith (2007) argues that the more “successful we become, the more positive reinforcement we get – and the more likely we are to experience the success delusion” – that is the more we are likely to believe that the more we do what we have been doing well (use our strengths), the more successful we will be. However, the delusion is that reflexive, habitual reliance on or excessive use of strengths will always lead to success. In fact, it is likely to lead to failure.

Locus of control (Judge & Bono, 2001), self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997), and attribution (Johns, 1999) are other theories which can be used to explain the overuse of strengths. Internal locus of control is associated with performance (Rotter, 1966), higher performing individuals tend to believe that they are in control of their destiny versus victims of fate. This translates into a belief that it is their behavior not chance or luck that has led to their success, so they are more prone to believe they should keep on doing what has made them so successful. Similarly, their belief that they can do the job (i.e., self-efficacy) and their belief that their contributions are the cause of success (i.e., self-serving bias) reinforce their belief in themselves even when there is evidence to the contrary or the circumstances have changed (Goldsmith & Reiter, 2007; Kaplan & Kaiser, 2006; Nelson & Quick, 2006).

Overuse of strengths is also related to theories of self-assessment and self-improvement (Eichinger & Lombardo, 2003, 2004 ; Lombardo & Eichinger, 2000). The overuse of strengths argument is as follows; many people advance professionally by repeatedly using their strengths; however, focusing on strengths alone may lead to repeating the same behavior in new situations, situations where the strength may not be as appropriate (i.e., your greatest strength becomes your greatest weakness).

“When backed into a corner, or under the gun to produce results, would you use anything less than your number one strength – or would you use it at any other level than full strength? Of course not! But the bad news is that any strength, in fact any skill, taken to an extreme can become toxic (either to you or the company)” (Girrell, 2004).

Put another way – “we know from more than 30 years of research on high performers ... that as stress increases, people tend to overuse their strengths. Under stress the range of people’s responses tends to narrow and they become less flexible and less adaptive” (McFarland, 2005). Goldsmith and Reiter (2007) assert that changing these self-limiting beliefs and actions are the key to future success.

Kaplan and Kaiser assert that “when managers don’t perform a function well, it is often because they either don’t do enough of it or they do too much of it” (2003, p. 16). The researchers believe in the “ubiquity of polarizing tendencies – that when one thing gets taken to an extreme, a complementary thing tends to get neglected” (cf. Jung, 1976) (Kaplan & Kaiser, 2003, p. 16). Given the duality of this paradoxical situation, they argue that traditional measures of the frequency and magnitude of skills (e.g., how often the manager engages in the behavior; how much the respondent agrees the statement describes the manager) should be replaced with a “curvilinear scale” (i.e., a scale of .5 to 3.5 going from “too little” to the “right amount” to “too much”) that allows respondents to indicate overdoing as well as underdoing (Kaplan & Kaiser, 2003). For example, supervisors, peers, and subordinates might be asked to evaluate a manager on dimensions such as “is cool under fire” and “is caring” using a “too little, right amount, too

much,” scale. They also recommend inclusion of measures that represent both sides of a duality, even when they are not opposing ends of a bipolar continuum (Kaplan & Kaiser, 2003).

The typical prescriptive process associated with the overuse of strengths is executive coaching or performance management. Typically, 360 degree feedback is obtained for the individual to diagnose potential strengths and weaknesses (including overuse of strengths); and then ongoing coaching is used for 12 – 18 months to provide feedback and reinforcement and hopefully ensure effective performance (Goldsmith & Reiter, 2007).

Two other theoretical approaches may also be used to explain the overuse of strengths at the individual and organizational levels. Cameron asserts that too much of either element in a paradox leads to extremism, “it is the presence of balanced paradoxes that energizes and empowers systems” (1986, p. 549). He argues that overuse or extremism leads to lower performance or ineffectiveness. Bateson (1987), introduced a concept – schismogenesis (a process of differentiation in the norms of behavior resulting from cumulative interactions) – based on cybernetic systems theory. Schismogenesis is a process of self-reinforcement where one action or attribute in an individual or organization perpetuates itself until it becomes extreme and therefore dysfunctional (Bateson, 1987). There are two types of schismogenesis, complementary and symmetrical, typified by the “rich get richer and the poor get poorer” and an arms race, respectively. For example, two individuals have a relationship; one buys a proprietary service from the other. The seller asserts her power and raises prices aggressively annually, because she can. The buyer complies because she feels she has no alternatives. Eventually, the buyer goes out of business because of a lack of a competitively priced critical service. This cycle of dominance and submission escalating into an out of balance system that disintegrates is an example of complementary schismogenesis. In symmetrical schismogenesis, the parties react to each other in a cycle of dominance-to-dominance – competition-to-competition – eventually leading to mutual destruction. Bateson (1987) argues that self-reinforcement and overuse of strengths can escalate into the ultimate failure – self-destruction.

To summarize, theories from the fields of psychology, sociology, career development, and systems provide the foundation for a model that posits the overuse of strengths may lead to individual and organizational ineffectiveness and that modulating the use of strengths and accepting contradictory characteristics/conditions may lead to individual and organizational effectiveness.

## **OVERUSE OF STRENGTHS – A FRAMEWORK FOR ASSESSING AND IMPROVING ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS**

Just as the overuse of strengths at the individual level can have a detrimental effect on individual performance, this study posits that the overuse of strengths at the organizational level can have a detrimental effect on organizational performance. Consider at the individual level a model where feelings, beliefs, and behavioral intentions interact to influence behavior, and behavior stimulates feedback, which in turn interacts with feelings, beliefs, and behavioral intentions – in a continuous feedback/reinforcement loop (See Figure 1). In this model as discussed above, the more positive reinforcement received the more the behavior is likely to be repeated/used. Similarly, at the organizational level consider a model where vision, mission, and plans interact to influence actions, and action stimulates feedback, which in turn interacts with vision, mission, and plans – in a continuous feedback/reinforcement loop (See Figure 1). Again one would expect that the more positive feedback received the more likely the action would be to continue or increase. Just as individuals may fall back on the things they do well, even when the action is inappropriate; organizations may continue doing the things they do well even when it may not be appropriate (e.g., consider the down-side of institutionalization and organizational inertia (Hannan & Freeman, 1977; Selznick, 2005)).

Consistent with the micro level model, an organization could conduct 360 degree feedback at the organizational level, asking representative samples of key constituents (e.g., employees, customers, suppliers, shareholders, regulators) for feedback. Feedback could be collected for each pair of dualities or paradoxes outlined in Fredberg et al.’s (2008) Figure 3 (e.g., predictable vs. dynamic, team vs. self, long-term vs. short-term, history vs. renewal, cohesion vs. diversity, or some other selection of organization-specific pairs) using the “too little, right amount, too much” scale. For example, suppliers could be asked to use a scale that goes from too little, to just right, to too much, to describe how they feel company X does on a series of dimensions – e.g., being predictable, being dynamic, focusing on the future, focusing on history. Then, based on the feedback the organization could modify its actions to achieve a more effective balance.

To further explore the potential of this framework, the concept of an organization overusing its strengths will be used to analyze two organization theories – Taylor’s scientific management rational theory (Scott & Davis, 2007; Taylor, 1916a, 1916b) and the high performance work system (HPWS) contingency theory (Appelbaum, 2002; Appelbaum, Bailey, Berg, & Kalleberg, 2000; Kirkman, Lowe, & Young, 1999).

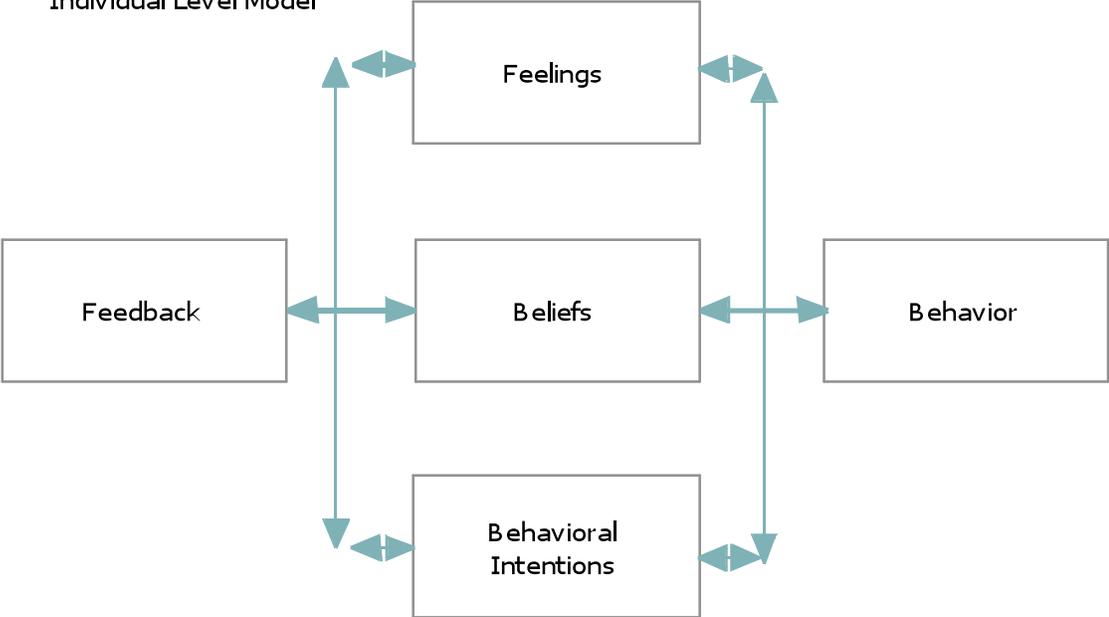
The scientific management theory as espoused by Taylor is based upon the principle that the “object of management should be to secure the maximum prosperity for the employer, coupled with the maximum prosperity for each employee” (1916b, p. 9). A summary description of the theory and critiques of it are presented below.

**TABLE 1  
SCIENTIFIC MANAGEMENT**

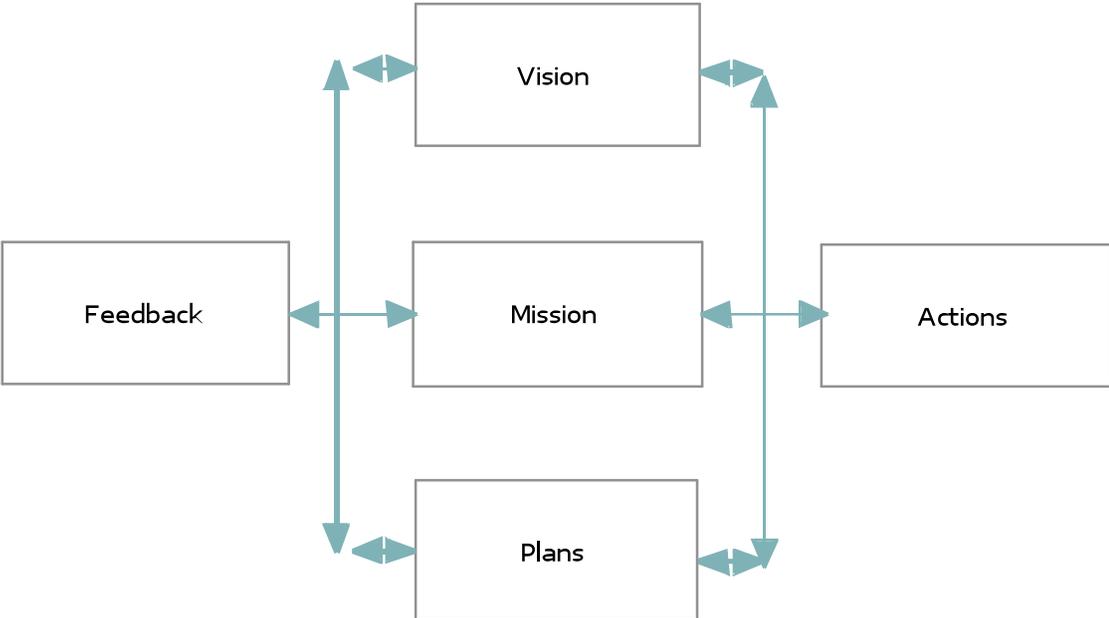
<b>Summary Description</b>	<b>Critiques</b>
Maximum prosperity for employers and employees via cooperation on increasing the size of the surplus (e.g., profit) Division of labor Standardization of tasks Focus on optimizing how tasks get done Use scientific methods and procedures to identify the one best way to do a job Use industrial engineering/time motion studies Focus on inspection to ensure quality Productivity drives higher wages/lower labor costs “Economic man” Man as a machine (Kaufman, 1993; Scott & Davis, 2007; Taylor, 1916b)	Lack of respect for the contributions made by employees and managers Deskilled labor to save costs Segmented workforce into finely differentiated grades reducing the potential for collective action Reduced discretion (managers and workers) (Kaufman, 1993; Perrow, 1986; Scott & Davis, 2007)

Figure 1

Individual Level Model



Organization Level Model



Looking at each fundamental of the scientific management approach and imagining what would happen if that strength was taken to an extreme (see table below) is a way of exploring if the overuse of strength concept adds value in the analysis of organizational effectiveness. Does it predict what might happen or what has happened in organizations using the scientific management approach? This analysis suggests that the framework may predict what would be considered the downsides of this organizational model, and also suggests it has face validity. Now, how might one use this framework practically to assess the effectiveness of an organization? One could create dual dimensions for each key feature of the model and then ask members of key constituents (e.g., employees, customers, suppliers, regulators, etc.) if the feature was underused, used just the right amount, or overused. This could then provide a diagnostic for the organization as well as a comparative tool for analyzing organizations. For example, suppose the dimension is “managers work cooperatively with workers”. One could use a curvilinear scale (overused, used just the right amount, or underused) to assess perceptions related to this dimension, and one could also assess perceptions related to a paradoxical or dual dimension – “managers micromanage workers.” The combined feedback would be more powerful than a simple frequency or magnitude measure on a single dimension, and could be used to modify plans and perhaps eventually improve performance.

**TABLE 2**  
**OVERUSE OF STRENGTHS ANALYSIS OF SCIENTIFIC MANAGEMENT**

Key Principles of Scientific Management (Taylor, 1916b)	Expected Dysfunctions If Strengths Are Overused
Use science to define the best tools and methods	Become rigid, inflexible, slow-changing, lose a sense of the “big picture”/context
Scientifically select, train, teach, and develop employees	Lose sight of the humanity of people, personal needs, desires and motivations May be discriminatory
Managers cooperate with/work with employees	May feel micro-managed, a loss of autonomy and/or freedom
Equal division of work and responsibility between manager and employees	May become lost in the execution, losing sight of pragmatism

The high performance work system (HPWS) as defined by Kirkman et al. is “an organizational system that continually aligns its strategy, goals, objectives, and internal operations with the demands of the external environment to maximize organizational performance” (1999, pp. 3, 8). High performance work systems use the following to dynamically adjust to their environment:

- “Self managing work teams
- Employee involvement
- Total quality management
- Integrated production technologies and
- The learning organization” (Kirkman et al., 1999, pp. 3, 8).

A brief summary of HPWS and critiques of them are presented in the table below.

**TABLE 3  
HIGH PERFORMANCE WORK SYSTEMS**

Summary Description	Critiques
<p>A combination of practices, structures, and processes that maximize employee knowledge, skill, commitment, and flexibility yielding discretionary effort and improved productivity. Workers have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opportunity to participate:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Greater autonomy</li> <li>○ Self-directed team membership</li> <li>○ Off-line team membership (problem-solving or quality improvement)</li> <li>○ Higher communication outside workgroup</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Skill (More selective staffing and training):                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Formal training</li> <li>Informal training</li> <li>Education</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p>Motivation/Incentives: Employment security Company shares information Promotion opportunities Company helps with work-family conflicts Pay is fair Pay for performance (Appelbaum, 2002; Appelbaum et al., 2000; Bohlander &amp; Snell, 2007)</p>	<p>Intentions of management may be focused on efficiency and profit Workers may feel manipulated Hard to implement (requires cooperation, what combination of attributes?) Seems like a “black box”, what really drives the improvements? (Appelbaum, 2002; Appelbaum et al., 2000)</p>

Now, looking at each fundamental of the HPWS approach and imagining what would happen if that strength were taken to an extreme (see table below) one can determine if the overuse of strength framework adds value in the analysis of organizational effectiveness. Does it predict what might happen or what has happened in organizations using the high performance work system management theory? Interestingly, this analytical tool may allow one to explore the potential downsides of a HPWS. Again, one could evaluate dual/paradoxical dimensions of the model using a curvilinear scale and assess an actual organization and/or compare organizations. For example, formal training and informal training could each be assessed on the “too little, right amount, too much” scale to determine if an optimal, productive balance was being achieved. Then, if necessary based on the feedback, appropriate changes in plans and actions made to achieve a more effective balance of training.

**TABLE 4**  
**OVERUSE OF STRENGTHS ANALYSIS OF HIGH PERFORMANCE**  
**WORK SYSTEMS**

Key Principles of HPWS (Appelbaum et al., 2000, pp. 116-123)	Expected Dysfunctions If Strengths Are Overused
Opportunity to participate: Greater autonomy Self-directed team membership Off-line team membership (problem-solving or quality improvement) Higher communication outside workgroup	Anarchy Loss of coordination Boggled down in meetings, no time to get work done Conflicting priorities
Skill (More selective staffing and training): Formal training Informal training Education	Higher costs, loss of productivity Higher costs, loss of productivity Higher costs
Motivation/Incentives: Employment security Company shares information Promotion opportunities Company helps with work-family conflicts  Pay is fair	Dead wood, loss of flexibility, "golden handcuffs" Everyone is an expert, even the competition No stability Boundaries between work and personal life disappear No motivation for exceptional performance
Pay for performance	No one moves without a pay plan

## CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, the field of organizational effectiveness has suffered from a lack of consensus and clarity for the past thirty years. A few researchers have suggested that unconventional approaches that embrace the dual, paradoxical nature of organizations might provide a productive path forward. This exploratory paper suggests that a concept from executive coaching – the overuse of strengths – may have application to organizations and may be helpful in theory development and empirical studies related to organizational effectiveness. The overuse of strengths framework provides a way to assess organizational effectiveness and thus potentially contribute to improvements in organizational effectiveness. It also provides a method for empirically exploring propositions about the relationship between the overuse of strengths and performance via a curvilinear “amount” scale used at both the individual and organization levels.

The framework outlined here could be empirically tested in specific organizations and used to improve performance or used to establish norms by organizational type or sector. This approach also provides an immediately useful analytical framework for practitioners. They can assess their own organizations using this framework and then make appropriate adjustments. If a body of empirical work is developed using similar dimensions for similar types of organizations, real progress could be made in terms of theory development. Researchers could hypothesize relationships, causality, etc. and then test their hypotheses.

For researchers who advocate the value of different conceptualizations of organizations and different organizational effectiveness models, this paper offers a unique perspective. An individual level model of performance effectiveness – the overuse of strengths – may provide an organizational level model of effectiveness that embraces the notion of paradox and allows researchers and practitioners to explore the relationship between the amount of contradictory characteristics/conditions and the perceived effectiveness of an organization.

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## **The Shifting Paradigm of Baby Boomer Retirement Planning**

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*Abstract: The Baby Boomer generation has done it again. As with other phases of their lives where they pioneered new lifestyles and choices, they now have succeeded in redefining retirement. While many workers before have gone the traditional route of retiring at age 62 with Social Security, Baby Boomers are forgoing the typical retirement scenario to stay on the job to satisfy both economic and workplace quality of life issues. While for years the predominant assumption was that there would be a significant labor shortage created as the Baby Boomers hit Social Security age, the opposite seems to be true. Findings in research offer a variety of potential reasons and explanations for this phenomenon which includes the fact that many organizations provide incentives for older workers to stay while many older workers themselves have come to the stark conclusion that they cannot afford to retire, and therefore will not into the near future.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

After many years of discussion and speculation the “front end” portion of the Baby Boom generation finally began to reach the minimum Social Security retirement age of 62 in 2008. In fact Kathleen Casey-Kirschling, born in the first seconds of 1946, became the first Baby Boomer to apply for and receive Social Security (Lee 2008). The long anticipated beginning of massive Baby Boomer retirements during the year 2008 has haunted many Human Resource professionals for years because of the potential of a talent gap created between the older workers who might opt for retirement and the lack of an adequate number of trained workers left behind in the labor force to shoulder the burden. The need for increased efforts in various Human Resource functional areas such as employment forecasting, succession planning, recruiting and training has been evident and well documented for several decades. In addition, a great deal of research points to the fact that into the late twentieth century, members of the labor force had consistently been retiring at an earlier stage in their careers as compared to previous generations (Johnson 2007). One estimate even has one half of the current U.S. government workers retiring in the next five to seven years (Horn 2005). This has led several to offer the notion of the “perfect storm” of labor force chaos that could result from large numbers of workers retiring in a relatively short period of time leaving organizations scrambling to fill key skill positions (Jamrog 2004).

However, in spite of all significant indicators and labor force trends that have been predicted, the mass retirement exodus long anticipated to begin in 2008 has not occurred at the previously believed levels. The initial reason offered is that organizations cannot and will not let it happen. Organizations have too much invested in highly skilled and proficient human capital to let it dissipate so quickly. Instead of passively accepting the chance of a great wave of retirements over a short period of time many organizations have actually been investing in financial incentives for older workers to remain with the organization in addition to providing more support for older workers through the use of training and the perks of added responsibility (Jamrog 2004). In addition, another significant factor to consider is that the older workers themselves are deciding to remain in their jobs simply because of the trend of the declining economy seen since 2007. There is evidence to suggest that while economic slowdowns usually mean lower labor participation rates for older workers, the recent decline in the economy has been a harsh wake up call for Baby Boomers to seriously assess their prospects for retiring at age 62 (Lee and Mather 2008). Into the near future an interesting paradox seems to be developing. The two forces at odds are the widely held belief that Baby Boomers are set to retire at a rate that will create a significant talent gap in the

economy versus the recent trend to the contrary indicating that older workers are likely to continue in the labor force indefinitely which will help organizations remain competitive and thus averting the predicted staffing crisis.

### **The Labor Gap Paradox**

An analysis of long-term economic trends typically indicates a strong and consistent correlation between the health of the economy and labor force participation rates. In times when the economy weakens, and can be accurately labeled as a recessionary period, the growth rate of labor participation usually slows significantly or even declines with the reverse being true during periods of economic expansion (Eschtruth and Gemus 2002). However, studies in recent years have found a trend that has been running somewhat contrary to this reality. Information provided by the Bureau of Labor Statistics indicates that while the overall employment rate had consistently declined between mid 2007 and July 2008 along with reported numbers of jobs lost in the non-farm sector increasing, the growth rate of older workers actually increased by 3.7 percent over the same period (Challenger 2008). In addition, this recent trend appears as if it could continue into 2012 where employees over the age of 55 are predicted to make up about 20 percent of the labor force compared to about 14% in 2002 (Munnell and Sass 2008).

Recent reports of the increased rate of participation in the labor market for older workers seem to fly in the face of the overwhelming projections of doom and gloom predicted by those in the Human Resources profession across all industries in recent years. The expectation of a labor shortage has been well documented. A report developed in 2000 by the Bureau of Labor Statistics predicted a gap of 5 to 6 million more jobs than workers in the United States by 2008, with the gap growing to around 10 million by 2010 and to 21 to possibly 40 million by 2015 (Jamrog 2004). A survey conducted by the Beta Research Corporation on behalf of the New York Times Job Market reported that 45% of HR professionals employed by organizations of 100 or more believe that there will be a severe shortage in the U.S. labor market into the year 2013 (Leonard 2003). In addition, despite the likely prospect that Detroit's Big Three auto companies will continue to downsize their overall operations over time, there are still industry wide plans of aggressive recruiting and selection programs between 2008 and 2016 to offset Baby Boomer retirements expected over the same period to keep the car companies competitive (McAlinden, et al 2008). In spite of the dire predictions, some researchers have likened the "sky-is-falling Gray2K" talent gap to the unfounded fear associated with the Y2K computer systems failures that were expected to occur on January 1, 2000 (Frauenheim 2006).

### **The Changing Retirement Paradigm**

Each year the commemorating of Labor Day typically generates a great deal of analysis and speculation as to the state of affairs of American labor. Articles that appear yearly in such media outlets as Business Week, the Wall Street Journal and numerous local newspapers across the country take stock of labor news as far as trends in unionism, the changing role of government in labor relations and the usual discussion of workforce data and associated demographic analysis complete with charts, graphs and predictions for the future. Labor Day 2008 was a little different in that it occurred during the year of the early Baby Boomers who would turn age 62 with expectations of the retirement floodgate opening wider as each month passed. However, the analysts who were ready to report the great Baby Boomer retirement phenomenon actually found something unexpected. To the amazement of some experts, a Labor Day surprise was reported which observed that older workers were not retiring at the rate expected and that the slower economy was not claiming older workers as victims of cutbacks and layoffs as is usually seen (Gurcheik 2008). Upon realizing that older workers were not leaving the workforce at previously expected levels the attention of the analysts then turned to the various possible reasons for this recent trend reversal. As might be imagined the results covered a full range of possibilities from older workers being asked to stay on at the organization's request to the realization by older workers that retirement is

not really a viable option at the current time due to the rapidly deteriorating condition of America's financial and economic systems.

### **Baby Boomer Retirement Factors: The Realities of Stay or Go**

The extra pressure of economic and financial uncertainty such as recently seen has forced older workers to take a hard look at their retirement plans and to realize that they may be simply unrealistic. In fact, a 2008 study conducted by the Employee Benefit Research Institute in Washington indicated that less than one-quarter of workers 55 and older had savings and investments of \$250,000 or more (Greene 2008). While acknowledging inadequate resources available for retirement is a painful process, it may be what many older employees need to do more often. Beyond the savings issue is the concern about the desire for an adequate benefits plan to meet the needs of older workers. The current realities of shrinking retiree health benefits and the risk of costly serious illnesses suggest a sense of acute fear on the part of some workers thinking about retirement (Skinner 2007). Therefore, some experts have concluded that it is a reflection of people's desperation concerning financial insecurity, eroding home equity values, rising health care costs and rising costs in the general market such as for energy that have caused the recent surge in working past 65 (Dresang 2008). However, while worsened economic and financial conditions may well be a leading cause for the extended work careers of older workers, there are other issues that deserve some attention such as the basic nature of the workplace and the workers of today as compared to previous decades.

The short lived dot-com boom and crushing bust of a decade ago may have discouraged some in the Human Resources area who had consistently emphasized the recruiting and maintaining of younger workers over older ones. In some ways many in organizational management, especially those in the Human Resources field, may have actually concluded that the move to cyber organizations and trendy financial investments was beyond the norm of usual conservative business practices and standard operating procedures and may have caused some businesses to pull back to more established positions. After the dust cleared from the dot-com debacle many organizations in a variety of industries seemed to be more open to the opportunity and comfortable with the prospect of retaining and hiring older workers especially as the economy took a downturn in 2001 along with the 9/11 attacks later that year (Uchitelle 2003). Since 2001, the employment patterns have shown that older workers have not only held their own during two economic downturns, but have actually thrived in the labor force especially in certain industries. The appeal of mature workers has been seen in many industries where older workers are very much welcome to apply. According to James Challenger (2008) of Challenger, Gray and Christmas, Inc., older workers have done very well in industries such as healthcare, teaching, consulting, nonprofit organizations, customer service/relations, small business and entrepreneurial ventures. Human Resource managers in many industries have been charged with the task of developing creative methods to retain older workers or to lure those already retired back into the labor force. Many workers are willing to stay on or reenter the workforce if organizations are willing to provide assurances of a welcoming and inclusive environment that promotes security and meaningfulness. This may also require the need to address potential resentments from younger workers who may be eagerly awaiting anticipated workplace advancements of pay and responsibility which may now be delayed indefinitely (Gurchiek 2008; Wessel 2008).

Providing job opportunities including work that contributes real value, task variety, a stimulating culture, true team efforts and a respect for associated life issues goes a long way in getting the attention, interest and the commitment of older employees (Jamrog 2004). In fact, a recent study conducted by Sun Life Financial Inc. showed that 83 percent of the workers surveyed indicated that the main reason they intended to stay on the job beyond the typical retirement age is the opportunity to stay mentally sharp (Pitt 2008). In addition, older workers, and workers in general, have been the beneficiaries of job designs that require less stamina, the elimination of most mandatory retirement age standards and a legal system

that has banned age discrimination (Wessel 2008). Coupling these workplace facts with Baby Boomers who are in better physical health than the generation before them makes it clear that the current trend of delayed retirement may not only be a function of economic upheaval and bear markets (Maples and Abney 2006).

Regardless of the sociological or economic elements associated with the understanding of the actions of older workers in the labor force, the fact remains that for about a twenty year period ranging from 1964 to 1984 there was an eleven percent decline in the birthrate in the United States (Piktialis and Morgan 2003). This decline essentially created the potential for a labor gap that had long been anticipated to occur within the first decade of the twenty-first century. As that time is now upon us, many organizations have had to face the reality of the chance of a 15 percent decline in prime age workers while the demand for managers, skilled workers and high-tech type jobs increases by an expected 25 percent (Challenger 2003; Kaihla 2003). The basic forces of supply and demand may go far in providing the initial answer to this workforce dilemma. In other words, many organizations are asking their older workers to stay on to ensure continued smooth operations and thus avoiding a labor shortage. This phenomenon is not only true in the United States but also in Europe where it was recently reported that the government of Poland, fearing the consequences of retirements and a highly mobile labor force, is encouraging workers to stay on the job longer by instituting a reduced pension payout system for workers who retire early under their current rules (Baczynska and Florkiewicz 2008).

As many older workers have opted to continue in the labor force a point of some caution needs to be acknowledged by organizations. As might be imagined the continued prolonged presence of older workers may not just cause feelings of resentment on the part of younger workers, but it also could lead older workers to demand legal resolutions to blatantly negative confrontations perceived as being discriminatory. In 2007 the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) reported that age related discrimination cases not only jumped 15 percent as compared to the previous year but also represented the category of greatest increase of all protected classes cases (Grossman 2008). The EEOC believes that there are many potential reasons for the increased age case filings such as aggressive American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) advocacy, a lack of an informed and publicized age discrimination policy within companies and a greater self awareness of the legal rights of older workers themselves. The recent EEOC figures obviously serve as an indication that older workers are not only fighting to remain on the job but also are fighting for their rights as well.

### **Aging Issues: Employer Best Practices**

In acknowledging the continued important role of older workers in the success of organizations it becomes important to develop and implement policies that will encourage and enhance their productivity. A review of the literature in the field indicates that those organizations that develop informed workplace solutions to issues critical to older workers see consistently strong work relationships and performances. The National Older Worker Career Center (2008) provides a good overview of employers best practices related to the recruiting, retaining and employing older workers such as;

- Challenge Stereotypes about Older Workers
- Comply with the Law
- Recruit for Experience
- Be Flexible with the Work-Life Balance
- Interview for Experience, Not Age
- Prepare for the eventual Brain Drain
- Take Action Now
- Seek Expert Advice

Going into an uncertain future it will be the enlightened organizations that will most likely be best equipped in navigating the realities of the vital role of older workers in the economy. Those organizations on the cutting edge will be the ones who will successfully leverage older workers and the advantages that they provide to the organization. Recent studies conducted by both the Society for Human Resource Management and AARP indicate that older workers offer a variety and wealth of advantages in the workplace such as being flexible in scheduling, acting as mentors, possessing stronger work ethics, having well developed networks, consistently achieving higher retention rates, being more readily available for work, and among other things, taking work responsibilities more seriously (Stubblebein 2007).

## CONCLUSIONS

The recent extending by older workers of their careers beyond what had been accepted as the norm for retirement planning and the event itself has been taking place in the context of the most significant overhaul of the financial system of the United States and the workings of the economy since the Depression. While these events are not trivial by any means, the phenomenon of delayed retirement by Baby Boomers cannot be totally explained by these most recent events alone. Even before the financial crisis of September/October 2008 hit, older workers were becoming more and more apprehensive to retire. In a survey published by AARP in May 2008, 27 percent of workers over the age of 45 had already decided to delay their retirement plans due to the decline in the economy (Greene 2008). In addition, the incentives offered by organizations to keep older workers on the job have succeeded in a very significant way. The issue of the continued increase in the voluntary labor participation rate on the part of older workers in the economy will have to be reconciled with what business organizations want to do in terms of their staffs. The conditions created may, for a time, provide an interesting need to balance the needs of older workers who offer workforce stability, institutional knowledge and competent leadership versus the realities of potential resentments from younger workers, a lag in cutting edge technical knowledge and higher instances of legal confrontations related to age discrimination.

Ultimately the question that seems to be asked more and more these days is how long will older workers hang on beyond age 62? A recent random telephone survey of 1,515 workers indicated that 48 percent plan to work well past the age of 65, either as full or part-time employees (Pitt 2008). In addition to staying on longer at work to pay the bills and maintaining a desirable quality of life, researchers at Boston College say that working just a few more years to age 66 can boost retirement income by one third (Wessel 2008). It appears that Baby Boomers are indeed creating a new paradigm of retirement planning for themselves and future generations which is another example of how this generation has consistently gone against the norm in many areas of American life. Why should retirement planning be any different?

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## **The Influence of Situational and Transformational Leadership on Successful Crisis Management**

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*Abstract: This qualitative study engages the narrative method and concerns the interplay of Situational and Transformational Leadership and its influence on successful crisis management. The subjects are two distinguished former World War II Fighter Squadron commanders who participated in lead roles during the invasion of Europe. It includes a review of applicable literature on the theories and a discussion of research that applies to actual crisis situations in a variety of settings. The results demonstrate that Situational and Transformational Leadership have an influence on successful crisis outcomes in terms of both preparation and response. Further, their application is equally appropriate in both historical and contemporary environments. Limitations include the absence of follower input and the military setting.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

The research project concerns the interplay of Situational and Transformational Leadership in determining successful outcomes in a crisis management environment. More specifically, this study examines the influence of the two theories and whether they were exercised tacitly or cognitively to a successful end by former Fighter Squadron Commanders during their wartime experiences. The objective is to demonstrate the leadership concepts as seen in the activities of the two men and their comrades in arms and determine if leadership competencies emerge which can be generalized to contemporary settings.

The applicable theories are Situational Leadership (Hersey & Blanchard 1969) and Transformational Leadership (Bass 1988). The context in which they will be applied is during a military conflict associated with the Allies' invasion of Europe at Normandy during World War II. In some respects, this research is analogous to the study of Situational Leadership as portrayed in the movie *Twelve O'Clock High* (Zanuck and King 1949). The distinction is that the leaders in this example did not assume command of troubled Squadrons and reverse their fortunes. Rather, they developed "green" troops into peak performers in relatively short order under the most trying circumstances.

The qualitative research approach that was engaged for this research is narrative study. In this regard, Hal Shook and Leo Moon, the leaders whose styles are being examined, were interviewed separately in the field about their respective commands of the 506<sup>th</sup> and 508<sup>th</sup> Fighter Squadrons, 404<sup>th</sup> Fighter Group, 9<sup>th</sup> Air Force, and their leadership experiences in planning, preparing, adjusting, and executing their missions related to the invasion of Europe at Normandy. The interviews are supplemented with published historical accounts of their personal activities as well as those of their comrades.

The research question is: What characteristics of Situational and Transformational Leadership influence successful crisis management?

### **Introducing Hal Shook**

Hal "Hub" Shook was quietly good natured, technically competent, and an extraordinarily instinctive pilot. That combination along with his ability "to get the most out of the equipment" set him apart as perhaps the best of all (H. Shook, personal communication, May 26, 2008). Against the background of his obvious talents, he set the example by performing fearlessly and tirelessly in the most

challenging missions behind the throttle of a P-47 Thunderbolt with nose art displaying his late wife's name, "Rae." Faith, patriotism, and a strong sense of responsibility motivate him. To be sure, he exceeded all combat requirements and flew on every one of the 506<sup>th</sup> Fighter Squadron's first 50 missions and was the first to fly 100 (Wilson 1948). On the last day of his tour, he took the unnecessary risk of flying two of the day's three missions.

At the age of three, Shook lost his mother whom he refers to as his "guardian angel" in life. His early years were heavily influenced by disciplined family elders who were gifted athletes and practiced law. Perhaps this is the origin of his core beliefs in fair competitive play, right and wrong, and teamwork. In adolescence, he fell in love with airplanes, and the romance still sees no end.

In 1944, he took command of three hundred soldiers in Europe as a 23 year old Major in the United States Army Air Corps. The amount of formal training he got in the cockpit far exceeded any time spent in leadership development opportunities. Admittedly, he had a lot to teach himself, too (Shook 2005). Nevertheless, he was tasked to develop these even younger and less experienced followers into an efficiently coordinated team capable of successfully destroying overwhelming and hostile forces. The consequences of failure were immediate and dramatic (Shook 2005). In the end, he was referred to by followers as the, "best Goddamned pilot and best C.O. [Commanding Officer] in the whole so-and-so Air Force" (Wilson 1948, p. 166). That same sentiment was voiced and demonstrated by followers at a Group reunion held on Memorial Day in 2008.

Following his distinguished military service, Shook engaged in management consulting and authored 2 books: *Flying Spirit* (Shook & Overmeyer 1998) and *Fighter Pilot Jazz* (Shook 2005). Both focus on leadership.

## **Introducing Leo C. Moon**

Leo Moon is a gentleman in every sense of the word. Growing up in rural Idaho, he was comfortable being alone hunting or in a workshop, for instance, and making things (like airplanes) in a creative fashion. During his junior year in high school, he lost his mother. Fortunately, he also enjoyed the interest and positive influence of his band and history teacher, Arlie Smith, the son of a Baptist minister, who he described as being "strict and kind" (L.C. Moon, personal communication, May 25, 2008). Indeed, he played the violin well enough to be chosen for the "All High School Band." He is equally proud of having won 50 cents in a fiddler's contest. When the church needed an organist, Moon stepped up and filled the void. At the University of Idaho, he earned his engineering degree and excelled as a member of the rifle team. Interestingly, he purchased his first rifle for \$13.79. He earned the money during the depression by raising a calf and selling it to his father for equal value (L.C. Moon, personal communication, October 3, 2008).

One day in his youth, Moon set his eyes on a Stearman PT-3 airplane overhead and suddenly became passionate about flying. After that, he said, "If it didn't have a propeller on its nose, I didn't care much for it" (L.C. Moon, personal communication, May 25, 2008). His disciplined approach to flying taught him to avoid getting into any poor personal habits as they could lead to carelessness. Along the way, he developed a competitive determination to win every fight.

Moon's initial enlistment into the Army was as an infantryman. Soon after, he was identified as a gifted aviator and his extraordinary ascent to the rank of Lt. Colonel came three years later.

In 1944, at the age of 26, "Little Caesar" (a nickname) took command of the 508<sup>th</sup> Fighter Squadron and began preparation for its lead role in the invasion of Europe. Their equipment was also P-47 Thunderbolts and his Squadron would complement the 506<sup>th</sup>s on some missions. Moon's nose art was, "I'll Get By". It came about after he asked his stateside girlfriend her suggestion for a name. She replied

that she did not care, “Just get by” (L.C. Moon, personal communication, May 25, 2008). (That romantic relationship ultimately failed. However, 60 years later, and after 57 years of loving marriage to his late wife, Moon came upon his old friend again; she lives just a few miles from his current home.)

On one hand Moon is a gentleman. On the other, he is a fierce warrior. For example, to extend his participation in combat, he had his plane modified to conserve and expend ammunition more efficiently. Personal satisfaction came from the effective use of ordinance (Wilson 1948). References to Moon’s exploits often include the words, “direct hit” (p.184). Over the course of 130 missions, he earned the Distinguished Flying Cross (with cluster) and 19 Air Medals. Clearly, he led from the front and by an uncompromisingly positive example. Modest then, as he is today, on the day it was time to turn over his command to a successor, Moon shunned ceremony, simply endorsed the change, and concluded by saying, “I had a wonderful time with you all” (Wilson 1948, p.191). A few days later, he was home.

After the war, Moon remained in the Air Force and became an accomplished test pilot who flew with the likes of Charles Lindbergh and Chuck Yeager. He is checked out in 104 different aircraft. Despite the urgings of his family and friends, the modest Moon never endeavored to be published about his vast leadership experiences. Until recently, he was reluctant to even talk about it. He didn’t think that anyone, except a kindred spirit who was there, could ever really understand. However, he said that if he does decide to write it down, the book would be entitled, “Never a Hero” (L.C. Moon, personal communication, July 23, 2008). Here’s hoping, Sir.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The literature review includes publications in scholarly journals which discuss Situational and Transformational Leadership theories qualitatively and their application in other situations. Indeed, the applications of these leadership styles are an especially good fit for military settings (Larsson 2002). Other articles discuss the leader’s ability to recognize external views and avoid a crisis disaster (Ucelli 2002). More specifically, what is said and how it is said are factors that could influence others’ judgments.

A third category of research addresses the unpredictability of crisis situations (Anonymous 2003). Thus, effective crisis response requires forward planning, speed in decision making, focus on the future, and a caring attitude toward those affected. Another set of articles compares how certain leaders responded to crisis situations and their exercise of Situational and Transformational Leadership traits (Larsson 2002). In this particular article, Ulysses S. Grant was studied. The remaining scholarly articles discuss the need for leadership flexibility, knowledge of the cause, alacrity, timely feedback mechanisms, and decisiveness (Scarpati & Betts 2006; Gupta 2005). This would include the ongoing development of followers and trusting relationships.

### **Situational Leadership**

The underlying premise of Situational Leadership is that there is no one best way to influence people (Hersey & Blanchard 1969). It has its genesis in the furtherance of Reddin’s (1968) 3-Dimensional Management Style Theory of leadership framework which advanced four task-relationship orientations for leadership depending on the situation. He referred to them as the dedicated, integrated, related, and separated types.

Hersey and Blanchard labeled their four styles telling, selling, participating, and delegating (Hersey 2001). They contend that the best application of leadership is influenced by the readiness level demonstrated by the follower in relation to a specific task or objective. In this regard, the follower may be unwilling and unable on one side of the spectrum, and willing and able on the other. In between are unable but willing, and able but unwilling. All are mediated by the degree of confidence or insecurity

within the follower. The leadership influence is most effective when the style is appropriately matched with the follower's situation.

In 1979, Hersey, Blanchard and Natemeyer integrated the concept of power with Situational Leadership. They illustrated how a follower's perceptions of a leader's power bases can also influence leadership applications.

The validity of the Situational Leadership Theory was tested by Hambleton and Gumpert in 1982. It was hypothesized that high performing managers would be higher rated than low performers on leadership effectiveness and flexibility by superiors and followers alike if they applied knowledge of Situational Leadership. Further, followers would also realize a positive benefit with higher performance ratings under managers who effectively exercised Situational Leadership strategies. The results supported the theory. However, the research design could not establish a causal relationship.

Robert Vecchio has examined the theory's validity on several occasions. In his 1987 study of high school teachers to determine their relationship with principals, he found Situational Leadership to be most effective where low-maturity followers required the most direction. The strength of the theory declined with moderately mature followers and was non-predictive with those holding high levels of maturity.

In 1992, Norris and Vecchio applied the theory in a study of full-time nurses. Again they found evidence of validity in the low to moderate maturity levels of followers, but overall mixed results. He cautiously concluded that the theory may have merit, but further research is required to be sure. Similarly, Houghton and Yoho (2005) concur that the theory has at least some validity as a determinant of appropriate leadership behavior.

More recently, Vecchio et al. (2006) studied the theory in a military setting. Once more, the research was inconclusive concerning the interaction of leader style and follower readiness and maturity. This time, he concluded that the theory may have little practical utility. Similarly, Larsson's (2002) study found interest in the use of the Situational Leadership model in military settings as it related to the style of Ulysses S. Grant, but he was unable to find scientific support for its effectiveness.

In Graeff's (1983) critique of Situational Leadership, he found that the theory makes only minor contributions to the literature. In this regard, he calls attention to the importance of recognizing the situational nature of leadership, generally, and especially as it relates to follower readiness. Graeff also challenges the validity of instruments that have been used to measure the theory in practice.

The Situational Leadership model provides a simple way to understand human interaction and deployment of intangible resources to gain the most effective use of human capital at every level. While it is intuitively appealing, it remains empirically contradictory (Cairns et al. 1998). Notwithstanding the weakness of empirical support, it furthers the notion that there is no one best way to be a leader. Leadership means different things to different people (de Jong & Den Hartog 2007). Perhaps its overriding contribution is that it just makes managers think.

## **Transformational Leadership**

Bass's (1985) Theory of Transformational and Transactional Leadership is often discussed in terms of the exchanges that take place between a leader and follower in their situational context (Wilcox & Rush 2003; Boerner & von Streit 2005; Strang 2005; Chen & Barnes 2006; de Jong & Den Hartog 2007). Thus, it appears to be a good companion for Situational Leadership.

Transformational Leadership is the ability to get more than expected out of followers by gaining their trust and confidence, loyalty, and respect (Chen & Barnes 2006). Bass (1988) identified four key aspects

of Transformational Leadership: (1) idealized influence, (2) inspirational motivation, (3) intellectual stimulation, and (4) individualized consideration. Idealized influence concerns charting and communicating a clear course, instilling pride, and setting an example which inspires affective commitment. Inspirational motivation includes participative approaches to establishing goals and objectives to enhance common ownership in outcomes. Intellectual stimulation means respect for followers' understanding of the situation and their ability to develop effective solutions to problems. Finally, individualized consideration recognizes the value of the person and their wants and needs.

The influence of Transformational Leadership on positive performance outcomes appears to be well settled. For example, Chen and Barnes (2006) studied professional service firms in Taiwan and the United States and found that the leadership behavior described above had an impact on enhanced internal and external knowledge sharing. Neck and Houghton (2006) found that Transformational Leadership bolstered job satisfaction, commitment, and productivity in fast paced and highly technical environments. Ilies et al. (2006) concluded that Transformational Leadership increased the intrinsic challenge and fulfillment of work. Therefore, it would be reasonable to expect better performance on complex tasks. De Jong and Den Hartog (2007) suggest that transformational leaders also stimulate creativity among followers when they are urged to apply lessons learned from professional developmental opportunities. Finally, Transformational leadership motivates individuals to have more willing attitudes toward assignments (Mastrangelo 2004).

The interplay between Transformational and Situational Leadership is underscored by their forward effect on followers' personal and professional growth, confidence, individual consideration, commitment, and improved organizational performance. The presence of any one, a combination, or all of these factors would be critical to achieve successful crisis management.

## **Crisis Applications**

The definition of crisis provides two alternative meanings of the word (Anonymous 2003). The first indicates a period of uncertainty, difficult or painful situation where complete breakdown or total disaster can only be averted by timely action. The second is a time when important decisions for the future are made. Thus, crisis is not necessarily synonymous with disaster; in either case, there is still time for action.

In 2003, Duncan et al. conducted a retrospective study of leadership in six major Civil War battles: Shiloh, Antietam, Chancellorsville, Gettysburg, Chickamauga, and Nashville. The research examined the application of the Vroom-Yetton Contingency Model of leadership and decision making behavior of the 10 commanding generals. To be sure, each of these events constitutes a crisis situation and all were fraught with, "...confusion, chaos, complexity and uncertainty" (p.11). They found that the generals' leadership styles did affect the outcomes. Further, their autocratic leadership styles warrant reassessment as to their appropriateness for future applications vis-a-vis a more inclusive approach. In addition, had the generals been more in tune to the Situational and Transformational Leadership opportunities, the outcomes may have been quite different. Indeed, Vroom said, "I do not see any form of leadership as optimal for all situations. The contribution of a leader's actions to the effectiveness of his organization cannot be determined without considering the nature of the situation in which that behavior is displayed" (Hersey 2001, p. 113).

In a qualitative study by Larsson in 2002, General Ulysses S. Grant's leadership style was related to the Situational and Transformational Leadership models. Larsson found that Grant exhibited many of the task-relationship characteristics inherent in Situational Leadership. For example, he was sensitive to the prioritizing of assignments and the encouragement of two-way communications simultaneously. With respect to Transformational Leadership, the evidence was clear about Grant's inspirational motivation in terms of fostering team spirit; his intellectual stimulation by approaching old problems in new ways; and

individual consideration by acting as a coach and mentor. He concluded, "...that leadership actions are affected by task-related competence, management competence, and social competence" (p. 51). Each of these factors aligns with Situational and Transformational Leadership styles.

An examination of the Battle of Hastings by Scarpati and Betts (2006) revealed that successful crisis management requires that leaders be flexible and adaptive. In addition, they must establish reliable feedback mechanisms, sensitivity to the circumstances, and be decisive. The English leader's failure to engage in Situational and Transformational strategies changed his country's standard of living for the worse.

Turning to more contemporary situations, Jessica Twentyman (2007) recently commented that, generally speaking, Situational Leadership in crisis management is, "...an extremely useful tool" (p. 28). In reference to the Exxon Valdez spill, Garcia (2006) calls attention to the critical role of leadership in crisis management. In that case, leadership fell short of its responsibility in large part when transformational techniques were ignored and truth gave way to denial. James and Wooten (2005) found that firms that thrive in a crisis build on a foundation of trust, create new solutions, act quickly, take courageous action, and learn from crisis to effect change.

In response to the crisis at Revco, a large drugstore chain, which resulted in its filing for bankruptcy, Transformational Leadership emerged to turn the company around (Galagan 1991). Management set a new vision which was clearly communicated to the employees. Employee concerns were thoughtfully taken into account and acted upon. Training intensified and creative solutions obtained. Rewards and recognition were more closely aligned with organizational objectives. The company recovered, was later sold and re-branded to CVS, all to the stakeholders delight.

Smits and Ally's (2003) research on leadership in crisis management of events like Hurricane Andrew, Three Mile Island, and the Challenger Disaster, demonstrates the positive influence of Situational and Transformational Leadership in successful outcomes. Their findings support the conclusion that the ready presence of such styles in extant organizational cultures would increase the likelihood of successful management when a crisis occurs. McCarthy et al. (2004) found that Transformational Leadership was also appropriate in times of tragedy (i.e. a plane crash involving key executives) and subsequent organizational change. Trust, vision, flexibility, open communications, and interest in others were key factors in this successful crisis management.

When a German symphony orchestra was struggling with its artistic quality, the conductor adapted to a Transformational Leadership style which fostered a more cooperative group climate (Boerner & von Streit 2005). This is not to say that leadership per se determines music quality. But it did create more favorable situational conditions for such production.

In sum, crisis management is a critical part of contemporary strategic management (Chong 2004). The influence of Situational and Transformational Leadership in successful crisis management has stood the test of time and is as relevant today as it was hundreds of years ago. Whether on the battlefield, in the community, or within organizational settings, the theories fit and help guide both leaders and followers toward strategies that influence successful outcomes.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The qualitative method used for this research is narrative study. Open ended interviews were separately conducted and supplemented with related documents and pictures.

For this narrative research, the researcher arranged interviews with Hal Shook and Leo C. Moon who both served as Squadron Commanders of Fighter Groups in Europe during World War II. The setting was

a reunion held in San Antonio, Texas, in May 2008. In addition, the researcher reviewed three books about the Squadron's history which includes references to their respective leadership styles.

The aforementioned books provide support for Shook and Moon's recollection of the facts. *Leap Off* (Wilson 1948) is a compilation of contemporaneous diaries and post-war contributions from various members of the respective Fighter Squadrons. It includes copies of documentation and pictures related to the events. Only 487 copies were published, none for sale. *Fighter Pilot Jazz* (Shook & Overmeyer 2005) and *Flying Spirit* (Shook 1998) include Shook's recollection of wartime experiences from personal notes along with his insights on leadership. Clearly, time and memory has not altered the information provided during the interviews.

## **Description of Data Collection Activities**

### ***Locating Site/Individual***

Both of the individuals interviewed for this study were initially located through sources found by the researcher on the internet. Leo Moon lives in Texas, and Hal Shook lives in North Carolina. The researcher contacted them through the publisher of a newsletter sent from the 404<sup>th</sup> Fighter Group. A Group reunion held in San Antonio, Texas in May, 2008, provided an ideal opportunity to interview both of them.

### ***Gaining Access and Making Rapport***

The researcher had previously spoken to both Moon and Shook by telephone regarding their relationship to his father. Everyone got along very well. Subsequently, Shook and Moon verbally consented to interviews for this research. The researcher explained the direction of the study and they understood the public nature of the findings and conclusions. They each signed an acknowledgment regarding these understandings.

### ***Purposeful Sampling***

Moon and Shook are the only individuals interviewed since they were the only two commanders of the Group during the critical period of operations. They have many stories to relate concerning their leadership and crisis management experiences.

### ***Collecting Data***

Data was collected through separate and unstructured interviews at the reunion hotel. The interviews centered on a list of 30 open-ended questions with the reserved right to expand upon responses. Meetings were arranged at mutually agreeable times. Books about their experiences were also examined during preparation ahead of time.

### ***Recording Information***

Contemporaneous notes were taken during the interviews. The interview setting was quiet and private. The format followed a predetermined interview protocol. The researcher planned to take three to six hours for the interviews, inclusive of breaks. Subsequent follow-up questions and discussions were planned for telephone conversations. Talking points for closing comments were thoughtfully drafted in advance.

### ***Field Issues***

The researcher knew the interviewees personally and established good rapport. Ample time for rest to relieve possible fatigue due to their advanced ages was built into the schedule. The subject matter is unclassified. It was understood that no breaches of confidence would be solicited or offered. If any unforeseen issues arose, they would be resolved in a manner which was satisfactory to Moon and Shook. Their trust in the researcher would not be compromised. Drafts would be shared with them before publication to ensure accuracy.

### **Storing Data**

Notes and documents will be stored at the researcher's home office. Original documents were copied and stored separately in locked fireproof file cabinets.

## **RESULTS**

Personal interviews with Shook and Moon regarding their experiences with Situational and Transformational Leadership in successful crisis management were held on May 25 and 26, 2008, in San Antonio, Texas. The focus was on their respective commands of Fighter Squadrons during the invasion of Europe in World War II. The results indicate how the emergent leadership strategies then, may be applied to contemporary settings today.

Both participants arrived at the leadership scene in their early to mid 20's with more technical knowledge and raw talent than anything else. Up to that point, their formal leadership training was fashioned by military protocol. The rest, and perhaps best, came from strong values instilled in them by their families. Among those were integrity, responsibility, loyalty, respect for others, sincerity, and ethical behavior. Enthusiasm came naturally to them. All of these critical leadership traits were ever present and projected throughout their commands.

Time was of the essence. The task was to assemble hundreds of young followers on foreign soil and to develop individuals into coordinated teams that were willing and capable of stepping into harm's way and efficiently destroying an entrenched opponent who was equally committed to returning the favor.

Recognizing the relative inexperience of their troops, Shook and Moon initially engaged in a "telling" style of Situational leadership and focused on intense training. A top priority was safety. Along the way, they looked to identify some who were more advanced and urged them to assist with developing others. Included in this process was establishing a clear set of standards and expectations for the Squadron members in terms of conduct. Of course, the overall objective was well communicated and certain, as well.

Despite the pressure, Moon felt it was better to take a "soft" coaching and mentoring approach to corrective action (L.C. Moon, personal communication, May 25, 2008). For example, on one occasion when he surmised that a follower's unsatisfactory performance was related to feelings of loneliness, he arranged for the soldier to participate in extracurricular activities that were consistent with his personal interests. Shook's style shared the same concept of Situational Leadership (i.e. "participating"). When "engine trouble" was the reason for a follower's early abandonment of a mission, Shook approved for the moment, but shortly thereafter enlisted the help of a subordinate who possessed exceptional interpersonal skills to restore the pilot's commitment and confidence (H. Shook, personal conversation, May 26, 2008). Neither man was ever guilty of publicly disciplining anyone. When punishment was called for, it was fair and fit the misdeed.

Shook and Moon both exercised the first quadrant of Situational Leadership when they held to the belief that it was important to explain, or "sell", to followers the underlying rationale for their planned direction. Moon would ask, "Is there anyone who objects?" (L.C. Moon, personal communication, May

25, 2008). Rather than project an authoritative demeanor, they contemporaneously employed Transformational Leadership qualities by soliciting input from followers. They were both careful with their choice of words to ensure that the tone did not inhibit candid feedback. Each spent a great deal of time visiting and expressing appreciation to the ground crews, sitting in tents with pilots, and chatting in the mess hall with enlisted men to gather information, listen to ideas, and share thoughts about daily issues. As Shook put it, “You can’t just sit in the ivory tower” (H. Shook, personal communication, May 26, 2008).

Both were gifted pilots and that talent was evident to their followers. They used that advantage to show optimism and instill confidence in leadership among followers. To be sure, everyone was anxious and harbored fears and insecurity. After all, this was war at its worst and the consequences were quick and dramatic. These Transformational Leadership examples set by Moon and Shook contributed to their Squadrons’ sense of pride and patriotic commitment that remains to this day.

In an example of Shook’s Transformational Leadership, he recalls a letter from a crew chief thanking him for personally bringing coats and jackets to the ground crew on a bitterly cold night in Normandy while they prepared the “birds” for the next day’s mission (Shook 1998). “It meant so much to us,” the chief wrote some 56 years later (p. 174). An appreciative Shook noted that the effort was just a showing of his, “...deep, sincere concern for others” (p. 174). To further illustrate the long term effects of Transformational Leadership, Shook called attention to a letter he received in December, 2002, from a pilot he commanded (Shook 1998). The man wrote about how instrumental Shook had been by setting an example that formed his character. Many decades later, he still looked up to Shook, “...with so much adoration, envy, and pride” (p. 175).

These outstanding leaders also shared another common denominator: a confidence in themselves that removed any fear or jealousy related to the delegation of authority. Both would assign leadership positions for certain missions to capable others and count on the information reported after the mission for future assignments. Moon put it this way, “Let your wingman get a victory if you can” (L.C. Moon, personal communication, May 25, 2008). When it was time for a change in command, both publicly endorsed their successors. Clearly, they were comfortable with engaging this Situational Leadership style of the model’s fourth quadrant, “delegating.”

Both men led from the front of the charge. “I figured I had to lead these guys” Shook once remarked, “So I wanted to know what went on on [sic] each mission. I felt I had to know the territory they were flying over and the stuff they were running into as well as they did, so I didn’t want to miss a thing” (Wilson 1948, p. 178). Similarly, when fog and inclement weather threatened a mission targeting the Ardennes during the Battle of the Bulge, it was Moon who took the exploratory flight to determine whether the area was clear enough for bombing and strafing (Wilson 1948). They set examples of Transformational Leadership for all, and it proved to be the gold standard.

Moon summarized his Situational and Transformational Leadership styles by explaining that he always took the person into account. “Some, you had to force,” he said, “others needed to be handled more gently. Of course, many fell somewhere in between. The trick is in knowing the difference” (L.C. Moon, personal conversation, October 3, 2008). Sometimes, he added, “The worst chewing out is one without words.” He believes in detailed training with frequent interaction until the task becomes “second nature” and the follower attains a level of ability and confidence that inspires peak performance. In this regard, he gave the example of a bird teaching its offspring to eat. First, the food is brought to them and pushed in their mouth. Soon, the chick willingly takes the food; and then it goes out and finds its own. In the end, both are happy.

So, how did their Squadrons actually perform under the influence of Shook and Moon's Situational and Transformational Leadership styles? The book, *Leap Off*, chronicled their activities and gave the following account of their extraordinary success:

For most of the Group's combat career, enemy guns, tanks, and troops have been its principal targets. When armored column cover was introduced for the first time in history at the St. Lo Breakthrough, the 404<sup>th</sup> Fighter Group took a leading part, flying 150 out of a total 400 armored-column cover missions during the critical period July 26-August 1, opening a corridor from St. Lo to Avranches and making possible the final exploitation throughout northern France. During that week, and during the period January 21-25 against the Ardennes salient, the Group achieved some of its greatest successes. Flying against enemy armor and transportation withdrawing from the Bulge four out of five days between January 21 and 25, the Group destroyed or damaged more than 1000 vehicles, or one quarter of its total for an entire year of operations. On January 25, its claims of 500 enemy vehicles made up half of the total for the entire IX Tactical Air Command. Truly, with the fire of 50-caliber machine guns and the steel of bursting bombs and rockets, the 404<sup>th</sup> Fighter Group has crushed the enemy, his arms and armor, with lightning attacks out of the sky, reddening the soil with his blood (Wilson 1948, p. 239).

In the aggregate, their Squadrons' members earned a total of 92 Distinguished Flying Crosses, 9 Silver Stars, and 110 Air Medals (Wilson 1946). Not a bad day's work.

To be sure, the Squadrons' overall performance provides clear support for the effectiveness of the Situational and Transformational Leadership theories. In this case, the leadership styles were applied to followers ranging from novice to seasoned veteran in dire circumstances. The positive outcome is a matter of well-established history.

## **SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION**

This study presents research on the influence of Situational and Transformational Leadership on successful crisis management following the qualitative research method of narrative study. The subjects are Hal Shook and Leo Moon, distinguished commanders of separate, but complimentary, World War II Fighter Squadrons that took lead roles in the invasion of Europe. The result of that crisis is history. Their leadership is a model.

During interviews, Shook and Moon's descriptions of their approach and leadership styles as they developed their Squadrons mirrored the Situational Leadership Model as they unknowingly explained the transitioning from telling, coaching, participating, and delegating. Their stories brought to life the Transformational Leadership characteristics of idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. In this case, the two theories are applied in tandem to achieve a favorable result to a major crisis in which the outcome was by no means a certainty.

The literature review illustrates that the leadership traits exercised by Shook and Moon over 60 years ago are just as relevant today. In fact, the theories were identified decades later and applied to contemporary settings with effect. Clearly, Situational and Transformational Leadership has a pivotal role on the influence of goal achievement in a full range of circumstances.

Limitations in this research surround the absence of follower input. Also, it involves a military environment in grave conditions.

I would be remiss if I did not close this study by expressing my deepest gratitude to Hal Shook and Leo Moon. During our meetings, they brought theory to life. During their lives, they gallantly brought freedom to the world. Godspeed, my friends!

## NOTES

My relationship to this topic centers on my Dad's service with the 506<sup>th</sup> Fighter Squadron. In 2006, I visited the Group's Normandy invasion staging area in Winkton, England, met with local people still familiar with the Group, and traced its military advancements through Normandy and onto Germany. In tribute to the Group, townspeople contributed personal time and resources to erect a permanent memorial in the New Bedford Forest where the Group's makeshift airbase in a grassy field once stood. Admittedly, this story is personal.

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## **Guanxi and Ethical Decision Making**

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*Abstract: Guanxi or gift giving in an international business context can mean the difference between continuing a working relationship versus prematurely discontinuing the working relationship. The analysis of gift giving indicates significant economic, cultural, judicial, and ethical differences exist between the United States and China. These differences can be mitigated through the use of a commonly accepted and frequently cited ethical decision making models proposed by Trevino (1986) which take into account cognitive development, individual, and situational moderators. The expected outcome in terms of ethical behavior should be consistent with the established company protocol and at the same time honor the commitment to United States law yet is culturally sensitive to the practices of China.*

The conflict which emerges in business discussions between United States (U.S.) and Chinese business practices is more about the differences in value systems than what is considered ethical or unethical. For instance, in the Asian culture giving a gift is intended to be more symbolic than an explicit attempt to gain undue favor. Rae and Wong (2004) observe, "In many parts of the world, gift giving is radically shaped by a historical marriage between the structures of patronage and bureaucracy" (p. 235). However, in Western cultures gift giving depending upon the individual and purpose of the gift can be seen as an effort to secure an unfair competitive advantage. The contrasts can be startling and have significant implications for business conduct for U.S. based companies.

The focus of this paper is to examine the economic, cultural, judicial and ethical differences between China and the U.S. as they pertain to the business practice of Guanxi, or giving and receiving gifts. An ethical decision making model proposed by Trevino (1986, 1992) will be used as a method to analyze how and why decisions get made and will provide a basis for assessing several scenarios. In addition, lessons learned and alternative approaches to the ethical dilemmas will be discussed. What follows is a discussion concerning the differences between the U.S. and China from an economic, cultural, judicial and ethical perspective.

### **DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES AND CHINA**

#### **Economic Differences**

China has become an economic powerhouse in the past 10 to 15 years. Currently, projections indicate in approximately 20 years China will surpass the U.S. economy (Walker, 2007). The Economist reported that the 2008 growth rate of China's economy is approximately 9.8% whereas the U.S. is approximately 1.5% during that same timeframe (August 23rd, 2008, pp. 81 - 82). With such a fast growing economy, the infrastructure and ethical underpinnings of business related decisions can be stretched beyond their intended purpose. In many cases, while economic growth is coveted often an unintended consequence is change which is unwieldy and difficult to manage (Friedman, 2005).

The tendency from a U.S. perspective is to often retreat and rethink the business approach to conducting operations in an international context where the culture and laws are different. However, globalization of the world's economy are inevitable realities as a result of the increased communication network capabilities, reduction in overall costs associated with transportation of goods and free trade zones (Song, 2002). Consequently, as businesses become more global and more dynamic ethical dilemmas begin to arise. The dilemmas can be attributed to a number of issues; however cultural practices and belief systems exercised in a global business environment driven by competitive forces are

perhaps the most influential (Dunfee & Warren, 2001). This causes additional complexity in the decision making process and can present challenges concerning future business opportunities. The following section discusses cultural differences of how Chinese and U.S. cultures respectively impact the ethical decision making process.

## **CULTURAL DIFFERENCES AS THEY RELATE TO ETHICS**

The Asian business culture is often predicated on relationships. The manner in which relationships are honored is through gift giving or Guanxi and is the basis for conducting business, interaction with political authorities, and is considered a standard of conduct in social institutions (Steidlmeier, 1999). In part this is because the Chinese Culture is a “very nuanced social philosophy of relationships. These embody both the response one person owes another in terms of face (myan dz) as well as obligations of mutual rights and duties (quanli yu yiwu), which bind people together” (Steidlmeier, 1999, p. 123).

The Chinese term for gift giving is Guanxi and can be defined as a relationship which engenders expectations and mutual dependence in working relationships (Chan et al, 2002). The concerns which come up from a Western perspective focus on the intent of gift giving. In most Western contexts gift giving is a symbolic gesture which is intended to express appreciation or acknowledge a special accomplishment. The intent is not in most cases to create a sense of mutual obligation or commitment among individuals conducting business together with the intent of trading favors over the course of the business relationship (Dunfee and Warren, 2001). Often times in a Western context this is referred to as quid pro quo. Nevertheless, the approach of creating obligations fundamentally challenges the mindset of impartiality, perceptions of impropriety, and preferential treatment. The stance taken by the U.S. government has been to continuously address this issue through ethics and business conduct related laws governing business dealings like the Foreign Corrupt Practice Act (FCPA) and Sarbanes-Oxley (SOX) (Smith, 2004).

Interestingly U.S. Government laws requiring ethical practices in the marketplace have not necessarily resulted in moral business conduct (Rae and Wong, 2004). Consequently, while the U.S. laws make it abundantly clear where the line is between a bribe and a non-bribe in many parts of the world a continuum exists which often is based on the marketplace norms. Essentially, the core issues in examining the social and business practice of gift giving in the Asian culture, from a Western perspective, are circumstances associated with the gift giving and whether it can be considered voluntary or compulsory, who gives the gift (i.e. prospective supplier) and the anticipated level of reciprocation between individuals who exchange gifts. Values which serve as a filter for many of our judgments have a significant influence on the decision making process.

Fundamentally cultural value systems have a tremendous impact on the individual making the ethical decision, organizational dynamics, and eventually strategic direction. This is especially the case if the mutual gift giving occurs among family members in a business setting (Steidlmeier, 1999). The Chinese often base their decisions on relationships whereas Americans generally work to a rule based approach as it pertains to ethical decision making. Next, an assessment of China and the U.S. judicial system will be studied to better understand how the issue of giving and receiving gifts is viewed.

## **JUDICIAL DIFFERENCES AS THEY PERTAIN TO ETHICS RELATED ISSUES**

China is trying to achieve in 50 years what it took the U.S. 250 years to accomplish. Thus, many of the judicial infrastructure elements necessary to curb potential corruption are non-existent. This situation, combined with a dynamic economy and cultural tendencies towards gift giving, has ushered the topic of ethical business practices in China to the forefront of many business conduct discussions. For instance, one glaring difference according to Smith (2004) is that, “China in many respects is still a closed society, and depending on the nature of the inquiry (e.g., ethics or corruption), it is difficult to obtain primary sources and interview data, and to verify secondary sources” (p. 301). The deficiency of information to

substantiate ethics related issues can be critical when attempting to build accountability into the judicial system.

In terms of punishment the major difference between Chinese and U.S. law is the use of the death penalty. In the U.S. guilty verdicts in corruptions cases result in prison time, however in China corruption cases can result in the death penalty (Smith, 2004). China's policy of exercising the death penalty in corruption cases stems from a multi faceted explanation. In the Chinese culture mutual dependence and trust within a communist system maintains order and accountability. If the Enron or WorldComm debacle had occurred in China the instigators would probably have received the death penalty. What follows is a discussion concerning the definition of ethical decision making, and the value systems which support each decision making process in the U.S. and China.

## **ETHICAL DECISION MAKING PREFERENCES OF THE UNITED STATES AND CHINA**

Before discussing ethical decision making preferences for the U.S. and China a working definition of what constitutes ethical decision making will be examined. Ethical decision making is a rational and systematic process with the intent of basing those decisions on ethical principles (Whetstone, 2003). Another description of ethical decision making involves developing approaches that allow the decision maker to form an opinion by evaluating and comparing circumstances associated with the ethical issue (Leung, 2004). Both definitions suggest several important elements. First, ethical decision making is thought to be rational and systematic. Secondly, a set of universal ethical principles are ascribed to in the process of forming an opinion. And third, the process of making an ethical decision involves making comparisons.

## **ETHICAL DECISION MAKING IN CHINA AND THE USE OF VIRTUE ETHICS**

The basis for societal and political order in modern day China originated with Confucius. Essentially, Confucius articulated the importance of virtue and fidelity, reinforced by practices which would align an individual in the proper relationship to the universe and his social group (Spence, 1990). The influence of Confucianism highlights the importance of being in right standing with individuals and making virtue based choices. As it pertains to Guanxi several parallels between Virtue Theory and Confucianism exist. First, virtue ethics is embodied in the individual and not in a rule based approach to decision making. Secondly, stepping outside the box of rule based systems demonstrates the simplicity associated with virtue ethics versus a carefully devised system of rules which defines morality.

## **ETHICAL DECISION MAKING IN THE UNITED STATES AND THE USE OF MORAL RIGHTS THEORY**

The U.S. has struggled to reconcile a rule based approach to dealing with international ethical dilemmas. While companies have churned out Codes of Conduct in response to ethical related issues considerable lapses continue to occur. Consequently, the U.S. government has been forced to consider legal action to curtail corruption in U.S. businesses. Steidlmeier (1999), summarizing the practice of Guanxi in China and contrasting it with the approach taken by the U.S. points out "Business and political corruption are by no means unique to China (Jacoby et al., 1977; Borrus, 1995; Clarke, 1990, Husted, 1994,; Kristoff, 1995; Mellon, 1995; Pearce and Snider, 1995). American business people are often wary, because the U.S. Foreign Corrupt Practice Act (FCPA) as well as company codes of conduct often prohibit any exchange of gifts between a company representative and supplier or customer" (Greanis and Windsor, 1982, p. 124).

According to Velasquez (2006) a legal right is, "an entitlement that derives from a legal system that permits or empowers a person to act in a specified way or that requires others to act in certain ways

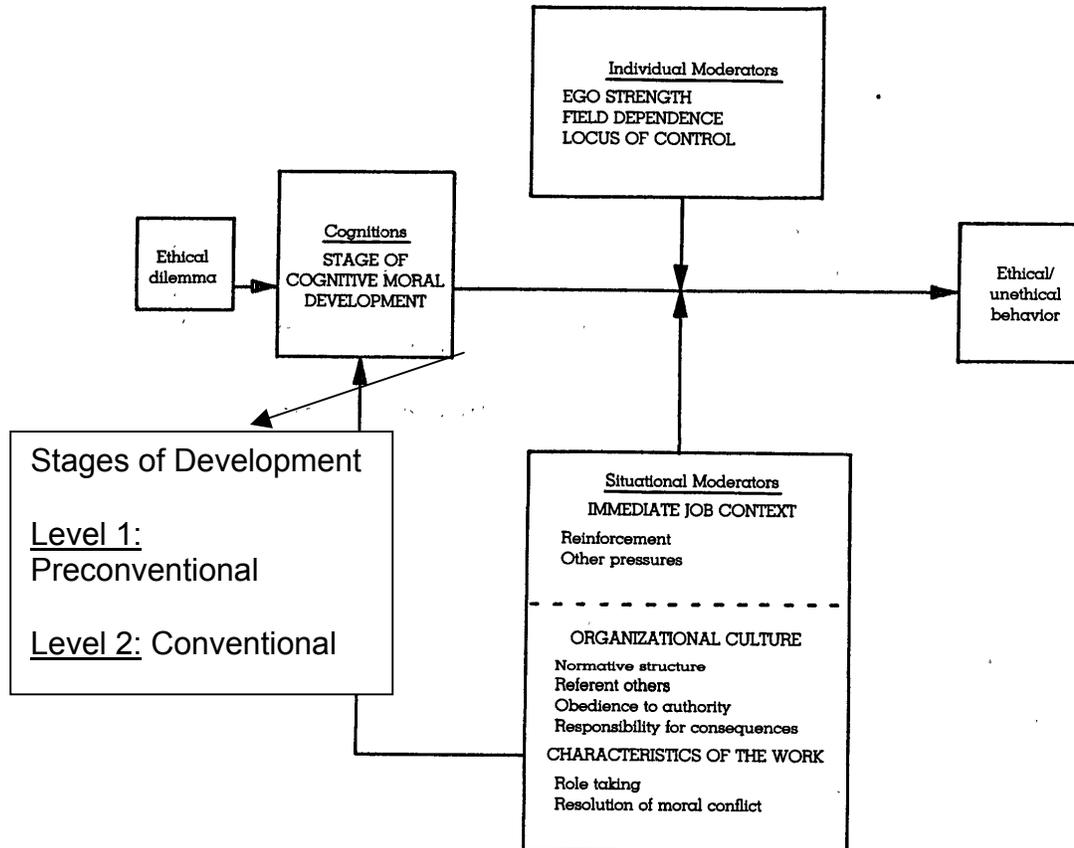
toward that person” (p. 73). Given the topic of Guanxi, or giving in a business environment, legal rights speak to the responsibilities of the business person to avoid perceptions of impropriety. This becomes a difficult proposition at best in a dynamic global business environment and warrants consideration. Rights can be looked at from a variety of perspectives when application is considered, Audi (2005) suggests, “On any conception of rights, they are the sorts of things of which we may predicate (among other things) being claimed, asserted, denied, Philosophical Issues, respected, violated, forfeited, and transferred” (p. 122).

A discussion of the differences in the economic, cultural, judicial, and ethical differences between the United States and China has taken place. The next step is to apply the differentiators to scenarios involving Guanxi utilizing an ethical decision making model.

## ETHICAL DECISION MAKING MODEL

Numerous ethical decision models exist. However, perhaps the most widely cited ethical decision making model in business ethics literature is the model proposed by Trevino (1986, 1992). Therefore, for the purposes of this paper Trevino’s (1986) ethical decision making model will be used as a basis to analyze several scenarios. The analysis of these scenarios will form the basis for additional discussion about lessons learned and alternative approaches to the ethical dilemma. A review of Trevino’s (1986) model will now be conducted.

Trevino’s (1986) interactionist ethical decision making model takes into account stages of cognitive development first proposed by Kohlberg (1969) situational specific variables (individual and situational moderators) which often factor into ethical decision making, and resulting ethical/unethical behavior:



Adapted from Trevino, L. K. (1986). Ethical decision making in organizations: A person-situation interactionist model.

Essentially, the model proposes that, “ethical decision-making is the result of an interaction between individual and situational components, with the individual’s way of thinking about ethical dilemmas being moderated by three individually based moderators (ego strength, field dependence, and locus of control) and three situational moderators (immediate job context, organizational culture and characteristics of the work itself)” (Bartlett, p. p. 226). However, before further examination of Trevino’s (1986) ethical decision making model key components of the model need to be reviewed. The first key component to review is Kohlberg’s stage of cognitive moral development.

## **STAGES OF COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT**

The fundamental basis for Kohlberg’s work originated from Immanuel Kant who proposed the Categorical Imperative which is considered his first formulation can be stated as follows: An individual should never demonstrate behavior which at the same time can’t be universally applied to all individuals (Kant, 2002). Kant, as opposed to Jeremy Bentham who developed the notion of utilitarianism, focused on a second formulation focused on never using individuals as a means to an end, instead allow individuals to decide their own personal direction (Kant, 2002). With this in mind, Kohlberg’s contributions involve understanding an individual’s ability to develop moral standards when making decisions, learn from those decisions, and improve the ability to make better decisions in the future (Velasquez, 2006). Consequently, researchers like Rest (1983, 1994, and 1999), Velasquez (2006), and Trevino (1986, 1992) among others repeatedly verified a number of critical assumptions concerning Kohlberg’s theory:

Velasquez (2006) notes that “although people generally progress through the stages in the same sequence, not everyone progresses through all stages” (p. 27). Kohlberg stated that each individual had to progress each stage in sequence, and once at the more advanced stage of moral development an individual couldn’t move to a lower stage of moral development (Knobe, 2005).

Kohlberg, points out moral judgments are the most significant determining factor when trying to understand and explain what influences moral behavior (Jorgensen, 2006).

Moore and Chang (2006) point out that “moral judgment is the ability to make a decision based on some moral ideal. Moral judgment differs from social norms, which are role patterns of behavior. Social norms make no provision for allocating rights or distinguishing between moral behavior and other forms of socially regulated behavior, such as dress codes or dining manners”. (p. 168).

Kohlberg’s theory has three basic levels, each of which can be divided into two stages (Knobe, 2005, p. 329):

Preconventional (stages 1 and 2): Moral behavior is seen as an effective means to attain ends that are fundamentally nonmoral (e.g., avoiding punishments and obtaining rewards).

Conventional (stages 3 and 4): Morality is identified with social convention. Moral behavior stems from an effort to gain social acceptance or from a more abstract loyalty to societal norms.

Postconventional (stages 5 and 6): Moral decisions are based on general principles. The individual believes that these principles should be obeyed even when they come into conflict with societal norms.

Fundamentally Kohlberg’s theory suggests individuals move from stage to stage as they grow in their intellectual capacity to reason and draw appropriate conclusions given the context of the ethical dilemma. The early stages are defined by a self-centered approach while the later stages require decision making

using moral reasoning (Velasquez, 2006). The other two components of Trevino's ethical decision making process will be discussed. First, individual moderators will be examined and then situational moderators.

### **Individual Moderators**

The individual moderators in the interactionist ethical decision making model "influence the relationship between cognition and action in ethical decision making in organizations" (Trevino, p. 609). The individual Moderators are ego strength, field dependence and locus of control. The definitions for each moderator are as follows:

**Ego Strength:** "Ego strength is a construct related to strength of conviction or self regulation skills. Individuals high on a measure of ego strength are expected to resist impulses and follow their convictions more than individuals with low ego strength" (Trevino, p. 609).

**Field Dependence:** This concept focuses on the ambiguity of a situation and the ability referents to "provide information that helps remove the ambiguity", whereas, "field dependent individuals make greater use of external social referents to guide their behavior" (Trevino, p. 610).

**Locus of Control:** "Rotter's internal/external scale measures an individual's perception of how much control he or she exerts over the events in life. An "internal" believes that outcomes are the result of his or her own efforts, while an "external" believes that life events are beyond control and can be attributed to fate, luck, or destiny" (Trevino, p. 610).

As the ethical dilemma is discussed each moderator will be applied with the intent of completely understanding how Trevino's interactionist decision making model can be applied when navigating through ethical dilemmas.

### **Situational Moderators**

Situational moderators are intended to provide the context which often dictates how individuals respond to ethical dilemmas. The supposition of how individuals move through the ethical decision making process focuses on the practicality of how decisions are made given the interaction between the individual and the circumstances surrounding the situation (Trevino, 1986). The situational moderators are immediate job context, organizational change and characteristics of the work. The definition of each moderator is as follows:

**Immediate Job Context:** This moderator involves reinforcement contingencies and other pressures. According to Trevino (1986) the focus of this moderator emphasizes the importance of understanding the "social context within which behavior takes place" (p. 614). This involves determining the organizational means which reinforce, or in some cases discourage ethical behavioral. Additionally, work environment issues and organizational pressures exists which place undue pressure (i.e. costs, schedules, and technical designs) on the decision maker.

**Organizational Culture:** This moderator involves normative structure, referent others, obedience to authority, and responsibility for consequences. According to Trevino (1986) this moderator can have significant influence on how decisions are made because, "Organizational culture influences thoughts and feelings, and guides behavior" (p. 611). Organizational culture involves what the organizational norms are, whose in a position to ultimately influence an ethical decision, whether a culture exist which supports obedience to authority, and if a decision "goes south" who steps up and takes responsibility for the consequences.

**Characteristics of the Work:** This moderator involves role taking and resolution of moral conflict. Trevino (1986) “defined as taking account of the perspective of others. The centrality of the individual to the communications and decision making of the group increases role-taking opportunities” (p. 611). Essentially the ability to resolve moral conflict while at the same time functioning in an organizational role in effect advances the moral development of an individual (Trevino, 1986).

The demonstration of ethical decision making using Trevino’s (1986) model will now be tested involving Guanxi or gift giving scenarios. Be consistent about capitalizing or not capitalizing Guanxi. These scenarios will focus on the stages of moral development, and how the interaction occurs between situational and individual moderators.

## **APPLICATION OF THE INTERACTIONIST ETHICAL DECISION MAKING MODEL TO ETHICAL SCENARIOS**

The next step in the process is to apply the Interactionist ethical decision making model (Trevino, 1986) to analyze several scenarios concerning ethical decision making. This analysis will be followed by lessons learned, and additional considerations.

### **Scenario 1**

A U.S. business person is approached by a Chinese salesperson at the U.S. company’s business office located in China. The Chinese salesperson offers the U.S. business person a complimentary dinner with no strings attached if the business person will attend a sales presentation. A company policy expressly prohibits the U.S. business person from taking advantage of the overture. However, the U.S. business person intends to make an exception in this case.

#### ***Analysis of the Situation***

The U.S. business person is operating at stage 1 (preconventional) of Kohlberg’s (1969) cognitive moral development which results in behavior where the means justify the benefits which will be gained. Given Kohlberg’s (1969) description of the sequential stages individual’s move through its evident the U.S. business person’s intellectual capacity given the situation is diminished. Additionally, since the preconventional stage is characterized by an ego-centric approach to decision making (Velasquez, 2006) it is apparent the U.S. business person has decided to focus on his/her own self interest. The individual moderators as outlined in Trevino’s (1986) model the U.S. business person show low ego strength, low field dependence (autonomous actions), and is exercising internal locus of control. The combination of how the U.S. business person is responding to the ethical dilemma would indicate the individual moderators are having marginal influence on a positive outcome or ethical behavior. The U.S. business person’s situational moderators indicate no reinforcement exists for ethical behavior and therefore no accountability, and the opinions of others isn’t referenced as being important. Evidently, the organizational culture suggests along with the work environment interaction between individual and situational moderators are marginal. The resulting behavior, if the U.S. business person takes advantage of this opportunity, can be considered unethical.

#### ***Lessons Learned***

Management oversight of individuals at foreign locations requires a concerted effort, especially if the country has a reputation for unethical conduct. The analysis demonstrates the U.S. business person is acting autonomously concerning decisions in a Multi-National Corporation (MNC) which usually reflects a decentralized organizational structure. This situation could place the MNC at unnecessary risk. One of several ways to mitigate the risk is to understand the business environment at the foreign locations. One of the many ways to do this is through the use of information gained from Transparency International (2008) which ranks countries based on their various business practices. Another excellent source of

information is the Corporate Government Quotient (2008) which outlines how companies (U.S. Domestic and International) rate in terms of corporate governance. In situations like scenario 1 where individuals have the ability to act autonomously without any accountability structure the risk of having an ethical lapse can be significant. As noted earlier, given the rule based approach to ethical decision making, a company violation could occur.

### ***Additional Considerations***

The Chinese salesperson has indicated the gift has no strings attached. As discussed earlier in the paper gift giving is a common practice in China. The U.S. business person has to consider the intent of the gift and whether retaining it will in anyway compromise his integrity. Consultation with management about the gift (free meal) should occur.

## **Scenario 2 (Continuance of Scenario 1)**

### ***The U.S. business person chooses to attend the sales presentation***

The U.S. business person attends the presentation and finds the services being presented by the Chinese salesperson could be useful to the U.S. company in China. The Chinese salesperson knows that the U.S. business person is the key decision maker and with additional encouragement may purchase the services being offered. The Chinese salesperson offers as a “token of his appreciation” a beautiful vase for attending the sales presentation. The U.S. business person graciously accepts the vase. The next day the Chinese salesperson pays a sales call to the U.S. business person. By now the U.S. business person has had an opportunity to think about the implications of attending the sales presentation and accepting the gift from the Chinese Salesperson. The U.S. business person explains that the vase is “very nice;” however he cannot accept the vase because the company policy prohibits accepting gifts. The Chinese salesperson receives the returned gift.

### ***Analysis of the Situation***

The U.S. business person is now operating at level two of Kohlberg’s (1969) stages of cognitive moral development (conventional – working to company identified expectations) because he has elected to return the gift and do the right thing while still acknowledging the social custom. This allows the U.S. business person to make decisions based on a rule based system and at the same time balance the expectation of working in an environment where gift giving is intended to create mutual commitment. The individual moderators as outlined by Trevino (1986) indicate the ego strength has increased and field dependence has become more dependent on others (i.e. expectation of immediate supervisor). This increase field dependence may be attributed to knowing the difference between the company policies versus personal gain, reinforced by an accountability structure (employee disciplinary action). Field dependence as a concept (Trevino, 1986) is intended to making an ethical decision clear as opposed to vague. Subsequently, through the process of rethinking the circumstances and becoming clearer about the implications of the decision the U.S. business person advances from pre-conventional to conventional (Kohlberg, 1969) thinking. Additionally, the situational moderators indicate the organizational norm to not accept gifts. Generally, the circumstances which bring the most tension to organizational norms are the ability to rationalize the potential outcome. Subsequently the U.S. business person let the Chinese salesperson know what the company policy is while at the same time resolving the ethical dilemma.

### ***Lessons Learned***

A number of important “navigational” signs can be identified in scenario 2. First, the decision maker (i.e. U.S. business person) has to make every effort to understand where they fall on Kohlberg’s (1969) moral development continuum and the implications to the decision making process. This will acquaint the U.S. business person with their moral development and how it potentially influences the ethical

decision making process. In this case, if the U.S. business person simply reflects carefully on how the decision will send the wrong signal to the Chinese salesperson about their willingness to accept gifts many of the issues concerning gift giving can be avoided. Secondly, an acknowledgement of how Guanxi or gift giving is perceived from both a Chinese versus a U.S. perspective is critical. This understanding will provide context to the individual (i.e. ego strength, field dependence, and locus of control) and situational moderators (i.e. immediate job context, organizational culture, and characteristics of work) as discussed earlier in Trevino's (1986, p. #) decision making model. Without this understanding of the cultural differences it becomes easy to rationalize the decision and not comply with U.S. business norms because "in China gift giving is an accepted custom... and I wouldn't want to offend anyone." Finally, the U.S. business person needs to know the company rules and norms which govern behavior on ethical dilemmas. While this is a rule based approach to cultural issue which is steeped in cultural tradition the U.S. business person has to determine whether they intend to follow company guidelines or cultural norms.

### ***Additional Considerations***

Rule based decision making can lead to binary results. In many cases yes and no answers to issues like Guanxi or gift giving oversimplifies the situation and discounts the working relationships in a culture where establishing, building, and maintaining relationships are critical to business. A plausible option for the U.S. business person is to consult with their management about accepting the gift. If management approves a waiver or exception then the U.S. business person could accept the gift on behalf of the company. This effectively mitigates any undue influence placed on the individual and at the same time maintains the working relationship with the Chinese salesperson.

### **Scenario 3**

The next scenario focuses on the amount of the gift and when the gift is given. In this scenario a Chinese company is currently a supplier to a U.S. based company. The U.S. based company is sending representatives to the Chinese company headquarters' to negotiate terms for a new contract. The arrival of the U.S. representatives happens to coincide with the Chinese New Year. During the Chinese New Year it is customary to give gifts to business associates.

The U.S. representatives arrive at their final destination after a long trip and check into their hotel. When the U.S. representatives checked in they received a fruit basket worth approximately \$20 U.S. from the Chinese company they intend to negotiate with in the coming weeks. The next day the U.S. representatives arrive at the Chinese company headquarters. Upon their arrival the senior manager in charge of negotiating on behalf of the Chinese company asks whether they received the fruit baskets. The U.S. representatives respond that they did and enjoyed the fresh fruit after a long trip. The Chinese senior manager indicates that because it is Chinese New Year and it is customary to give gifts the company felt it would be appropriate to provide the fruit basket at a nominal cost. The U.S. representative, realizing prior to the trip, Chinese New Year involves giving and receiving gifts purchased a variety of gifts (coffee mugs, hats, shirts, posters) with the company logo clearly printed on each item. Overall, the working relationship between the two companies has been very successful and the U.S. representatives were optimistic recent quality and cost issues would be addressed.

### ***Analysis of the situation***

The U.S. representatives are functioning at level two of Kohlberg's (1969) stages of cognitive moral development (Conventional – taking into account cultural customs and still maintaining neutrality in business dealings). The behavior demonstrated in this situation is usually described as doing the right thing, yet at the same time acknowledging the cultural societal norms (i.e. gift giving during Chinese New Year). It should be noted moral judgment and moral behavior are actually aligned and results in the U.S. representatives modeling integrity. The individual moderators according to Trevino's (1986) decision

making model indicate that ego strength is high, field dependence is independent (autonomous), and locus of control is internal. The individual moderators are closely aligned with the U.S. representative's cognitive moral development thereby mitigating the need to justify decisions being made on personal interest or individual needs. The situational moderators suggest immediate job context reinforces culturally sensitive ethical decision making, pressures to compromise ethical conduct are nonexistent, and the organizational culture is to accept local customs without assuming the Chinese company is attempting to unduly influence the negotiation process. The situational moderators create an environment where it is easy to make decisions based on what should be done as opposed to what's convenient. Additionally, the U.S. representatives made a point of acknowledging the fruit basket while at the same time reciprocating by providing a gift to the Chinese company representatives.

### ***Lessons learned***

The U.S. representatives handled a difficult situation in a very culturally sensitive manner by acknowledging Chinese New Year and reciprocating with an exchange of gifts with their Chinese counterparts. The Chinese in turn were very transparent about their intentions (i.e. gift giving is a custom observed during Chinese New Year) which mitigated any perception of impropriety on the part of the U.S. representatives. An ethical dilemma was essentially defused as a result of both the U.S. and China representatives giving forethought and consideration to the kind of gift, approximate value of the gift, reason for the gift, and the way in which it was presented. This exchange strengthened existing working relationships as opposed to raising suspicions.

### ***Additional considerations***

The factor which played a significant role in this scenario was the cost of the gift and how it was presented to both parties. If the Chinese company (supplier) had presented a gift valued at approximately \$500 U.S. while both companies were in negotiation the intent of the gift may have raised suspicions.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The purpose of this paper was to understand the differences between U.S. and China as it pertains to Guanxi or gift giving. These differences were then integrated into the analysis of various gift giving scenarios using Trevino's interactionist ethical decision making model, lessons learned, and additional considerations. Through this process a number of critical items have become evident. First, people are the byproduct of their culture. Rae and Wong (2004) suggest, "Moral choice in every society is founded in the cultural character of a person and the way he or she sees the world. We are cultural creatures who make sense of our lives by means of a narrative that distinguishes between the good and the evil" (p. 236).

The notion that people are cultural creatures leads to the next observation: ethical decision making is a complicated process involving an individual's cognitive moral development, individual and situational moderators, and ethical or unethical behavior. Consequently, it becomes imperative individuals make every effort to understand the context they find themselves in, appropriately assess the situation, and focus on insuring the behavior aligns with company expectations.

Finally, while rule based approaches to ethical dilemmas provide simple and immediate responses some decisions aren't easily answered with a yes or no response. However, when these decisions show up on your proverbial doorstep consider dialoguing with a coach, mentor, or your immediate management so you can maintain perspective about the most appropriate direction. This will provide the necessary reflection time to consider all the issues and how best to navigate through the ethical dilemma.

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## **Instructional Technology in Business Education: An Examination of Online Learning Styles**

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*Abstract: Management education has rapidly adapted to recent technological advances with initiatives ranging from Web-based degrees conferred by online schools to hybrid courses offered on traditional campuses. Despite the substantial growth in these programs, however, the field's understanding of the effects of these initiatives is relatively limited as only a few management education researchers have empirically investigated the actual use of instructional technologies. The present study adds to the developing empirical literature by examining Web log server data generated by undergraduate students enrolled in a Management Information Systems course where an online Learning Management System (LMS) was used to complement a traditional classroom environment. We adopt a comprehensive model of student learning to guide the pursuit of two research questions: 1) How do students use online instructional technologies? and 2) What effect does such usage have on student learning? Our findings indicate that distinct usage patterns are reflected in how students actually use instructional technologies and that there are gender differences in these patterns. These findings illustrate the potential role of online learning styles in the consideration of the effects of instructional technologies on student learning.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Students currently enter higher education institutions with expectations that technology will be provided, and once admitted, indicate that they prefer learning environments in which instructional technology is available (Carlson 2005; Harley et al. 2003). Business education has rapidly adapted to these conditions with initiatives ranging from Web-based online degrees conferred by online schools to hybrid courses offered on traditional campuses. Despite the substantial growth in these programs, however, only a few business education educators have empirically investigated the use of these technologies (Alavi & Gallupe 2003; Arbaugh 2005a). Accordingly, our understanding of the effects of these initiatives on management education is relatively limited.

The present study adds to the developing empirical literature by examining Web log server data generated by undergraduate students enrolled in a Management Information Systems course where an online Learning Management System (LMS) was used to complement a traditional classroom environment. Specifically, we adopt a comprehensive model of student learning to investigate LMS usage patterns and the effects of those patterns on student performance outcomes. As reported below, we find four distinct usage patterns as well differences in the level and variation of LMS usage by male and female students.

This study represents an exploratory study as a part of a larger student learning research project investigating the relationships between instructional technologies, student learning styles, instructor teaching styles, and student learning outcomes. Accordingly, this project continues the development of the research direction proposed by Arbaugh and Stelzer (2003), as well as responding to Alavi and Leidner's (2001) call for additional depth in theoretically-grounded empirical research on the interaction of technology, instructional method, and student learning. We also contribute to the literature by using a new type of primary data, actual student usage of instructional technologies recorded on a Web server in contrast to prior work that had previously examined only survey data. This new type of data also allows us to contribute to the research by testing new hypotheses regarding online learning style patterns.

The remainder of this paper is divided into the following sections. First, we review education research from business and other disciplines to illustrate a comprehensive model of learning with instructional

technologies. Second, we state our questions regarding online patterns of student behavior and the potential effects on student learning. Next, we describe our methodology followed by our results. We then close the paper with discussion of our findings.

## RESEARCH MODEL

The various literatures have not adopted a common terminology regarding the term instructional technology. Terms such as online technology, Web-based courses, learning management system, asynchronous learning network, and computer-mediated instruction have been used to describe many approaches in the use of instructional technologies. In this portion of our paper, we use the term instructional technologies to be inclusive of all the terminologies and systems previously used.

Three broad research streams crossing many disciplines have examined the development of instructional technologies. One stream has prescribed how instructors and institutions should use instructional technologies to create innovative projects, course web sites, courses, management systems, and programs (Bergman & Bergman 2003; Morgan 2003; Twigg 2001). For business educators, research of this type has recognized key organizational, learning, and teaching practices and processes (Alavi & Gallupe 2003; Arbaugh & Stelzer 2003). A second stream of work has sought to determine whether there are significant differences in outcomes between new technology-based and traditional courses (Harley et al. 2003; Phipps & Merisotis 1999). Although the majority of the early research here indicated no significant differences between student outcomes, this work has been criticized for methodological problems (Phipps & Merisotis 1999) and for omitting constructs such as instructional design and teaching style (Arbaugh 2000a; Hiltz & Wellman 1997). Findings from more recent rigorous research are still mixed. Benbunan-Fich and Hiltz (2002) reported no significant difference between perceived learning and course mode delivery (completely online, mixed, completely on campus) but significantly lower grade performance for on campus learning environments. Arbaugh (2000b) found no significant differences between perceived learning reported by students in online and traditional MBA courses.

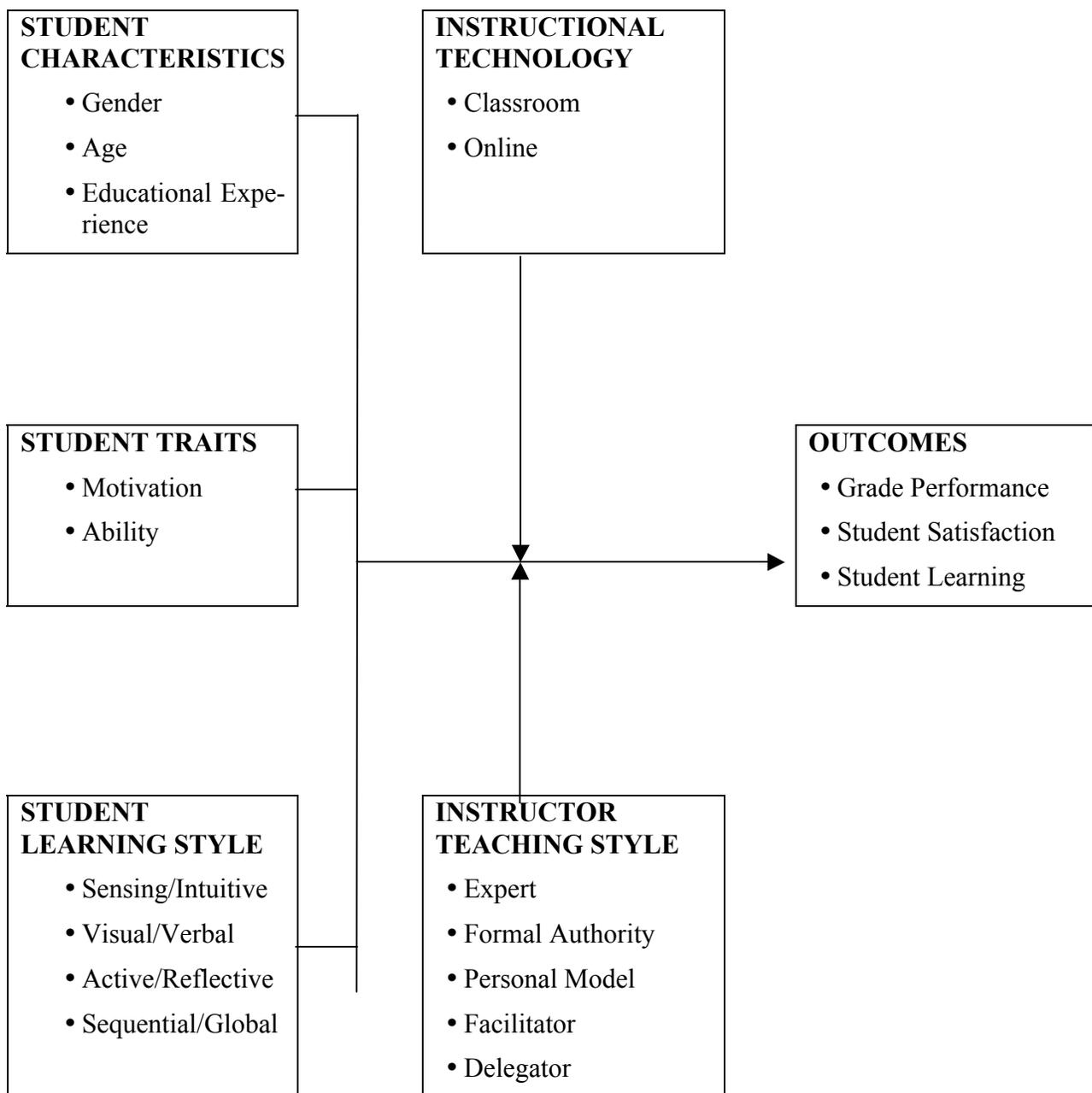
The third and most recent stream of research has developed integrative models focusing on teaching and learning with instructional technologies. Researchers in this stream have started to empirically explore the potential influences of both extrinsic and intrinsic factors on several dimensions of student outcomes, including student satisfaction, learning, and course performance. For example, Alavi and Leidner (2001) suggested that examination of the crucial question of how technology enhances learning requires attention to relationships between instructional, psychological, and environmental factors. Similarly, Arbaugh and Stelzer (2003) suggested that relationships with and interactions between student characteristics, student learning, and instructor pedagogical styles are fundamental to understanding the role of faculty in Web-based courses. Clearly, this research emphasizes the crucial influences on and interdependencies between learning and teaching that affect student outcomes.

Our research builds on this third stream of work examining a comprehensive model of teaching and learning. Although the learning context model suggested by Alavi and Gallupe (2003) has influenced us, our model of student learning, as represented in Figure 1, focuses more specifically on students and teachers, and as such, is consistent with recent work performed by business (Brokaw & Merz 2000), management (Marks, Sibley & Arbaugh 2005), marketing (Young, Klemz, & Murphy 2003) and engineering (Zwyno 2003) education researchers. Overall, the effects of multiple inputs, such as student characteristics, traits and learning styles, instructional technology, and instructor teaching styles, are considered with outcomes of student satisfaction, learning, and performance.

The conceptual basis for this model rests on theories of learning and teaching developed by educational psychologists as well as researchers from other fields. Student learning has been conceptualized as an individual's perceptual and intellectual activities relating to individual information processing, problem solving, and decision-making (Armstrong 2000). In this context, student characteristics, such as gender, experience, and age, and traits, such as individual motivation and ability, have been found to influ-

ence student performance (Benbunan-Fich & Hiltz2002; Wang & Newlin 2002; Zwyno 2003). In contrast to characteristics and traits, student learning styles are the behaviors that serve as indicators of how learners perceive, interact with, and respond to the learning environment. Although more than fifty different cognitive learning style theories and models have been proposed by scholars (Armstrong 2000), three prominent streams of empirical research have followed from the works of Grasha, Kolb, and Felder. Whereas Grasha’s (1996) research is premised a social interaction model of learning and teaching, and Kolb’s (Kolb & Kolb 2005) work is based on experiential learning theory, the Felder-Silverman Learning Style Index (LSI) model is focused on differences in information acquisition, processing, and understanding (Felder & Silverman 1988; Felder & Spurlin 2005). Due to this emphasis, Felder’s LSI model is adopted in our study examining the usage of instructional technologies.

**FIGURE 1  
MODEL OF STUDENT LEARNING**



Felder's LSI model consists of four dimensions. The active/reflective dimension contrasts the behavior of active learners who retain and understand information by discussing, applying, or explaining it, to reflective learning, which involves contemplation and consideration. The sensing/intuitive dimension points toward preferences for concrete information versus abstraction. The student with sensing tendencies prefers facts and well-established methods whereas intuitive learning entails discovering possibilities and looking for innovative problem-solving techniques and solutions. The visual/verbal dimension rests upon the means by which information is presented. Visual learning involves the images students see – these kinds of learners remember best pictures, diagrams, charts, and demonstrations. On the other hand, verbal learners rely upon words, either written or spoken. Finally, the sequential/global dimension is grounded on the sequence by which information is understood. Sequential learners move in linear steps, where each intermediate step is logically followed until a complete solution is understood. Global learners move in large, seemingly random jumps before they “get it.”

Instructor teaching style has also been recognized by learning theorists as necessary in understanding student learning (Felder 1993; Grasha 1996). An objectivist teaching style envisions the instructor as the transmitter of knowledge with the purpose of conveying objective reality as knowledge, whereas the constructivist approach envisions the teacher as supplying multiple sources of information, which is constructed by the learner (Arbaugh & Benbunan-Fich 2003). An instructor's teaching style therefore reflects beliefs and behaviors regarding teaching approaches, instructional design, presentation methods, interaction modes, and practices of management, supervision, and mentoring (Grasha 1996). Accordingly, teaching style can be viewed as a combination of Expert, Formal Authority, Personal Model, Facilitator, and Delegator elements (Grasha 1996).

Accordingly, the model of student learning in Figure 1 reflects our larger research agenda examining the effects of the usage on instructional technology on student outcomes. In the present paper, we explore part of this model by focusing on two research questions:

Are there patterns of online instructional technology usage by students?

What effect does such usage have on student learning?

## **LEARNING MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS**

In exploring our research questions in this paper, we focus on Learning Management Systems (LMS) as a particular online instructional technology commonly adopted by or created in educational institutions. Approximately 90% of all higher education systems have adopted either a proprietary or open-source LMS such as Blackboard, WebCT, or Sakai (Hawkins, Rudy, and Madsen, 2003). While there are multiple forms of and uses for LMS (Boetcher 2003; Morgan 2003), it is a platform for both asynchronous learning environments (file transfers, email, text, graphics, video, audio, and discussion forums) and synchronous learning environments (whiteboards, videoconferencing, and chat) that extend conventional learning environments.

### **Student Learning Styles**

Over the last two decades researchers from multiple disciplines, including business and related fields, have empirically examined differences in student learning styles. Using Felder's LSI, De Vita's (2001) report of the learning style preferences of management undergraduates in Great Britain shows higher levels of active, sensing, and sequential learning and lower levels of visual learning than other studies examining engineering undergraduate students (Felder & Spurlin 2005). Jaju and Kwak's (2000) examination of undergraduates of a large U.S. university indicated that marketing, management, and MIS students exhibited learning preference tendencies towards concrete experiences and active experimentation in contrast to the abstract perception and reflective process preferences of non-business majors. Brokaw and Merz (2000) found that students enrolled in principles of economics courses at an engineering/science

oriented U.S. university tended towards learning style preferences of understanding a wide range of information and putting it into concise logical form, which is consistent with science and information careers but not business.

Only a few researchers have incorporated instructional technology into their learning style analysis. Young and his colleagues (2003) found that the learning style preferences of undergraduate students enrolled in required marketing courses in a U.S. university did not extend to differences in preferences for instructional technology usage. In contrast, Zwyno and Waalen's (2002) examination of Canadian undergraduate students enrolled in an upper-level engineering course showed that students with preferences for intuitive, visual, and active learning had the highest average number of page hits, logins, and pages read, whereas students preferring verbal learning were highest users of email but had the lowest number of logins, hits, and use of web resources. In a study of undergraduate marketing courses in an Australian university, Morrison and his colleagues (2003) reported that learning styles of traditional students differed from on-line students in that on campus students tended to prefer visual and active learning style dimensions, whereas online students preferred sensing, reflective, and verbal dimensions. Furthermore, applying cluster analysis, three learning style groups were found for traditional as well as online students in which different combinations of learning style factors were reflected.

Despite the lack of a clear consensus in this research, these studies suggest that student learning styles are distinguishable and as such, patterns of instructional technology usage should reflect differences in online learning styles. Accordingly, we would expect to find patterns of LMS resource usage that indicative of student learning styles.

## METHODOLOGY

### Sample

The data were collected in Fall 2004 from two undergraduate sections of a survey Management Information Systems course taught in the business school at a small highly selective private liberal arts university during a twelve-week semester. Thirty-three students were originally enrolled in this elective course; one student dropped and two others did not complete the course, leaving a sample of thirty. The morning section consisted of seventeen students (56.7%) while the afternoon section had thirteen students (43.3%). The final sample of traditional undergraduates includes eleven females (36.7%) and nineteen males (63.3%), sixteen Seniors (53.3%) and fourteen Juniors (46.7%), and majors from the fields of Accounting ( $n=2$ , 6.7%), Business Administration ( $n=24$ , 80.0%), Computer Science ( $n=2$ , 6.7%), Engineering ( $n=1$ , 3.3%), and Politics ( $n=1$ , 3.3%).

A single instructor taught both sections of the course. The instructor employs a hybrid instructional format, consisting of traditional face-to-face class meetings three days a week integrated with extensive use of a LMS developed by the instructor. Students had access to the LMS by means of desktop computers made available in labs and laptop computers used intermittently in class, both provided by the university, and their own personal (desktop or laptop) computer.

The LMS contains virtually all of the course's required pedagogical resources, other than the material presented during classroom discussion. These course content resources include Course Syllabus, Assignments, Student Grades, Textbook Online, Topical Articles, Real-World Scenarios, Case Guidelines, Case Studies, CyberShows (McCray 2000), Software Development Projects, Software Tutorials, and a Final Case Study. The LMS also includes a variety of pages for team project management, password management, instructor contact information, online textbook password and access, and general navigation (home, menu, and header pages), none of which contain substantive course content. Table 1 provides a brief description of the content contained in the LMS.

**TABLE 1**  
**DESCRIPTION OF LEARNING MANAGEMENT SYSTEM CONTENT**

<b>Content</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b><i>Pedagogical Content</i></b>	
Syllabus	A Web page containing lecture meeting location and times, where to purchase the access key for the online textbook, course description and objectives, major topics covered, course requirements, due dates for major assignments, grading scale, method of evaluating student performance, course policies, and links to various course content.
Assignments	This Web page lists the homework or major assignment due for each class period. The date of the class, the topic to be covered, and the assignment due for that class are provided in a chronological table. The assignment usually consists of set of hyperlinks that are linked to various pedagogical resources contained within LMS. Most of the resources on the LMS must be accessed through the assignments page.
Student Grades	Students may access their grades on individual assignments and their overall average for the course using this dynamically generated Web page. This page is updated as assignments are returned to students. Students may view only their individual grades and the class averages.
Textbook Online	This is an online version of the textbook provided by the publisher and hosted on the LMS. Because it is online and a subset of the textbook it is considerably less expansive than the full paper version. Students purchase an access key at the university bookstore in order to gain access to the textbook on the LMS. Students may access individual chapters or sections of the textbook through the assignments page on the LMS.
Topical Articles	A variety of topic specific online articles from business newspapers, periodicals, and academic journals are hosted on the LMS as Adobe Acrobat files.
Real-World Scenarios	These are online mini-case studies, usually 2 to 2.5 pages in length, that present information technology issues that are being evaluated by real organizations. The real-world scenarios are an integral part of classroom discussion at the conclusion of presenting a major IT topic. Four of these mini-case studies are included in the LMS.
Case Guidelines	A set of pages that provide guidelines on how to analyze a case study and prepare a written document of the analysis and the subsequent recommendations.
Case Studies	Three online case studies are hosted on the LMS. Students must prepare a written analysis and a set of recommendations for each case, as well as, be prepared to actively discuss the case during class the day the case is due.
CyberShows	These are online multimedia mini-lectures that are 10 to 15 minutes in duration. They were developed by the instructor to cover various IT topics before the students attend class. Five CyberShows are hosted on the LMS.
Software Development Projects	These Web pages contain the business scenario along with the functional and deliverable requirements for two Microsoft Access application development projects.

**TABLE 1**  
**DESCRIPTION OF LEARNING MANAGEMENT SYSTEM CONTENT – CONTINUED**

<b>Content</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b><i>Pedagogical Content - continued</i></b>	
Software Tutorials	This content consists of a set of Web pages that contain hyperlinks to ElementK's online interactive multimedia software tutorials as well as the actual ElementK Tutorials. The software tutorials cover the material necessary to complete the software development projects and some homework assignments.
Online Presentations	PowerPoint presentations used during class. The presentations are made available for students to download after they are presented in class.
Final Case Study	The course "final" is an in-depth comprehensive case study. The case narrative, tables, and figures along with the preparation requirements and guidelines are hosted on the LMS. The final case study is due in the middle of final exams.
<b><i>Logistical Content</i></b>	
Team Management	This page contains a narrative describing why teams are used for the software development projects, the process used to form teams, and general team management information.
Team Registration	Students in the class use this dynamic Web page hosted on the LMS to form and register their teams.
Change Password	This page allows students to change their default password to a password of their choosing.
Instructor Contact Information	A Web page listing the instructor's office hours, office location, email address, and phone number for the semester.
Access Code	This is a dynamic Web page where students enter the access code they purchased at the bookstore to gain access to the online textbook. When a valid access code is entered the access code is linked to the student's username in a database, so students only need to enter the access code once during the semester.
<b><i>Navigational Content</i></b>	
Home Page	This is a splash page that serves as a visual introduction and portal to the LMS. It is also a frame within a frameset that defaults to home, menu, and header pages.
Menu Page	The menu page in the primary navigational page on the LMS. This page contains hyperlinks to the main content areas of the site and is always visible to the student.
Header Page	The header page appears at the top of the frameset and contains graphics and text identifying the course LMS. This page is also always visible to the student.

Students are graded based upon performance on: three case studies, 125 points each (37.5% of total); two software development projects, 125 points each (25% of total); course contribution, 150 points (15% of total), and a comprehensive final case study, 225 points (22.5% of total).

### **Data Collection and Preparation**

During the first day of class, students are instructed on how to access and use the instructor's LMS. Students are also instructed to regularly check the LMS for new or revised assignments, which are posted

approximately ten days before they are due. Occasionally during the semester, students are informed that new material or assignments have been recently posted to the LMS. Each enrolled student is assigned a username but selects their own password as LMS access is not granted to unauthorized users. Web servers track and log all student “click-stream” activity over the entire academic term, including which students access resources, which resources are accessed, when resources are accessed, where resources are accessed from, and how resources are used.

In raw form, the format of the log file data collected by the server is unsuitable for meaningful data analysis. In addition, because the Web server logs any and all activity on the LMS, there is a considerable amount of log file data that is not pertinent to learning style activity. Consequently, a conversion process is necessary to remove non-pertinent data and convert raw data into a format suitable for data analysis.

The LMS Web server for the subject course logged 204,242 entries during the Fall 2004. After completing the data scrubbing and conversion process, there were 27,904 entries, commonly referred to as hits, pertinent to the class under study. Of these, 4,577 hits were logged by the instructor, the instructor’s research assistants, or students that did not complete the course and 8,328 hits were by students accessing minor pages (course logistics and navigation), leaving a total of 14,999 relevant hits recorded by the LMS Web server for students in this sample. In addition, a different server hosting software tutorials used in the class logged 764 pertinent hits. Thus, the total number of pedagogical content hits attributable to the thirty students in this sample is 15,763.

## Measures

Patterns in online learning styles were measured by frequency of accessing the thirteen LMS pedagogical resources (Chang, Wang, & Da-Tsuen 2000; Garrison, Fenton, & Vaissiere 2001; Lu, Zhu, & Stokes 2000; Nachmias & Segev 2003; O’Hanlon & Roecker 1999; Peled & Rashty 1999). As previously mentioned, students access to LMS content is recorded on the LMS server based on the student’s username in the log file. The number of times each student accessed a type of pedagogical content resource is then counted, thereby allowing us to analyze patterns of resources accessed on the LMS by student. In Table 2 these measures of student usage are grouped by classification of resource type. For example, all of the variables relating to procedural content appear under the “Procedural” heading, while all content relating to online readings are grouped together under the “Reading” heading.

As presented in Table 2, some LMS resources are entirely or predominantly text oriented and static, whereas others are dynamic, multimedia, and interactive. Three of Felder’s learning style dimensions, active/reflective, visual/verbal, and sensing/intuitive, are of the type reflected in the patterns of LMS re-course usage. For example, active learners should prefer using the interactive Software Tutorials more often because they can immediately apply what they have learned, while reflective learners would rather think about the material and use the resource less often. Visual learners, because they remember best what they see, should have a stronger preference towards using the multimedia/interactive content (Cyber-Shows and Software Tutorials), while the verbal learners get more out of written words. Therefore they should prefer the reading content (Textbook Online, Topical Articles, Real World Scenarios, and Online Presentations). Sensing learners prefer learning material that is connected to the real world, they like learning facts and problem-solving methods they have been previously taught. Therefore they should prefer the Real World Scenarios, Topical Articles, Case Studies, Software Projects and Final Case Study content. Intuitive learners, on the other hand, because they dislike dealing with details, may shy away from accessing the Software Projects, Case Studies, and Final Case Study content. Consequently, the frequency that students used LMS resources serves as measures of learning styles.

**TABLE 2**  
**LMS PEDAGOGICAL CONTENT VARIABLES AND DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS**

Variable							
Type	Description	Hits	Mean	Median	Std. Dev.	Minimum	Maximum
<b>Procedural</b>							
	Syllabus	358	11.93	10.00	7.692	1	30
	Assignments	2,644	88.13	83.50	42.074	17	201
	Case Guidelines	747	24.90	23.50	13.770	6	80
	Case Studies	307	10.23	10.00	3.266	6	19
	Software Projects	1,096	36.53	33.00	19.057	12	104
	Final Case Study	144	4.80	4.00	3.960	1	23
<b>Multimedia/Interactive</b>							
	CyberShows	1,093	36.43	33.00	26.971	0	111
	Software Tutorials <sup>1</sup>	1,223	40.77	41.50	25.325	2	96
<b>Reading</b>							
	Textbook Online	5,213	173.77	156.00	80.214	57	329
	Topical Articles	2,038	67.93	61.50	36.046	3	167
	Real World Scenarios	217	7.23	5.00	5.137	0	19
	Online Presentations	33	1.10	0.00	2.187	0	8
<b>Performance Outcomes</b>							
	Student Grades	650	21.67	16.00	17.833	2	73
<b>Total Hits</b>							
	Total Content Hits	15,763	525.43	494.00	206.025	129	1094

<sup>1</sup>Total software tutorial hits (459 on LMS sever and 764 on ElementK server)

**TABLE 3**  
**SUMMARY STUDENT PERFORMANCE OUTCOMES**

Performance Measures	Mean	Median	Std. Dev.	Minimum	Maximum
Case Studies	82.1	83.7	6.53	69.3	91.7
Software Projects	84.7	85.5	9.17	63.0	96.0
Final Case Study	81.2	80.5	7.61	60.4	94.3
Course Contribution	86.8	87.5	5.67	75.0	95.0
Course Average	83.2	82.6	5.36	70.9	92.5

Five measures of student performance were adopted. The grades for three case studies and two software development projects were averaged separately, resulting in two variables, Case Studies Average and Software Projects Average. The Course Contribution Grade and the Final Case Study Grade were also included as performance measure variables. The final variable, Course Average, represents a student's overall weighted average of all performance measures in the course and the final grade awarded to the student. A summary of these variables is presented in Table 3.

## RESULTS

### Descriptive Statistics

Table 2 reports the full set of descriptive statistics (mean, median, standard deviation, minimum, and maximum) for the thirteen LMS resource variables. Textbook Online (5,213 hits), Assignments (2,644 hits), and Topical Articles (2,213 hits) were the most widely used LMS resources, and Online Presentations (33 hits), Final Case Study (144 hits), and Real World Scenarios (217 hits) the least used. Textbook Online and Assignment Resources also showed the highest levels of usage variation. Descriptive statistics for resource usage by gender are reported in Table 4. Mean and median LMS resource usage for female

students was higher for nine of the thirteen variables, but showed lower levels of variation in usage in eight of the thirteen variables. As reported in Table 5, women also scored higher on four of the five student performance measures. Given the size of our sample, further tests of statistical differences were not conducted.

**TABLE 4**  
**LMS LOG FILE HITS - PEDAGOGICAL CONTENT BY GENDER**

Content	Female (n = 11)			Male (n = 19)		
	Mean	Median	Std. Dev.	Mean	Median	Std. Dev.
Syllabus	13.82	12.00	8.035	10.84	9.00	7.485
Assignments	97.55	91.00	34.343	82.68	72.00	45.949
Case Guidelines	23.73	25.00	7.938	25.58	22.00	16.406
Case Studies	9.55	9.00	2.423	10.63	11.00	3.670
Software Projects	33.27	32.00	11.279	38.42	34.00	22.453
Final Case Study	5.27	5.00	2.054	4.53	3.00	4.765
CyberShows	39.09	33.00	27.49	34.89	35.00	27.301
Software Tutorials	49.45	57.00	28.001	35.74	30.00	22.910
Textbook Online	172.64	181.00	74.536	174.42	153.00	85.315
Topical Articles	71.45	68.00	29.483	65.89	60.00	39.980
Real-World Scenarios	8.64	6.00	4.884	6.42	5.00	5.231
Online Presentations	1.64	0.00	2.767	.79	0.00	1.782
Student Grades	28.45	24.00	18.780	17.74	13.00	16.492
Total Hits	554.55	604.00	145.187	508.58	406.00	236.341

**TABLE 5**  
**STUDENT PERFORMANCE OUTCOMES BY GENDER**

Content	Female (n = 11)			Male (n = 19)		
	Mean	Median	Std. Dev.	Mean	Median	Std. Dev.
Case Studies	84.5	85.0	5.30	80.6	79.0	6.88
Software Projects	84.0	83.5	10.40	85.0	87.5	8.65
Final Case Study	82.2	83.9	6.55	80.7	79.7	8.27
Course Contribution	88.0	91.00	5.40	86.1	86.0	5.84
Course Average	84.4	83.4	5.11	82.6	82.4	5.36

## Data Analysis

Cluster analysis of the thirteen pedagogical content variables was used to identify patterns in LMS usage. Ward's hierarchical cluster analysis was initially used to determine the number of clusters followed by K-means cluster analysis (Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black 1998). Cross-tabulations between the initial Wards Method and the final K-means clustering results indicated 83.3% of the students were placed in the same clusters using both methods, thus providing evidence of convergent validity (Hair et al. 1998; Morrison et al. 2003). The clustering procedures yielded four clusters, as shown in Table 6.

Examination of the variable means and medians for each cluster provides a mechanism for comparative analysis of LMS resources usage patterns. Overall, Cluster 1 has the lowest values for all variables with the exception of the Case Studies and Software Tutorials variables, while Cluster 4 is the group of heaviest users with the highest values for all variables except for Case Studies. Values for Clusters 2 and 3 primarily lie within but vary between the other two clusters.

While the mean and median values of the LMS variables assist in the initial identification of the clusters, they do not completely address all elements that require interpretation and understanding. Informa-

tion regarding the degree of dispersion of the clustering variables in each cluster allows us to assess the relative strength of each clustering variable across the four clusters, and thus provide us with richer information that can be used to interpret the four clusters. In order to assess the degree of dispersion of the clustering variables across the four clusters, we calculated a Z-Score for each clustering variable in the four clusters:  $Z = ((\text{cluster mean} - \text{sample mean}) / \text{sample standard deviation})$ . The derived Z-Scores are reported in Table 6. A graphical representation of these results provides the final step in our understanding and interpretation of the four generated online learning style clusters, as presented in Figure 2. Inspection of the Z-Score values in Table 4 and of the graph of those scores in Figure 2 reveals four distinct patterns of student behavior in accessing content on the LMS.

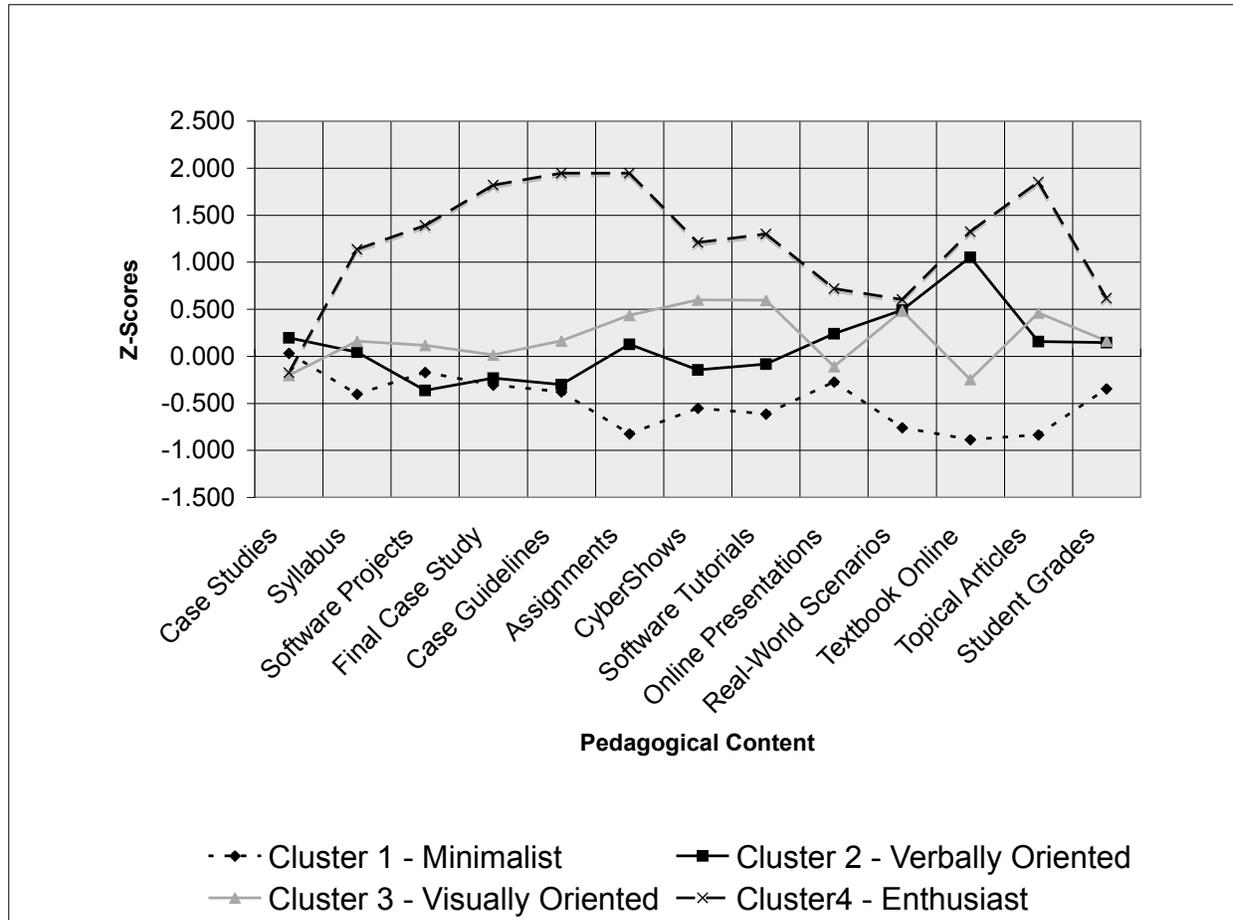
In the remainder of the paper, all references to the values of clustering variables refer to the mean value of that variable for a given cluster. The Z-Scores are based on these mean values, therefore, when comparing a Z-Score for one variable across clusters we are actually comparing the mean behavior of students in that cluster to the mean of the entire class or to the mean behavior of students in another cluster.

**TABLE 6**  
**CLUSTERING VARIABLE PROFILES FOR THE ONLINE LEARNING STYLE CLUSTERS**

Content	Cluster 1			Cluster 2		
	Minimalist ( <i>n</i> = 12)			Verbally Oriented ( <i>n</i> = 8)		
	Mean	Median	Z-Score	Mean	Median	Z-Score
Case Studies	10.33	10.00	.031	10.88	10.00	.196
Syllabus	8.83	8.50	-.403	12.25	11.00	.041
Software Projects	33.25	28.00	-.172	29.63	30.00	-.363
Final Case Study	3.58	3.50	-.307	3.88	4.00	-.234
Case Guidelines	19.67	21.50	-.380	20.75	23.50	-.301
Assignments	53.42	50.00	-.825	93.50	91.50	.128
CyberShows	21.50	23.00	-.554	32.50	34.00	-.146
Software Tutorials	25.17	26.00	-.616	38.63	44.50	-.085
Online Presentations	.50	.00	-.274	1.63	.00	.240
Real-World Scenarios	3.33	3.50	-.759	9.75	10.00	.490
Textbook Online	102.58	100.00	-.887	258.00	254.50	1.050
Topical Articles	37.83	41.00	-.835	73.50	77.50	.154
Student Grades	15.50	13.00	-.346	24.25	18.50	.145

Content	Cluster 3			Cluster 4		
	Visually Oriented ( <i>n</i> = 7)			Enthusiast ( <i>n</i> = 3)		
	Mean	Median	Z-Score	Mean	Median	Z-Score
Case Studies	9.57	10.00	-.203	9.67	11.00	-.173
Syllabus	13.14	12.00	.157	20.67	23.00	1.135
Software Projects	38.71	36.00	.114	63.00	48.00	1.389
Final Case Study	4.86	4.00	.014	12.00	7.00	1.818
Case Guidelines	27.14	26.00	.163	51.67	48.00	1.944
Assignments	106.43	105.00	.435	170.00	167.00	1.946
CyberShows	52.57	51.00	.598	69.00	53.00	1.207
Software Tutorials	55.86	57.00	.596	73.67	73.00	1.299
Online Presentations	.86	.00	-.111	2.37	1.00	.716
Real-World Scenarios	9.71	8.00	.483	10.33	9.00	.603
Textbook Online	154.00	146.00	-.246	280.00	262.00	1.324
Topical Articles	84.57	74.00	.462	134.67	136.00	1.851
Student Grades	24.57	21.00	.163	32.67	14.00	.671



**FIGURE 2**  
**A GRAPHICAL REPRESENTATION OF THE CLUSTERING VARIABLE PROFILES**  
**USED TO FORM ONLINE LEARNING STYLE CLUSTERS**

### **Cluster 1**

On average, this group of 12 students (40% of the sample), accessed content on the LMS at a level considerably below the rest of the class. This low level of access is consistent across all four content types: Procedural, Multimedia/Interactive, Reading, and Grades. Of particular note are the large negative Z-Scores for the Assignment resource ( $z = -.825$ ), which is the entry point for many other resources, as well as the three main reading resources (Real World Scenarios ( $z = -.759$ ), Textbook Online ( $z = -.887$ ), Topical Articles ( $z = -.835$ )). Grades for this cluster are lowest on three of the five performance measures, including overall Course Average (see Table 7).

### **Cluster 2**

The eight students (26.7% of the sample) in this group accessed Procedural and Multimedia/Interactive resources slightly less than the mean of the entire class. However, they accessed Reading content more frequently than the mean level for the entire class. Of particular interest is their high level of access for the Textbook Online ( $z = 1.05$ ). These students checked their grades slightly more than the mean for the entire class, but less than those students in Clusters 3 and 4. This cluster had the highest grades on two of the performance measures, including overall Course Average.

### **Cluster 3**

The pattern of resource usage for the seven students (23.3% of the sample) that comprise this cluster shows that they accessed seven of the eight Procedural and Multimedia/ Interactive resources more fre-

quently than the students in clusters 1 and 2, with especially high levels of access for Multimedia/Interactive content. In contrast, this cluster accessed three of the four Reading resources at lower levels than Cluster 2. Finally, the students in this group checked their grades more frequently than those in Cluster 1 and slightly more frequently than those in Cluster 2, but less often than those in Cluster 4. Grades for this cluster are lowest on the Final Case Study but highest on Software Projects.

**Cluster 4**

The cluster analysis assigned three students (10% of the sample) to Cluster 4. As the graph in Figure 2 clearly shows these students accessed all but one of the Procedural resources more frequently than one standard deviation from the class mean, with the level of access for the Final Case Study, Case Guidelines, and Assignments approaching two standard deviations. Similarly, they accessed Multimedia/Interactive and Reading content more frequently than those in the other three clusters. This group also checked their grades more frequently than any other cluster. This cluster had the lowest grade for the Software Project but the highest for Class Contribution and the Final Case Study.

**TABLE 7  
STUDENT PERFORMANCE OUTCOMES BY CLUSTER**

Outcome	Cluster 1 Minimalist (n = 12)			Cluster 2 Verbally Oriented (n = 8)		
	Mean	Median	Std. Dev.	Mean	Median	Std. Dev.
Case Studies	80.73	80.70	6.912	83.45	84.65	5.32
Software Projects	83.17	86.50	9.678	86.50	85.50	6.824
Final Case Study	81.64	79.98	7.414	81.09	81.18	6.868
Course Contribution	85.58	85.50	6.288	87.50	88.00	4.840
Course Average	82.27	81.38	5.484	84.29	82.70	3.422

Outcome	Cluster 3 Visually Oriented (n = 7)			Cluster 4 Enthusiast (n = 3)		
	Mean	Median	Std. Dev.	Mean	Median	Std. Dev.
Case Studies	82.43	83.70	7.372	82.87	85.30	8.611
Software Projects	85.79	88.50	11.499	83.00	77.00	10.392
Final Case Study	79.97	83.89	9.927	83.08	80.75	8.009
Course Contribution	86.71	87.00	6.130	89.67	90.00	5.508
Course Average	83.36	83.32	6.717	83.98	82.92	7.998

**Analysis of Clusters**

The distribution of gender differences across the clusters is reported in Table 8. There were no female students in Cluster 4 and only two of twelve (16.7%) in Cluster 1. Women comprised half (50%) of the students in Cluster 2 and five of seven (81.8%) students in Cluster 3. In sum, 81.8% of all females in the sample were members of Clusters 2 and 3.

Overall, evidence from the cluster analysis and the Z-Scores graph suggests that differences in online learning styles in student LMS usage. As indicated by the graph of Cluster 1’s variables in Figure 2, the students in Cluster 1 had the lowest frequency of usage for almost all of the LMS resources, which provides the label for this cluster as “Minimalist.” Indeed, on those important items that normally require

**TABLE 8**  
**CLUSTER DEMOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION**

Cluster	Gender	
	Female (n = 11)	Male (n = 19)
1 – Minimalist		
Count	2	10
% Within Cluster	16.7	83.3
% Within Column	18.2	52.6
Expected Count	4.4	7.6
2 – Verbally Oriented		
Count	4	4
% Within Cluster	50.0	50.0
% Within Column	36.4	21.1
Expected Count	2.9	5.1
3 – Visually Oriented		
Count	5	2
% Within Cluster	71.4	28.6
% Within Column	45.5	10.5
Expected Count	2.6	4.4
4 – Enthusiast		
Count	0	3
% Within Cluster	0.0	100.0
% Within Column	0.0	15.8
Expected Count	1.1	1.9

continual access by students throughout the entire semester, such as Assignments, Textbook Online, and Topical Areas, the students in this cluster had the lowest frequency. Several different scenarios possibly explain this behavior. First, the students in this cluster may be a type of technologically averse student. Rather than accessing online resources on a regular basis, it is possible that these students may be printing out the content, filing it, and using hard copy in a more traditional manner. Similarly, since the results indicate that these students accessed the Multimedia/Interactive content considerably less than students in the other three clusters, these students may have been gaining the relevant information from traditional face-to-face classroom instruction. Overall, this pattern may represent a reflective, verbally oriented learning style that did not fit with the emphasis on technology embedded in the teaching style of the instructor. It may be that an objectivist, teaching-centered style would have been more consistent with the learning styles of the students in this group. Alternatively, these students may simply have been unmotivated, and regardless of the instructor's teaching style, their online activity would lag. The grade performance of this group was notably lowest in three of the five categories including Course Grade.

The students in clusters 2 and 3 exhibited similar behavior when accessing the Procedural and Performance Outcome resources but divergent patterns for Multimedia/Interactive and Reading content. Both clusters were relatively close to the class mean for Procedural and Performance Outcome resources, indicating a pragmatic approach to this content. However, for Multimedia/Interactive content, Cluster 2's frequency of access is slightly below the course mean, while Cluster 3's is well above the class mean. Based on Felder's visual/verbal dimension, this suggests that the students in Cluster 3 may be more visually oriented learners and those in Cluster 2 more verbally oriented. When Reading content is considered, the clusters diverge in opposite directions, thereby affirming these visual and verbal orientations. Overall, Cluster 2 students access text-based reading content more frequently than the Cluster 3 students. The divergence is most extreme in the Textbook Online content, which constitutes the bulk of the assigned reading for the course. Cluster 2 students accessed the online textbook content far more frequently than the students in Cluster 3, who accessed the online textbook content less than the course mean. This supports

the interpretation that the reading preference of the Cluster 2 students indicates verbal orientation as explained by Felder. Accordingly, good descriptive labels for clusters 2 and 3 would be “Verbally Oriented” and “Visually Oriented,” respectively. The interaction of the learning styles of these students indicates fit with some but not all elements of the instructor’s teaching style.

The usage pattern of the students in Cluster 4 showed that they enthusiastically embraced all of the LMS technology. Their frequency of accessing the Multimedia/Interactive materials suggests active learners comfortable with visual as well as verbal resources. They also appear to be very comfortable with reading the reading assignments online. Accordingly, an appropriate descriptive label for Cluster 4 would be “Enthusiast.” Overall, there are to be four distinct patterns of usage that appear to represent four distinct online learning styles.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Limitations and Future Research**

Before we discuss the interpretation of our findings in this exploratory study, we must include three notable limitations. First, the sample size employed here limits our ability to conduct tests of statistical differences and the generalizability of our findings. We knowingly accepted this limitation in order to take advantage of the opportunity to examine a rich and unique data set. This information not only allowed us to test previously published findings regarding the effects of gender, it also allowed us to begin to examine new questions surrounding learning styles that has not been addressed in the business education literature. Clearly, use of larger samples in future research would test some of the conclusions we have drawn here as well as also provide a basis to apply more robust statistical analyses.

Related to this limitation are the effects of our sample being drawn from a single discipline at a single institution taught by a single instructor, which is common in prior education research in this area (Arbaugh & Stelzer 2003). The students in the sample were all traditional, full-time students attending a highly-selective, residential, private undergraduate institution. Extending these findings to broader educational settings is clearly a necessary development for future work.

Finally, our findings are constrained by the fact that we were looking for patterns of technology usage as they developed in reaction to a single teaching style used in a hybrid course. The resource usage patterns comprising the online learning styles evidenced here, may not be the same type that would be that reflected when interacting with other teaching styles or in completely online courses. Future research would benefit from the measurement of the teaching styles of multiple instructors or comparing styles in hybrid versus online courses.

### **Conclusions**

Based on the results discussed above, we can begin to answer our two primary research questions regarding how students use online course resources and what effect this usage has on student learning. We found initial signs of differences in patterns in the actual usage of the instructional technologies. These patterns indicate the potential existence of online learning styles and differences in the online learning styles of women and men. In essence, learning styles matter.

This conclusion has several implications. First, consistent with Arbaugh’s early (2000a) and recent (2005b) research, our work shows that gender should be taken into account in the empirical investigation of instructional technology in business education, as it appears that they used instructional technology differently than men. Furthermore, when online learning styles are considered, some women were found to be more active and visually oriented than others. This finding that not all women used online resources the same way represents a new contribution to the research in this area and represents a potentially worthy direction for future research.

Recognizing learning style differences is the first step for instructors seeking appropriate teaching methods (Brokaw & Merz 2000). While some have recommended that instructors should modify their teaching styles to accommodate the wide variety of student learning preferences (De Vita 2001; Felder 1993), instructional technologies such as LMS offer supplemental mechanisms by which instructors may be able to address a wider variety of instructional needs. Individual instructors unwilling to adapt well-established and successful personal classroom teaching styles may find that the development of new uses for instructional technologies offers a means of responding to previously overlooked learning styles. Accordingly, rather than a simple additional static channel facilitating course delivery, instructional technologies such as LMS represent an alternative means to increase consistency between student learning style and instructor teaching style and thereby improve student learning.

The second implication of this study is that we have applied a methodology that distinguishes this study from prior research of instructional technology in business education. We used a new source and type of primary data to examine student usage of online instructional technologies. Prior research focusing on student learning has relied almost exclusively on self-report data of student learning preferences collected through surveys. While a great deal has been learned from this type of data, server data provides complementary evidence of actual usage of instructional technologies over an extended period of time. This direct information can serve to overcome some of the methodological problems associated with self-reported and perceptual measures. Future research combining self-report and direct usage data would provide a fuller picture of student learning.

Finally, a necessary means to getting this new source of data, and the final contribution of this exploratory study, is the development and application of the methodology to collect, process, analyze, and interpret Web log data. While this process has been initially developed and applied in other fields, it can be applied regardless of pedagogy, discipline, or institution. From a teaching perspective, management educators and instructors have a new assessment process that provides a protocol that can be used to determine online learning profiles and evaluate the effectiveness of LMS technologies relative to those profiles.

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## Guidelines for Contributors

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The above-listed topics are not all-inclusive; rather, they are suggestive of the fields of study and instruction from which manuscripts are invited. Case studies in any of the topic areas are also invited. All manuscripts submitted for peer-reviewed publication will be reviewed by at least two anonymous reviewers.

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