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Building Literacy for Knowledge Economies: Reading and Writing About Trends and Issues in Business Week

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*The World Within the Words:
Business Practice in Plain Language*

Refereed Proceedings

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*The World Within the Words:
Business Practice in Plain Language*

Proceedings Editor

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INTRODUCTION

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It should be obvious to anyone watching recent business news that the strategic use of language and imagery has become more critical to business. Whereas in the past managers and owners could ignore public opinion and focus on producing their goods and services, they must now respond to media inquiries, testify before legislative bodies, explain performance to shareholders and regulatory agencies, appeal to potential customers, satisfy existing customers, refute or placate interest groups, maintain a presence on the Internet, and so much more. In the era of competitiveness and accountability, rhetorical representation matters!

The ABC Spring Conference brought together researchers, instructors, and business practitioners to share our views on how language, imagery, and technology interplay with social and economic processes to create business rhetoric. And to help remind us of the uncertainties of even the best planned program, we survived the SARS outbreak and snowstorms that prevented many conferees from flying or driving to Toronto. Those that came described the sessions as intimate and informative. Here's an overview of the articles in the proceedings.

Naseem Javed's plenary remarks at the opening of the conference addressed the importance of "name" in the cluttered, electronic environment of business. As founder and owner of the ABC Namebank International, a firm that helps companies get their names right, he notes that many companies are at a loss for how to distinguish themselves from their competitors as well as the average computer user who can create an official identity on the Internet and undermine the ethos of legitimate organizations. From his most recent book, *The Brand New Laws of Corporate Image*, Javed offers seven remedies for creating a name that will withstand the tests of time and chaos.

The first symposium of the conference examined the value of using plain language in business. A featured panelist, Joe Kimble, a law professor and a leading proponent of plain language, was unable to brave the snowstorm, but sent copies of his widely used article, *Writing for Dollars, Writing to Please* (Kimble, 1996), for participants. Kimble argues that plain language not only cuts through the complicated and ambiguous language of commerce, but is more cost-effective for business. One the other hand, say Riley and Mackiewicz, plain language undermines politeness, which is a key communication facet of many cultures. As Sandy French, founder and president of Northern Lights, Canada's leading internal communication agency, notes "whether it's business or personal, tact and politeness drive our culture—particularly when we have a negative message to deliver" (French, 2002).

The conference also showcased the increasing importance and challenges of the Internet and other electronic forms in business communication. Emilie Gould's paper discusses the cultural constraints of using plain language in website development. Damiani and Galery discussed how e-mail facilitates communication among members of an organization and reduces hierarchy while improving network relationships. Pollach examined the opportunities and challenges for companies attempting to communicate their ethical stances on their websites, while Johansen's study explained why a company's computer-generated letters don't always communicate well to customers.

How do these issues translate into pedagogical practice? George, Davis and Easter see the diversity of communication classrooms as both a challenge and opportunity in our complex business environments. Easter and Schommer-Aikins apply theories of learning and social perception to student performance, while Bommelje uses a listening model to teach conflict resolution. Muir and Heine discuss the use of current issues and event reported in the business media to help students develop critical thinking and writing skills and connect with the realities of the marketplace. And Dubinsky and Rosenweig describe how they have used service learning to help students apply communication techniques to community and organizational problems.

Conclusion

There's no doubt that communication skills will become more critical in business and the global arena, which calls us to become more attentive to the needs of our students as well as the organizations we serve. This call is sounded in the emphasis on communication skills in the recent revision of the accreditation standards of the Association for Advancing Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB, 2003). As researchers, teachers, and practitioners, we have new opportunities to situate our discipline in the "thick of things," because when all is said and done, it is the rhetoric that matters!

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CORPORATE IMAGE, TRUSTWORTHINESS AND A TYPING REVOLUTION

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Abstract

The evolution of corporate image and name Identities is at a standstill. It's been a monkey business for some time. The issue of trust is on the forefront while the visibility of the corporate name identities is getting into a thicker fog in cyber-space. Like a revolution of its own, typing is driving the e-commerce and affecting our lives in a big way…let's unfold..

The Setting

It's New Year's Eve. The music and dancing has completely stopped. In silence strange things appear: fancy dressed harlequins and charlatans running around taking cover in confusion. The party goers are already at the gates, screaming slogans, demanding *honesty and integrity* while the *Typing Revolution* charges on with thunder…. klika-ta-klick, klika-ta-klick,.. What happened? How did we arrive here?

Lets' Go to the Dance party

Corporations, dressed up like charlatans and harlequins, have done enough dancing; shareholders are no longer fooled by fancy images, fake identities with silly names, making fun of their investments. Everyone demands honesty from every aspect of the business empire. It's all about *trustworthiness*.

In January 2003, ABC Namebank International completed a global survey. A list of 5000 major international corporations was compiled and each corporate name was analyzed for its marketing power, image, ownership and trustworthiness in four categories. These are examined below.

1. Suitability: How Truly a Name Describes Itself and the Nature of it's Business

When names are totally irrelevant to the business, they often mislead or confuse shareholders and consumers alike. This large group of corporate names is an interesting mixture of mumbo-jumbo, strange name identities, projecting weird, non-related, connotations, confusing and conflicting with the actual business itself. These types of names often appear to be intentionally deceptive about the size, quality or marketing reach of the corporation. Dressed up like Harlequins or sometimes as Charlatans with fancy logos, spinning circles, bright color schemes with shooting stars they only create fear and doubt among already burned investors. About 83% of names failed the test of name suitability.

2. Personality: How a Name Stands Out among other Competitors with Honesty.

When names are borderline silly, nonsensical, overly creative, too trendy, projecting a short life expectancy, they scare everyone. This group of accidental names only makes fun of shareholders' money. Business can sometimes be all fun but corporate image making is a very serious business. 47% failed.

3. Registerability: How the Corporation Globally Owns a Name with its Identical DotCom.

When names are tangled in trademark litigation worldwide they only become a liability and an expensive burden to the corporation, bleeding marketing and advertising dollars. Companies in this group each have hundreds or, at times, thousands of similar and identical names in the global marketplace. E-commerce, with all its vengeance, only crushes these names on search engines. Customers and shareholders can hardly find the right company at the right time. 85% failed.

4. Respectability: How a Name Matches its Real Image with Actual Goals and Results.

When image is credible and matches the projected goals, shareholders feel comfortable and consumers trust the corporation. This small group of shining stars have one of a kind, unique, powerful, global name identity and image. The name clearly identifies with their goals and what they do. This creates respectability and clearly provides them with ongoing trustworthiness. 93% failed.

The research classified the corporate name identity of the global multi-nationals in the following four categories:

i) **Charlatans:** Deceptive Corporate images appearing to intentionally confuse shareholders. Names which project false marketing goals or financial capabilities. "Global Monopoly Inc"; "MarchFirst Inc."; "e-Corporation"; "Global Crossing"; "WorldCom", "MCom".

ii) **Ghosts:** Images originating from the early part of the last century, or prior, projecting futuristic image. Re-invented logos under antiquated names confuse the marketplace. "e-Steel"; "St. Peter's Online Bank"; "Devine E-Commerce". "e Eaton"

iii) **Alphabetti Soup:** Names that simply drown in the soup, making it impossible to decipher the nature of its business, tricking the marketplace. "XPGHRT INC"; "FUGTI"; "AIGTNA"; "BOOBOO INC"; "3 INC". "HIH".

iv) **Stars:** One of a kind, unique, powerful, globally protected, with an identical DotCom. This group represents 7% of the 5000 tested. "SONY"; "TELUS"; "MICROSOFT"; "PLAYSTATION"; "FOUR SEASONS HOTEL".

Malpractice of "corporate identity" created this accidental naming, further compounded when voodoo accounting met voodoo branding. A silly name with a hundred million dollar rollout campaign became the standard. Package designers abandoned the noble profession of corporate naming to other big dollar maneuvers, becoming experts in corporate governance, IPOs, and other strange areas, in the name of branding. Voodoo that is.

What about the Typing Revolution?

Right now, we are heavily engaged in a war of global e-commerce where everyone is forced to type absolutely correctly. Particularly a business name.

Whitehouse.gov takes you to Lincoln's bedroom, while **whitehouse.com** will take you to Lolita's. So, type in the morning, the afternoon, the evening, in cars, elevators, bedrooms, restrooms, boardrooms, dining tables, picnic tables and sometimes all day in the office too. The same fingers that did all the walking on the Yellow Pages have now learned tap dancing. Klika-ta-klick, klika-ta-klick…

There were similar major revolutions during the entire last century. Namely,
- **print society** - forced reading and literacy.
- **radio society** - listening, dialogue and music.
- **telephone society** - conversation, spiel, telemarketing.
- **tv society** - better sofas, centrality of the living room, visual knowledge.
- **computer society** - organization and planning.
- **telecom society** - globalization and surfing.
- **cyber-society** - decentralization, intellectual-anarchy.
- **broadcast society -** fueled by anchoring and broadcasting from every basement in the globe. Make-up, lights, camera, action. Hello, CNN*.

Today, it's all about searchability controlled by spelling and cognitive associations. Listings have gone through the roof: A two-inch telephone directory of the past is now a two-mile thick book. Masses with their strained memorability are frustrated with typing twisted names with strange dashes and slashes while evolution of brain is simply stuck slightly ahead of Jurassic Park. The brain has no incentive to work hard.

Positioning a name for maximum impact in global e-commerce is the new game. One hour on the Internet takes you through more artwork than was created during the entire last century by all the logo shops of the world combined. No one really cares about logos. Name is what everyone talks about, remembers, types, chats about, refers to, calls, praises or curses. Think of Yahoo. Can you recall their logos or colors? How about E-Trade, Amazon or Kazaa? There are hundreds of other businesses that you are already typing in daily, simply by name!

The Morning after the Party

Forget the hangover, corporate image-makers and brand agencies have only hurt themselves by ignoring the correct methodologies required for proper naming. Agencies asking sub-contractors to hire free-lancers to do their brainstorming and focus groups are over. Exercises to pool 5000 names over five months for few millions to come up with a *PHOOFFS* are finished. Extreme exercises with executives locked up in a boardroom, in the dark, each with a flashlight, making letter signs to form words while the other half tries to decipher, are lost in the darkness along with their OINGA, BOINGA names.

If this is the end of logo design then what's the future for Corporate Identity Services? Corporate image-makers have only hurt themselves by ignoring proper naming. Yet, this offers a great leadership opportunity for providing well-executed name identity, under the guidance of "Masters of Naming Architects". After all, there never was a shortage of great names just lack of expertise and wisdom.

Seven Remedies for Corporate Naming

1. **Respect:** A name must have an alpha-character to qualify and gain respect. Face of honesty, integrity, reliability and credibility. No room for "PurpleFrog," "PinkRhino," "Globe-a-Con," or "Tomorrow Inc." Sobriety must prevail because corporate names are not beer commercials.

2. **One Face, One Name:** Stand up with a happy, healthy face. Don't try too many masks and transmit multiple personalities. This can seriously blur the image. Advertising is wasted in harnessing a common mind share. Is the name selling Accounting or Space Navigation, Computers or Distilled Water? Honest names are truly honest about what they do.

3. **Current Status**: If you think you're on top of the world, then show it with your name. Old-fashioned names will not attract customer's attention to your ongoing evolutions. Glories of the past often lose their value with the changing times. Face cyber-branding realities of tomorrow's global e-commerce.

4. **Become a Star:** Have a star quality in your corporate name. Its alpha-structure should be bright, clear and shiny. Don't educate the universe on how to spell, pronounce or remember a weird spelling or obscure origin of a blunt klutzy name. No need to be a matchstick when it can be a flashlight.

5. **Freedom to Travel:** Spread your wings and fly away. Wander country to country with your name-Identity and explore global opportunities. No room for difficulties of global translations, connotations, secondary meanings, foreign obscenities, pronunciations and all other language issues. Today, marketing is *only* global, *burn* all the other books that say otherwise. Think locally, but name universally.

6. **Pride and Joy:** Be a leader. Set an example. Take pride. Introduce it globally with full confidence. Why the embarrassment? It's not stolen, or is it? Watch competitors struggle with confusion, dysfunctionalities and embarrassing naming stories. Shine where others hide.

7. **Rightful Ownership:** If you own a corporation, why not its name? Today, 93% of corporations do not own a global trademark with an identical domain name. This is the easiest thing to do. Shortages of global names are only myths successfully established by design firms. Fix it immediately as there is no winning without a global trademark with an identical dotcom (Javed, 2003).

Conclusion

At this moment, there is a much bigger war of branding image going on out there. Corporations are fighting for global positioning while shareholders are frightened by the hoopla. For those honest and progressive corporations of the real economy armed with realistic goals, there are still opportunities to stay clear of these corrupt, polluted and damaged name identities. Seek professional naming solutions to your marketing needs making sure that your names are on solid ground and can pass the acid test of trustworthiness.

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GLOBALIZING PLAIN LANGUAGE: CULTURAL CONSTRAINTS ON WEBSITE DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

This article discusses the implications of Edward T. Hall's theory of high and low context communications for global business communication on the Internet. It defines context in face-to-face communication, and how to establish it in a website. This paper should be helpful for people developing information for international audiences.

Communication and Culture

Since Aristotle, we have been told that, "Style to be good must be clear," and that, "Clearness is secured by using words (nouns and verbs alike) that are current and ordinary." But in a global economy, is plain language always appropriate?

Edward T. Hall would say no. His theory of high and low context communication suggests that some cultures prefer indirect speech. He found that people in high context societies (like China, Ecuador, and Malaysia) gather most of their information from the nonverbal circumstances in which face-to-face communication takes place – the meeting facilities, attendees, their relative status, and prior contacts. Preserving cordial relationships and maintaining harmony necessitates polite but unclear speech. "Yes" can actually mean "no," but those within the culture generally know how to interpret the intent.

By contrast, people in low context cultures (like the United States, Israel, and Germany) gather most of their information from explicit verbal messages. They expect "yes" to mean "yes" and it generally does. Relationships are less important than immediate outcomes and politeness is often expressed in direct speech that does not waste anyone's time.

Website Development

So, how do people from high context societies gather information when nonverbal communication is not available? What kind of strategies do website developers need to develop to address them?

There are two -- often embedded -- strategies. Some high-context people expect fewer words and more graphics; others look for dense and figurative speech. In many cases, the homepage of a high context website is pictorial while pages deeper in the hierarchy include a great deal of seemingly irrelevant text. Choose the appropriate strategy by analyzing the proportions of text and graphics in a sample of websites from your target country.

Next, decide on ways to increase contextual information in your website. Begin by focusing on site usability and screen graphics. Ease of use shows consideration -- but the site should not be simplistic. A study of fax and email use in Korea found that subordinates preferred to fax messages to their superiors because email did not require enough effort to be used for serious messages. In addition, appropriate choice of subject, gaze, horizontal angle, and ease of use help establish message credibility. High context people may view older subjects wearing business dress as more serious and competent than younger people dressed in casual clothing. Men may be seen as more authoritative than women. People interacting with one another may be considered more collaborative than an individual standing alone. Gaze should be indirect; in many cultures, looking straight into another person's eyes is a challenge, not a sign of respect. Similarly, the horizontal angle between the subject on the screen and the plane of the viewer will be read as confrontational or polite.

The status of the company sponsoring the site provides more context. Since high-context people are interested in relationships, they often need historical information, mission statements, branding, and information about management before they will act. A company with a long history is inherently more trustworthy. Mission statements reveal information about the company's long-term goals, ethics, and business philosophy. Branding makes an implicit statement about company identity and pride. An easily accessible organization chart, or prominence given to the CEO, demonstrates who is in charge. All this information (or, at least, its conspicuous display) would be considered unnecessary in a site for a low-context audience.

Finally, plain speech itself can backfire. Too much task-orientation eliminates needed context. Over-familiarity ("you-attitude") may not address visitors to the site with sufficient respect. Saying something once, in one part of the site, may not demonstrate sufficient commitment; messages often need to be repeated for emphasis.

Conclusion

Audiences differ individually and culturally; not every member of a culture prefers the dominant style. However, in general, plain language is most appropriate for low-context audiences. High-context audiences may require additional information that current editorial practice sees as unnecessary, verbose, or overly focused on the organization. Edward T. Hall's theory can help us choose which style will work best.

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GLOBALIZING PLAIN ENGLISH: CAN PLAIN BE POLITE?

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Abstract

Research suggests that Plain English often violates cross-cultural politeness strategies, creating problems in tone that may offset increased readability. Drawing on pragmatics, we classify business communication speech acts and genres based on their relative needs for plainness and politeness. This taxonomy can help business writers, especially non-native speakers, decide whether Plain English is appropriate in a particular situation.

Introduction

Proponents of Plain English have offered three types of arguments for its use. One is that Plain English promotes better understanding – that Plain English texts are easier for a greater number and variety of readers to understand (e.g., Bailey, 1990; Suchan & Colucci, 1989). A second argument is that Plain English makes writers more accountable by preventing them from hiding behind a "bureaucratese" style (e.g., Kimble, 1996-1997, p. 4; Pomerenke, 1999, p. 31). For example, Plain English advocates the use of active voice and discourages the use of agentless passive structures (such as Ronald Reagan's famous remark, "Mistakes were made") that obscure agency and therefore can be used to shirk responsibility, especially by bureaucrats. A third argument is that Plain English improves tone, since it is more personal, direct, to the point, and so forth (Plain English Action & Information Network, 2001).

However, caveats about Plain English have been offered, especially on the first and third points. For example, Thrush (2001) tested intermediate speakers of English as a second language on their comprehension of Plain English vocabulary. These speakers correctly identified only one third of the phrasal verbs tested (e.g., *fill in* for *complete*). Also, the speakers preferred Latinate vocabulary (e.g., *utilize*) over "common," Anglo-Saxon vocabulary (e.g., *use*). Similarly, Maylath (1997) demonstrates how some words that native speakers consider "easy" or "simple" (such as *gum*) have multiple, unrelated meanings and thus can be difficult for non-native speakers (NNSs) to interpret. He also points out how idioms like *a piece of cake* cannot be deciphered from the words that comprise them and, therefore, are not easily comprehended by NNSs. Ironically, these results suggest that writers using Plain English to facilitate comprehension may instead impair NNSs' comprehension.

It is the third point on which our paper focuses: namely, the interaction of Plain English and tone, especially that of writing produced by NNSs for Anglo-American readers. We address this topic from three perspectives:

- First, we look at specific syntactic strategies associated with Plain English and with politeness. For the latter, we use the guidelines outlined by Brown & Levinson (1987) in their study of politeness strategies. We show that Plain English guidelines are, in several cases, at direct odds with politeness strategies widely used across cultures, including, but not limited to, Anglo-American culture.

- Second, we provide evidence that NNSs may create tone problems by using overly direct strategies.

- Third, we offer a system for helping business writers decide when Plain English is appropriate, based on two variables: the individual speech acts that a writer is composing and the genre in which the writer is working. We argue that the use of Plain English depends on whether the individual speech act, the genre, or both are face-threatening; and we offer a taxonomy for determining the degree and type of face threat associated with speech acts and genres that are common in business communication.

Plain English vs. Polite English

Based on a cross-cultural study focusing on three unrelated languages – English (as spoken in the U.S. and England), Tamil (South India), and Tzeltal (Chiapas, Mexico) – Brown & Levinson (1987) delineate 40 linguistic strategies used by speakers to encode politeness. These strategies can be found not only in the three unrelated languages that form the basis of Brown & Levinson's study but in other languages as well. Because of these parallels, Brown & Levinson posit a universal (i.e., pan-cultural) system for linguistically encoding politeness.

What is most relevant for our purposes is that the stylistic hallmarks of Plain English are exactly at odds with the politeness strategies documented by Brown & Levinson. The following list compares several linguistic patterns recommended by the Plain Language Action & Information Network (2001) with politeness patterns discussed by Brown & Levinson. The list below includes those patterns that are among the most characteristic of each style.

PLAIN	POLITE
Active voice	Agentless passive
Verbs	Nominalization
Present tense	Conditional/past tense
Singular pronouns	Plural forms/general forms
Shorter sentences	Longer sentences

Here we offer some examples of each opposition. Portions of some sentences are underlined to show the relevant details within the example sentences.

- **Active voice vs. agentless passives:** Compare the Plain English active form *We recommend that you establish guidelines* to the polite agentless passive form *We recommend that guidelines be established* (Hagge & Kostelnick, 1989, p. 326).

- **Verbs vs. nominalizations:** Compare the Plain English verb-centered form *Transport the shipment next week* to the polite nominalized form *We would appreciate your transportation of the shipment next week.*

- **Present tense vs. conditional/past tense:** Compare the Plain English present-tense forms *I hope you will write me a letter of recommendation* to the past/conditional tenses used in the polite form *I was hoping you would write me a letter of recommendation.*

- **Singular pronouns vs. plural/general forms:** Compare the Plain English singular pronoun form *If you wish an exception to this policy, you must petition the dean* to the polite generalized form *Any student who wishes an exception to this policy must petition the dean.*

- **Shorter sentences vs. longer sentences:** It is generally the case that Plain English forms are shorter than their polite counterparts, as illustrated in the foregoing examples. Also compare the Plain English direct (i.e., imperative) request *Please send us your form today* with the polite indirect counterpart, which frames the request as an interrogative (*Could you please send us your form today?*) or declarative (*We would appreciate it is you could send us your form today*) – both of which are relatively long compared to the imperative structure.

This series of oppositions demonstrates a potential tone problem with Plain English: writers who follow Plain English guidelines may simultaneously violate politeness guidelines. And, furthermore, NNSs writing in English may create problems in tone by using Plain English forms in rhetorical situations that call for politeness.

Tone Problems in NNS Writing

It is a truism of cross-cultural communication that NNSs of English tend to be more indirect than native speakers of English. For example, Chaney & Martin (2000) write that "The overuse of politeness is very common for many cultures and should not distract U.S. readers. However, as a writer, keep these cultural differences in mind to avoid sounding harsh and insensitive to the reader" (p. 133). Likewise, Guffey (2000) advises that "in high-context cultures, straightforwardness is avoided. In Latin cultures bad news may be totally suppressed. In Asian cultures negativism is avoided" (p. 308).

However, empirical studies have presented evidence that contradicts, or at least seriously qualifies, this received opinion. These studies indicate that NNSs may use *more* directness than native speakers do and, consequently, that NNSs may more easily enact Plain English guidelines. At the same time, these patterns may create tone problems when NNSs construct discourse that is potentially *face-threatening* to native-speaker addressees (i.e., listeners or readers).

Building on previous work by Goffman (1967, 1974), Brown & Levinson describe two main types of face-threatening discourse. Messages that threaten *positive face* infringe upon the addressee's desire for approval or inclusion. Positive face threats include "expressions of disapproval, criticism, contempt or ridicule, complaints and reprimands, accusations, insults . . . contradictions or disagreements, challenges" (Brown & Levinson, p. 66). In contrast, messages that threaten *negative face* impede the addressee's autonomy or freedom. Negative face threats include messages that affect some future act of the addressee, viz., orders and requests, suggestions, advice, reminders, threats, and warnings (Brown & Levinson, p. 66).

Studies of how NNSs deliver face-threatening messages in English suggest that NNSs may be more direct than their native-speaker counterparts. In a study of one negative face threat, requesting, Yu (1999) found that Chinese NNSs of English were more direct than native speakers; for example, NNSs stated, *Please take it for me* rather than *Could you take it for me?* Yu also found that NNSs didn't mitigate their requests by stating them in the past tense, as native speakers did (for example, by saying *I wanted to ask you whether you would take it for me*) (pp. 292-293). The utterances produced by Yu's NNSs, then, more clearly displayed the Plain English principles of using imperatives and present tense.

Studying another negative face threat, advice-giving, Hinkel (1994) found a similar pattern in which NNSs were more direct than their native-speaker counterparts. For example, NNS advice cited by Hinkel includes *You smoke too much. You do not need to smoke, you can chew gum or something. You drink too much coffee, too* and *You should learn how to play basketball better because you don't play very well* (pp. 71-72). Such advice clearly displays the Plain English principles of using active voice sentences and the pronoun *you* to refer to the addressee. In addition, examples like these suggest that NNSs may also state criticisms, which threaten positive face, more directly than native speakers do.

In explaining these results, both Yu and Hinkel suggest that NNSs may be motivated by different communicative goals in the pragmatic choices they make, a conclusion that reinforces earlier claims by Lebra (1976) and Matsuda (1989). NNSs may, for example, value positive politeness over negative politeness, meaning that they may risk hurting the addressee's feelings in order to show concern with the addressee's status as a group member or to help the addressee achieve that status. Yu writes that Western indirectness may clash with the goal of demonstrating sincerity by being clear, stating, "From the Chinese standpoint, a direct request . . . is socially acceptable, sincere, and polite, whereas for Westerners, it may be perceived as impolite or even rude" (p. 304; see also Lee-Wong, 1994). Hinkel writes that rather than intending to invade their addressee's privacy, NNSs may intend to show empathy and interest (p. 74).

Looking more specifically at business writing, researchers have found differences between native-speaker and NNS discourse. Henry (1995), for example, describes how his business writing students – Arab, Indian, and Pakistani employees of a pharmaceutical company – questioned the use of the politeness strategy of incurring a debt. This strategy can lead to longer, conditional forms, as in *I would be obliged if you would send me a cheque for this amount* (p. 180). Henry's students objected to this strategy because of cultural assumptions that an obligation is not to be taken lightly; hence they were uneasy to state (even nonliterally) that they were obliged to the addressee. Henry writes, "To them, being under an obligation had serious consequences and they refused to consider using this expression even after I had explained the non-literal force of the word 'obliged' in terms of politeness" (p. 180). A directive such as *Send me a cheque for this amount* would circumvent the obligation issue and also be shorter and more direct, in line with Plain English. However, it would violate politeness norms for Anglo-American discourse, unless the writer were intentionally using "motivated" or "strategic" rudeness, for example to show anger with the addressee (Kasper, 1990, pp. 208-210).

Differences have also been found between native-speaker and NNS letters of request. Maier (1992) asked native speakers and NNSs to write a letter to a personnel manager to apologize for unavoidably missing an interview and to request another interview. She found that NNSs were less likely to use the politeness strategy of incurring a debt. While native speakers were more likely to write a request like *I would really appreciate the opportunity...*, NNSs were more likely to write a request like *I would like you to give me another interview* (p. 197).

Maier also found that native speakers used more indirectness than NNSs. Rather than directly asking for another interview, native speakers asked the potential employer to "consider" their request: *I would very much appreciate your consideration once again and also be grateful to you to be able to reschedule our meeting* (p. 198). NNSs, on the other hand, asked the potential employer to "give" them another chance: *I'd like to ask you to give me a chance of another interview* (p. 199). The native speakers' politeness strategies created requests that were less direct and, therefore, less plain than those produced by NNSs. Nevertheless, these less direct requests were more in line with the politeness patterns observed by Brown & Levinson.

What emerges from these studies, then, is a more complex picture than originally thought. Native speakers may mistakenly assume that they need to take a more indirect approach in communicating with NNSs than with native speakers. Conversely, NNSs may mistakenly assume that a highly direct approach is appropriate for communicating with native speakers. However, the direct language of Plain English is not necessarily appropriate for all discourse situations in which NNSs may use it. Thus, NNSs in particular would benefit from a system that helps them decide when Plain English is appropriate.

Deciding when Plain English is Appropriate

In this section, we develop a system for helping writers decide when Plain English is appropriate, based on two variables: the individual speech acts that the writer is composing and the genre in which the writer is working. We argue that decisions about whether to use Plain English must consider whether the individual speech act, the genre, or both are face-threatening.

Individual speech acts. Individual speech acts (e.g., sentences within a business letter) are classifiable into general types such as the following (Searle, 1976):

- commissives: those that commit the speaker to a particular course of action – e.g., *I agree to your terms*.
- declarations: those that affect the legal or official status of a discourse participant – e.g., *I nominate Fred to the budget committee*.
- representatives: those that describe some state of affairs – e.g., *Your refund is enclosed*.
- directives: those that attempt to get the hearer to do something – e.g., *Send us your check today*.

Individual speech acts can further be classified according to whether or not they are face-threatening and, if so, whether they threaten positive or negative face. Following Brown & Levinson's general categories, Table 1 classifies individual speech acts according to these variables. For each category, it also lists some sentence types commonly found in business communication.

EFFECT ON FACE	SPEECH ACT	EXAMPLES OF SENTENCE TYPE
None	Representative (neutral)	Informative statement
Face-building (appeasement of positive or negative face)	Representative (positive); commissive	Acceptances Praise Refunds Offers Order for goods/services
Face-threatening to positive face	Criticism or refusal	Statement of criticism Statement of refusal Statement of complaint
Face-threatening to negative face	Directive	Sales letter Job application letter Request for information Request for action

Table 1. Individual speech acts classified according to face threat.

Genres. We propose that not just individual speech acts but also common business communication genres can be classified according to their threat to the reader's positive or negative face. This proposal builds on related discussions by Riley (1988a, 1988b), and Boosalis (1995) that point out similarities between certain discourse types and certain speech acts. Our approach here expands on traditional treatments of speech acts in two ways.

First, as the term implies, speech acts are usually conceived of as instances of face-to-face, spoken communication. Our approach assumes that much business communication is, in fact, a written extension of speech acts. More significantly, speech acts are usually conceived of as single utterances that are part of a limited discourse exchange. We propose that the longer documents commonly recognized as business communication genres (e.g., complaint letters, apologies, refusals, etc.) can be analyzed as "mega-speech acts," i.e., as elaborate instances of individual speech acts. In their essence, for example, letters of offer are commissives; certificates and diplomas are declarations; informational brochures are representatives; order forms are directives; and so forth.

As a starting point, Boosalis (1995, p. 31) draws the following parallels between speech acts and business correspondence:

SPEECH ACT	BUSINESS CORRESPONDENCE GENRE
Answering a question	Generally favorable response
Asking a question	Routine inquiry
Apology with compliance	Adjustment grant
Apology without compliance	Adjustment refusal
Admonishing an individual	Collection letter

We propose that this preliminary list can be expanded and, further, that Brown & Levinson's distinction between positive and negative face can be used to construct an even more revealing system for classifying business communication genres, as shown in Table 2.

EFFECT ON FACE	SPEECH ACT	RELATED BUSINESS COMMUNICATION GENRE	EXAMPLES OF FORMS IN GENRE
Face-neutral	Representative (neutral)	Informative ("Routine")	Informational brochures Descriptions Instructions
Face-building (appeasement of positive or negative face)	Representative (positive) or commissive	Inclusive or accommodating ("Good news")	Acceptances Praise Refunds Offers Order for goods/services
Face-threatening to positive face	Criticism or refusal	Exclusive ("Bad news")	Credit refusal Job application refusal Adjustment or refund refusal Complaint letter Reprimand
Face-threatening to negative face	Directive (i.e., requests; orders that do not benefit addressee)	Invasive ("Persuasive")	Sales letter Job application letter Request for information Request for favor

Table 2. Genres classified according to face threat.

This taxonomy has several advantages over traditional taxonomies used in business communication texts (i.e., routine/good news, bad news, persuasive). First, it reveals the common ground between two seemingly unrelated genres: bad news and persuasive communication. Both genres threaten the addressee's face and, therefore, require greater degrees of politeness or indirectness than the informative genre. More generally, the taxonomy explains *why* messages traditionally labeled as "good news" or "bad news" deserve those labels: because they either appease or threaten the reader's face.

Let us look in more detail at the four genres outlined above and explain why each one does or doesn't threaten the addressee's face. First, *informative genres* (e.g., informational brochures; descriptions; instructions) threaten neither negative nor positive face, since their primary aim is neither to direct nor to criticize. Although instructions direct behavior, they presuppose that the reader has relinquished the desire to act autonomously. Moreover, instructions may actually enhance the reader's autonomy in the long run, by helping the reader to master a procedure.

Items in the second category, *inclusive* or *accommodating genres*, appease either the positive or negative face of the addressee. Inclusive genres appease the addressee's positive face by conveying acceptance or approval of the addressee by the writer. Specific forms that illustrate this genre include letters of acceptance, letters of offer, and letters congratulating or praising the addressee. Accommodating genres appease the addressee's negative face by explicitly or implicitly granting increased autonomy to the addressee.

In a business situation, greater autonomy is enabled by the acquisition of goods, including money. Therefore, communication that increases the addressee's goods can be considered to appease the addressee's negative face. Specific forms that do so include refunds and orders for goods from the addressee. In the latter case, the addressee of course incurs an obligation to the writer (e.g., to deliver the ordered goods); but presumably the benefits to the addressee (e.g., in terms of potential profits) outweigh the obligation. For this reason, instructions that help or potentially protect the addressee are "exempt" from the face-threatening status usually assigned to directives; hence the writer of a warning label may use an imperative structure (e.g., *Do not use near flame*) without fear of offending the reader.

Items in the third category, *exclusive genres*, threaten the addressee's positive face by conveying some element of disapproval on the writer's part, either by presupposing or stating criticism. Examples of forms that fall within this genre include refusals of most types, for example credit refusals and job application refusals. Forms that explicitly or implicitly criticize the reader also fall into this category, for example letters of complaint and letters of reprimand.

Finally, *invasive genres* (e.g., sales letters; application letters; requests for information or favors) threaten negative face by impinging upon the reader's autonomy, in a way that does not automatically confer a benefit on the addressee.

Interaction of variables. The two variables outlined so far – speech act and genre – can interact to create a total of four possible combinations, outlined below. We propose that writers can use this taxonomy to predict when politeness is needed.

First, consider the case of a non-face-threatening speech act in a non-face-threatening genre. When neither the speech act nor the genre is face-threatening, writers have no need to use politeness strategies and thus may use Plain English without fear of tone problems. An example of this combination is illustrated by the following instruction within an informative pamphlet: *Don't ignore symptoms, especially if more than one person is feeling them* (Reep, 2002, p. 244).

The second possible combination is a non-face-threatening speech act in a face-threatening genre. Writers including a non-face-threatening or face-building speech act within a face-threatening genre again may use Plain English without fear of tone problems. An example of this combination is illustrated by a face-building speech act (a compliment) within a face-threatening genre (a letter rejecting a job applicant): *Your ability to communicate will certainly help you achieve an excellent position in a recognized accounting firm* (Bovee & Thill, 2000, p. 266). In this case the writer may use a Plain English feature such as the second person pronoun because the speech act itself is face-building for the reader.

Locker's (1999) study of buffers in letters delivering negative messages, however, adds some complexity to the picture. Although she found that buffers, which fall under the aegis of politeness, did not significantly affect readers' responses to rejections and refusals, she also found that readers *did* respond more favorably when they were not surprised by the negative message and when they were given reasons for the rejection or refusal. Using indirectness to imply a negative message and giving reasons for a negative message are discourse strategies that move language from plainness to politeness. Therefore, Locker's research suggests the need for a balanced approach to Plain English in relation to tone.

The third possibility is a face-threatening speech act in a non-face-threatening genre. In this situation, writers must use their judgment about the degree of politeness needed. According to Brown & Levinson, the need for politeness when issuing requests is determined by three variables: the degree to which the request imposes on or fails to benefit the addressee, the power differential between the writer and reader, and the degree of familiarity between writer and reader. For example, a writer requesting a difficult or thankless task from an unfamiliar addressee who is the writer's superior would need to use a very high degree of politeness.

In contrast, consider the following face-threatening speech act (a request) within a face-building genre (a letter accepting a paper to a conference): *Be sure to submit your paper for the conference proceedings by June 1.* In this case, the writer can state the request fairly directly (i.e., plainly rather than politely) because the requested action clearly benefits the reader, who presumably will want his or her conference paper to appear in the proceedings.

The fourth and most important possible combination is a face-threatening speech act in a face-threatening genre. Our system predicts that this combination would require the greatest amount of politeness and, as a corollary, that Plain English would be inappropriate. This combination of variables would occur in a case where a writer had to make a request (a speech act threatening the reader's negative face) within a credit rejection letter (a genre threatening the reader's positive face). In this situation, the use of a Plain English structure like *Please pre-pay your order* would be less appropriate than the use of a polite structure like *Your order will be shipped as soon as we receive your payment.* Notice that the polite structure introduces several face-saving features; for example, instead of using an imperative to issue a directive to the reader and making the reader the agent of the verb *(You) pre-pay*, the polite version uses a declarative sentence to imply the directive, and the verb has been nominalized (*payment*).

Consider another example from Hagge & Kostelnick (1989). They argue for the effectiveness of recommendations like the following, which is signaled by a modal, *should*, and followed by an agentless passive construction:

> *We recommend* that guidelines *be established* for the types of items and the dollar amounts that may be handled in this manner. Vendors who make deliveries to the branches in excess of such amount *should be required* to send invoices to the bank. Further, any such items *should be cleared* from the fund daily. (Hagge & Kostelnick, p. 326)

Hagge & Kostelnick note that the Plain English version of this recommendation might sound something like this:

> You should establish the types of items and the dollar amounts that you want to handle in this manner. You should require vendors who make deliveries to the branches in excess of such amount to send invoices to the bank. Further, you should clear any such items from the fund daily. (Hagge & Kostelnick, p. 326)

The Plain English revision uses the pronoun *you*, cuts words, and avoids passive constructions. However, it also fails to account for the face needs of the recipients and, therefore, risks alienating them.

Conclusion

Structure endorsed by Plain English guidelines are, in several cases, at direct odds with pan-cultural politeness strategies. NNSs writing in English as a second language may create tone problems by using Plain English in rhetorical situations where Anglo-American readers expect more polite structures. We have outlined a system for helping business writers decide when Plain English is appropriate, based on the individual speech acts that a writer is composing and the genre in which the writer is working. In discourse situations where greater politeness is needed, Plain English structures may actually impair a document's tone. Instead, writers striving for a more polite tone may want to use non-Plain English structures such as passive voice, nominalizations, conditional/past tense, plural/generalized forms, and longer sentences – strategies identified by Brown & Levinson as creating politeness.

Acknowledgement

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MESSAGE DESIGN FOR CORPORATE ETHICS WEB PAGES

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Abstract

This paper illuminates how companies communicate their ethical stance on their Web sites with a view to enhancing their public images. The major challenges corporate ethics communication on the WWW faces include audience skepticism and the non-linearity of the medium. More specifically, this paper examines how companies attempt to construct convincing arguments and how they respond to the peculiarities of the hypertext environment. The framework for the analysis is grounded in functional discourse analysis, persuasion theory and hypertext theory. The analysis has shown that the companies examined respond well to the difficult persuasion environment but could enhance the effectiveness of their Web communication by reconsidering the syntactical structure and the hypertextual organization of their messages.

Background

Companies attempting to communicate their ethical stance on their Web sites with a view to enhancing their images face a number of challenges. First, with the WWW being a pull medium, the readers of corporate ethics Web pages can be characterized as a high-involvement audience, due to their interest in the company's ethical affairs. They are less susceptible to propagandistic material (Unger & Fuchs, 1999). An additional challenge is that the readers are potentially very heterogeneous in terms of nationality, mother tongue, age, education and personal stake in the company, unlike for example the readers of annual reports. In this sense, Web sites are directed at an amorphous but critical mass, which makes Web communication a complex task. Third, the general public is typically biased against business and meets corporate messages with distrust (Pinkham, 1998). Therefore, ethics communication gives rise to a high discrepancy between the audience's attitudes towards the company and the company's claims.

This, together with the high involvement of the audience, creates a very difficult persuasion environment (Sherif & Hovland, 1965). Also, texts on the Web are non-linear (split up and published on several pages) and require users to decide which page to see next. Reading non-linear Web text is a cognitively complex activity that must be facilitated by adequate navigational aids (Van Berkel & de Jong, 1999; Aarseth, 1997). Ultimately, the effectiveness of WWW communication is always limited by the fact that Web users typically scan texts rather than read them word-by-word, which calls for the use of visual cues such as subheadings and bulleted lists (Nielsen, 2000). In view of these challenges, this paper examines how companies attempt to construct convincing arguments and how they take into account the peculiarities of the hypertext environment.

Methods

The prime sources for the analysis were ethics-related Web pages found on company Web sites. The sample for the analysis consists of BellSouth, Ben & Jerry's, Levi Strauss, Lockheed Martin, McDonald's and Nike. The rationale for selecting these companies was that they belong to various industries, that they are major players in their industries, and that they all try to present themselves as ethical companies. Only those pages on their Web sites that focus on corporate ethics to a reasonably large extent were included in the analysis. Typically, these pages were found under menu items such as "Corporate Ethics" or "Social Responsibility". Table 1 shows the number of ethics-related pages included in each corpus and the total number of words each corpus contains.

TABLE 1: Corpus Sizes			
Company	**URL**	**# of Web Pages**	**Word Totals**
BellSouth	http://www.bellsouth.com/	17	5,745
Ben & Jerry's	http://www.benjerry.com/	9	4,747
Levi Strauss	http://www.levistrauss.com	8	5,361
Lockheed Martin	http://www.lockheedmartin.com/	10	1,897
McDonald's	http://www.mcdonalds.com/	12	2,823
Nike	http://www.nike.com/	17	6,203

The framework for the analysis is grounded in functional discourse analysis, as put forward by Halliday and Hasan (1976), Fairclough (1989; 1992) and Stillar (1998), complemented by selected aspects of the Neo-Aristotelian theory of persuasion (Cragan & Shields, 1998), social judgment theory (Sherif & Hovland, 1965) and hypertext theory (Aarseth, 1997). The analysis focuses on the ideational, the interpersonal and the textual function of the Web sites examined. The ideational function concerns the sites' content and persuasive appeals, while the interpersonal function looks at the relationships the companies establish with their stakeholders and how they include their audiences in the discourse. Ultimately, the textual function provides an assessment of the hypertextual organization of the messages conveyed. This qualitative analysis is supplemented by textual statistics computed with *WordSmith Tools*, a software tool for textual analysis.

Results

A. The Ideational Function

The basic message on these corporate ethics Web pages is the same across all companies. The companies seek to convince the readers that they are caring and socially responsible companies. In terms of content these pages differ across companies depending on the industry they belong to. Nike and Levi Strauss, for example, focus primarily on overseas labor issues, Ben & Jerry's on food safety, McDonald's on animal welfare and Lockheed Martin and BellSouth on preventing employee misconduct. Each company has some sort of ethics statement, e.g. a code of conduct, a mission statement or a corporate vision, in which they voice commitments to their stakeholders.

Although the pages appear to be rather similar in terms of content, they differ in the nature of the arguments put forward. The discourse analyses have identified an array of persuasive appeals the companies examined use to construct credible arguments on their ethics pages. According to Neo-Aristotelian Theory, persuasive appeals can be categorized into appeal to emotion, appeal to source credibility, and appeal to reason (Cragan & Shields, 1998). The analyses have revealed that appeal to emotion is the least prominent means of persuasion in ethics communication. This is readily understandable, given that a high-involvement audience can only be convinced with strong arguments (Sherif & Hovland, 1965) and emotional appeals are too subtle to accomplish this. In some places, all six companies use emotive language or decorate their ethics pages with emotive pictures images. For example, McDonald's uses pictures of happy employees to counter its "McJob" image and a picture of peacefully grazing cattle on its page on animal welfare. Nike and Levi Strauss use pictures of happy factory workers in high-tech sewing factories, presumably to reverse the sweatshop image that haunts the textile industry.

Table 2 gives an overview of the various appeals to source credibility and appeals to reason identified on the ethics Web pages examined. Appeals to reason are the foremost argumentative pattern used on corporate ethics Web pages. Appeals to source credibility, meanwhile, are used sparsely, despite the fact that source credibility is considered to most influential factor in persuasion (Cragan & Shields, 1998). In view of the public's skepticism towards corporate ethics messages, companies are right to use appeals to reason rather than appeals to source credibility.

TABLE 2: Persuasive Appeals

| Appeals to … | Source Credibility | | Reason | | | | | |
Company	Membership in NGOs	Ethics as a Heritage	Inviting Feedback	Numerical Evidence	External Audits	CEO Statement	Ethics Awards	Alignment with Science
BellSouth		✓	✓	✓		✓		
Ben & Jerry's			✓		✓			✓
Levi Strauss	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	
Lockheed Martin			✓			✓		
McDonald's	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
Nike	✓		✓	✓	✓			✓

Membership in NGOs

Three companies in the sample point to their membership in ethics-related NGOs, including the Ethics Officer Association (EOA), Business for Social Responsibility (BSR), and the Fair Labor Association (FLA). To qualify for membership in these organizations, companies must meet certain ethical standards. As a result, membership adds credibility to these companies' ethical claims.

Ethics as a Heritage

Further, three of the companies appeal to source credibility by claiming that integrity is a heritage in their organizations. They suggest that they have not just jumped on the bandwagon recently. Rather, they stress that their business decisions have always been made in an ethical and socially responsible manner and that their values were already espoused by their founders. However, they typically fail to provide concrete evidence for their claims. An appropriate example is the following passage found on McDonald's Web site:

> "*A Heritage of Social Responsibility*
>
> *McDonald's is an organization founded on a heritage of <u>giving back to the communities</u> in which we live and work. Being a <u>good citizen</u> has been inherent in the fabric of the company heritage since its inception. Leadership and <u>doing the right thing</u> has been the legacy of McDonald's throughout our 45-year history.*" *(emphasis added)*

The slow information rate of this passage is hard to overlook. Essentially, each sentence expresses the same idea — that McDonald's has always been a socially responsible company. Considering that the page heading expresses just that in five words, the whole paragraph is more or less redundant.

Inviting feedback and questions

By soliciting comments and questions companies try to convey the impression that they are forthcoming with information and willing to enter into a direct dialogue with their stakeholders. Especially for those companies that have been involved in scandals, e.g. Nike's sweatshop scandal and McDonald's "McLibel" trial in the U.K., inviting feedback and questions on ethical matters conveys the impression that the company has nothing to hide. The companies examined invite feedback on their ethics pages by providing e-mail addresses of departments or individuals responsible for corporate ethics, e-mail forms, and the phone numbers of toll-free ethics hotlines. Nike even has an online FAQ database for submitting questions and also publishes its replies to past questions.

Numerical Evidence — Dates and Figures

General statements become more credible if they are enriched with numerical evidence. The companies seek to raise the acceptance of their messages by providing details and facts from corporate reality. Although these facts and figures are not verifiable for external audiences, they still suggest that the company delivers on its commitments, whereas the absence of such details conveys the impression that the company does not enact the principles it claims to espouse. Levi Strauss, for example, provides dozens of examples of when it launched certain campaigns. Nike, in turn, does not provide such information but merely seeks to impress with the amount of its past charitable contributions.

External Audits and Monitoring Reports

To add credibility to their ethical commitments, companies publish lengthy ethics audits and ethics monitoring reports prepared by third parties, e.g. Ernst & Young, or CERES on their Web sites. These reports offer a seemingly independent and objective perspective on company dealings, yet one has to bear in mind that the companies would not publish these reports on the WWW, if they contained a substantial amount of negative information.

CEO Statements

Statements on ethics made by CEOs are intended to enhance the credibility of corporate ethics messages, as they signal that top management is committed to ethics. Further, statements made by an identifiable individual weigh probably more than those made by a faceless institution. Clearly, such CEO statements are only advisable if the CEO's image is spotless. Nike's CEO Phil Knight, for example, who was heavily criticized in the media after Nike's sweatshop scandals in the late 1990s, does not make such an ethics statement on the Web site and he is right not to do so in view of his low credibility.

Ethics Awards and Magazine Rankings

Companies pride themselves on rankings in renowned magazines and on honors and awards they have received from ethics organizations. These seemingly objective third-party endorsements are intended to lend credibility to the companies' claims. The awards McDonald's received include, for example, a *Fortune* magazine ranking and honors from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission and Audubon Society. McDonald's lists its awards on a separate Web page, which smacks of self-congratulations, though. Mentioning these rankings in the context of the relevant ethical commitments would have been a more subtle way of appealing to reason. Levi Strauss mentions a ranking by *Fortune* magazine in 2000, America's Corporate Conscience Award from the Council on Economic Priorities, and the U.S. President's Ron Brown Award for Corporate Leadership. Interestingly, Ben & Jerry's does not point to any ethics awards on its ethics Web pages, although it has received a number of them. Instead, they are only listed in the rather lengthy company history. Hence, Ben & Jerry's could exploit the third-party credibility that awards provide to a much larger extent.

Alignment with Science

Companies have also been found to back their claims with seemingly scientific evidence by appealing to the authority of academia or government-sponsored research. Cases in point include Nike, which publishes an audit report prepared by a university professor, and Ben & Jerry's, which quotes from a report by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Overall, it seems that the companies respond well to the difficult persuasion environment they find themselves in. They appeal to reason rather than emotion or source credibility, which is certainly the most effective way of convincing their audiences of their sound ethics.

B. Interpersonal Function

Language is capable of constructing relationships among the participants in the discourse. Addressers take on roles or assign roles to their addressees and express evaluations of and attitudes toward the addressees or the content of the discourse (Stillar, 1998). All six companies acknowledge that their business activities have a bearing on their stakeholders and they all make commitments to their main stakeholder groups, including customers, employees, stockholders, suppliers, and the community at large. The companies seek to create the impression that they take into account their stakeholders' interests in their decisions. In two cases, companies even make commitments to stakeholder groups they do not have. One of them is Ben & Jerry's, which commits itself to "increasing value for our shareholders", although the company was taken over by Unilever in 2000 (British Broadcasting Corporation [BBC], 2000) and is now a "wholly-owned subsidiary of Unilever", as Ben & Jerry's points out on one of its financial pages. Since its only shareholder is now Unilever, this statement is pure hypocrisy and also proves that the company has not updated its ethics pages for a long time. Similarly, Levi Strauss claims its shareholders "expect" the company to abide by "the principle of responsible commercial success", although Levi Strauss is a family-owned close corporation, as it says in the financial section of its Web site. In both cases the companies deceivingly make commitments to stakeholders they do not really have, creating the false impression that they care how their stakeholders, or in this case shareholders, feel about their responsible business conduct.

Unlike for example annual reports, the Web as an informal medium justifies the frequent use of the direct audience address like *you* or *your* on company Web sites. The personal address is also an effective rhetoric device to increase the acceptability of the message and to enter into a direct dialogue with readers. Nevertheless, not all of the companies include their audiences in the discourse to the extent they could. Table 3 gives the frequencies of the personal address and the audiences addressed for each company.

TABLE 3: Personal Address

Company	Absolute	in % of Total Words	Addressees
BellSouth	115	2.00%	Employees
Ben & Jerry's	61	1.29%	General public, grant applicants
Levi Strauss	3	0.06%	Grant applicants
Lockheed Martin	10	0.53%	Employees
McDonald's	4	0.14%	Employees
Nike	9	0.15%	General public

The use of the personal address varies greatly across the companies in the sample both in absolute and in relative terms, ranging from 0.06% to 2% of total words. Interesting, the companies address very different audiences. While BellSouth, Lockheed Martin and McDonald's address their employees directly, the other three companies address constituencies outside of the company. The above figures suggest that only Ben & Jerry's employs the personal address effectively, regarding frequency and addressees. The other companies either use it seldom or establish a dialogue with an audience that is not the primary target audience of a public Web site. It might be advisable to restrict employee communication to the corporate Intranet and address external audiences on public Web sites.

The companies have been found to mitigate the unwelcome in order to make it more acceptable. Lockheed Martin, for example, neutralizes the negative connotation of "bribes" by using "gifts" and "favors." Instead of problems or dilemmas, BellSouth talks about "ethical situations," "situations," "concerns" or "gray areas," thus presenting ethical dilemmas as harmless and easy to handle. Similarly, on Lockheed Martin's ethics Web pages "ethical issues" or "an uncomfortable situation" substitute for "problems". Nike refers to the onslaught of public criticism it has received as "the challenges facing us" in order to mitigate the sweatshop scandal that hit Nike in the mid-1990s.

Negative statements merit discussion as well in connection with the addresser's attitude toward the content. Speakers/writers who make negative statements are "implicitly taking issue with the corresponding positive assertions" (Fairclough, 2001, p. 128). Thus, negative forms must always be interpreted in terms of the underlying positive statement (Hodge & Kress, 1993). For example, Nike and Levi Strauss repeatedly claim that they do not use child labor, thus implicitly contesting the charge that their products are made with child labor. Since both companies have been accused of using child labor, it is readily understandable that they anticipate their audiences' concerns and seek to reverse the sweat-shop image that haunts their products.

C. Hypertextual Organization

When reading print text, users merely perform an interpretative function by making meaning of what they read. The non-linearity of hypertext, however, adds a performative aspect to the reading process, as readers also have to decide where to go next. Since hypertext readers have to complete two tasks—reading and navigating (Aarseth, 1997), reading Web texts is a cognitively complex activity.

Navigational aids such as hyperlinks aid in making individual pages of a Web site coherent and help readers develop a mental image of the Web site's content and structure (Van Berkel & de Jong, 1999). Hyperlinks may occur as menu items, links within pages (e.g. "Back to top"), external links to other Web sites, or cross-links, i.e. hyperlinks embedded in a text block that point to other pages of the same Web site (Van Berkel & de Jong, 1999). Cross-links are important cohesive devices to connect the fragmented hypertext documents of a Web site and enable the reader to navigate the site in a non-linear sequence (Landow, 1997). The number of cross-links used on a site indicates how well the text has been tailored to the hypertext environment. Lockheed Martin, for example, does not have a single crosslink on its ethics pages. The average number of cross-links per page was determined for each company (Exhibit 1). Six companies have a maximum of one cross-link per page and do not fully exploit the opportunities of the Web to interconnect the content of individual pages. This would have made navigation easier and induce users to go the Web pages they would not have visited otherwise.

Exhibit 1: Cross-links per Page

|	
LM	0
L	1.25
N	0.29
McD	0.25
B&J	1.00
BS	0.35
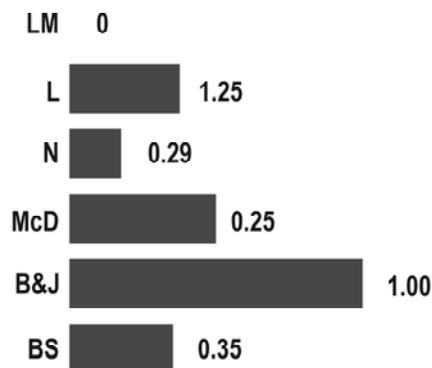
LM = Lockheed Martin, L = Levi Strauss, N = Nike, McD = McDonald's,
B&J = Ben & Jerry's, BS = BellSouth

Pre-existing text from printed material has to be adapted to the hypertext environment not only because of the non-linearity of the medium but also because of the Web users' reading habits. Since reading from screens is tiring and users are constantly forced to decide on the sequence of information while they read, Web users tend to scan text rather than read it word-by-word. To accommodate these reading strategies, Web texts should account for two additional considerations—brevity and visual prominence (Nielsen, 2000). Especially bulleted lists are important textual elements, as they both shorten text and attract the reader's attention by setting off the list items from the running text (Fairclough, 2001).

Exhibit 2 gives the average number of bullet lists per page for each company. The results reveal that companies are unaware of how greatly bullet lists would enhance the readability of their documents. Apart from Levi Strauss, the companies examined have far less than one list per page, despite the fact that bullet lists are widely recognized as useful textual elements on Web pages.

Exhibit 2: Bullet Lists per Page

Company	Bullet Lists per Page
LM	0.2
L	1.25
N	0.29
McD	0.25
B&J	0.78
BS	0.77
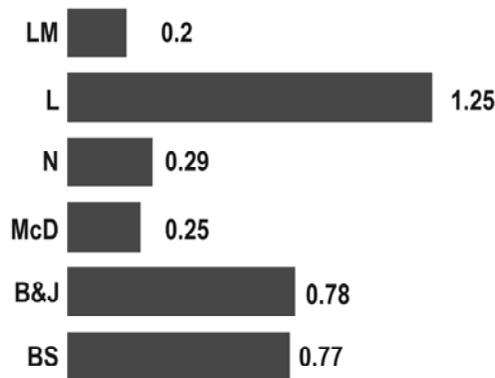
LM = Lockheed Martin, L = Levi Strauss, N = Nike, McD = McDonald's,
B&J = Ben & Jerry's, BS = BellSouth

Readability and usability of Web pages can also be improved by splitting long flows of text into several paragraphs and by providing a heading for each paragraph. Instead of one long page that requires the users to scroll, the text should be published on two or more screen-size pages (Nielsen, 2000). To get an idea of how the six companies in the sample have adapted their Web pages to the hypertextual environment, the average number of words per page and the average number of words per paragraph were calculated (see Exhibits 3 and 4).

A comparison of the results for words per page and words per paragraph reveals that long pages tend to be written in long paragraphs, too. Especially Levi Strauss and Ben & Jerry's could improve the readability of their Web pages significantly by splitting their texts up into a larger number of pages and by breaking the flow of text into shorter paragraphs to make it more suitable for screen presentations.

Exhibit 3: Words per Page   **Exhibit 4: Words per Paragraph**

	Words per Page			Words per Paragraph
LM	190		LM	65
L	670		L	101
N	365		N	54
McD	235		McD	108
B&J	527		B&J	163
BS	338		BS	98
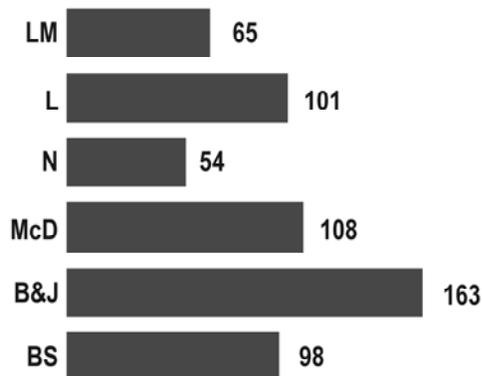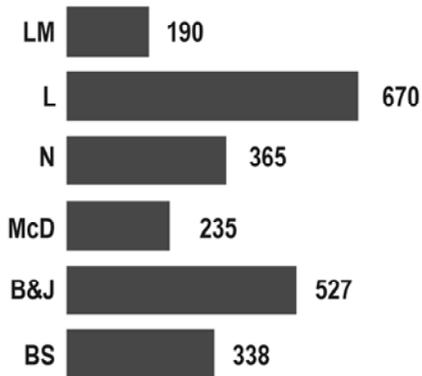
LM = Lockheed Martin, L = Levi Strauss, N = Nike, McD = McDonald's, B&J = Ben & Jerry's, BS = BellSouth

Conclusion

The companies examined respond well to the difficult persuasion environment they find themselves in by appealing mainly to reason. Although commonly used in product advertising or corporate advertising, emotional appeals are not widely used on ethics pages, although companies essentially advertise themselves on their Web pages. Companies seem to be aware that their messages face low credibility, so that they do not use appeals to the credibility of the speaker extensively either. A syntactical analysis has shown that the text design is for the most part ill-suited for Web communication. The companies' ethics pages especially lack structural devices such as bulleted lists, which would substantially increase reader-friendliness and thus the effectiveness of ethics communication. What is more, companies do not exploit the sheer endless possibilities the WWW provides for multimedia presentation and interactivity to support the messages. Rather, they mainly use the classic hypertext features—text, links and images.

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COMPUTER-GENERATED CORRESPONDENCE AND CUSTOMER SERVICE POLICY IN MORTGAGE LOANS

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Abstract

The phenomenon of businesses outsourcing their document preparation and letter writing to electronic groups and companies epitomizes the contemporary techno-philosophical view that knowledge lies with the database of an organization rather than its user. In the case of electronically generated banking correspondence, the knowledge of the user (the bank associate) is skipped, and the end-point user (the customer) becomes the victim of a message created from a database of facts and rules only. This article describes one financial center's decision to re-introduce a customer-centered approach to its correspondence database. The results of the research and project were policy changes that evolved from the correspondence review.

Background

The phenomenon of businesses outsourcing their document preparation and letter writing to electronic groups and companies epitomizes the contemporary techno-philosophical view that knowledge lies with the database of an organization rather than its user. Rather than keeping a library of letters controlled internally, many businesses outsource letter writing to relational database companies that depend on their database of both letter content information and address information: the relational database is more than simply a mail-merge operation. From a fiscal viewpoint, businesses view outsourcing as a way to free up resources for their core business. McCarthy (2002) explains that [American Express] is joined by other chief technologists in the financial services and banking sectors who are handing off to outsourcers day-to-day management of noncore -- yet crucial -- operations.

In the case of electronically generated banking correspondence, if the knowledge of both the user (the bank associate) and the end-point user (the customer) is skipped, and if no communications expertise is introduced into the relational database, the customer becomes the victim of a message intended to provide only as much information as is legally required to protect the bank or financial service center. This leap to outsourcing is being made throughout financial circles nationally and internationally. Ironically, if the user(s) disappears in the process of outsourcing, customer service costs may increase rather than decrease as intended by the outsourcing. This article describes one financial services company's decision to re-introduce a customer-centered approach to its correspondence database. The results of this project were practical and humanistic policy changes that evolved from the correspondence review.

History and Future of Correspondence Outsourcing

In the banking world, mergers and acquisitions reached a fevered pitch in the 1980's and 1990's when state and federal laws changed to permit banks to acquire other banks outside their immediate geographic area and to expand their banks in other states. As the acquisitions grew, so did the communication problems. A bank with many purchases and acquisitions found itself employing large numbers of people who had received little or no training from the home institution, employees who had been employed under varying sets of criteria. Their writing skills, therefore, varied drastically,

and their understanding of the home bank's mission also varied. As a result, some banks opted to maintain writing standards for external correspondence by outsourcing their customer service correspondence to companies who generate letters electronically as part of their information services. Outsourcing was also often cheaper than keeping correspondence generation in-house.

Banks, now often called "financial services companies" have found electronic document production corporations useful. This utility finds expression in the outsource companies' advertising such as this from Metavante (2002):

> "The powerful, advanced architecture of CSF Communication Designer incorporates feature-rich, easy-to-use tools to produce any type of communication needed to create and retain vital customer relationships, such as bills, statements, notices, letters, policies, direct mail campaigns, booklets, and brochures."

Document production companies like Alltelfinancial (2002) can offer a unified service center, and the competitive advantages to businesses are a part of their advertising claims: "a family of integrated loan origination, secondary marketing, e-business, electronic data transmission and loan servicing offerings that provide our clients with the most sophisticated solutions available. Our automation tools and dedicated team of professionals offer an unrivaled competitive advantage to your business."

Some of these outsource corporations were established to create documents before the advent of computers and software. Now, in combination with a centralized relational database, they create entire sections or individual elements of a document quickly and with great flexibility. As technology advances, the number and complexity of services offered by the relational database companies increases. They are easily visible through advertisements such as this one from Wendover (2002) with details offered on the Web. Our company "can increase productivity, reduce overhead, and improve customer service. We support every aspect of back-office mortgage loan servicing, including payment processing, tax tracking and payment, monthly statements disbursement, escrow analysis, collections, loss mitigation, and more."

Outsourcing of noncore business is forecasted to increase according to McCarthy (2002) to about 31 % of budgets by 2004. Among the barriers listed, however, are strategic importance of customer data, security concerns, long-term stability of IT vendors, long-term dependence on IT vendors, lack of industrial expertise, loss of management control, high cost, and regulatory scrutiny. Lack of industrial expertise and loss of management control specifically apply to the problems created between the technology objectives of a relational database and the customer service objectives of a customer-friendly institution.

Database Description

A relational database comprises many documents and pieces of information. From this base, relevant content is extracted using information extraction technology that Roa (2002) says "is already important to the publishing industry and mission-critical to the intelligence community (15). Financial centers can feed format information, relevant contact information like phone numbers and addresses, customer addresses, and directives from government departments like HUD, FDIC, FNMA, and RESPA into the relational database, and a letter is produced.

Creating letters from a relational database using legal and directive information provides safeguards against both data inconsistency, a problem of data redundancy that may occur without a database (See Tribunella, 2002), and obsolete information, since all information changes in the database are made at one location. The resulting letters, however, carry the stylistic dynamics of the writing introduced into the database. For example, the FDIC notice FIL-84-2000 (1995) about consumer protections for bank sales of insurance is written in this style:

> *The final rule prohibits the bank, or anyone acting on the bank's behalf (a "covered person"), from engaging in any practice that could mislead someone or otherwise cause a reasonable person to reach an erroneous belief about: [sic]*
> - *the uninsured nature of any insurance product or annuity;*
> - *the investment risk associated with certain products, such as variable annuities; and*
> - *The fact that the approval of a credit extension cannot be conditioned on the purchase of an insurance product or annuity from the bank, and that the consumer is free to purchase the insurance product or annuity from another source.*

Resulting Letters and Notices

Letters and notices created with their foundations in these relational database documents, tend to be written in legal terminology and packed with information relevant to the financial service company, some of it irrelevant to customers. When financial service companies use a relational database that skips the fundamental understanding of audience, the result is an institution-focused discourse that obsesses on the financial institution's needs and requirements, not the customers'. Even when the letters do not require legal language, the writing carries an overly formal style, often telling customers what cannot be accomplished: the letters tend to be lists of prohibitions and directives. Because of their legal and governmental department bases, they are overly prescriptive and often negative. Most important, while they provide customers with information, they neglect to tell customers what action to take about the information.

The Market Niche and Resulting Correspondence Review

The 21st century arrived with all banks able to provide similar services-- investment services, life-estate planning, insurance—along with the traditional banking services of deposits, loans, and trusts. In the case of Big Bank (obviously a fictitious name), the end-point user, the customer, became the target of the Big Bank's desires to find its niche in the banking world of the new millennium. Big Bank decided to hold fast to its reputation as the most customer-friendly financial services company among all the competing financial companies, and it launched a large internal program to re-train its associates in customer services, enhancing its customer-centric focus.

In the meantime, the Mortgage Division of Big Bank (BBMS) was redefining its business goals, and in the process of reorganization identified the need to outsource mortgage service, customer service, and letter writing functions. During the BBMS reorganization, the recently employed Director of Corporate Communications began to read the correspondence being sent by the new BBMS relational database vendor, Megatech (fictional name). She and BBMS were astounded by the customer unfriendliness of its correspondence being generated by the relational database vendor. Therefore, before it began its roll-out of newly re-focused, brand-oriented customer service training for mortgage associates, BBMS reviewed and edited all correspondence sent to mortgagees from Megatech. BBMS hired a communications consultant to review the correspondence, and the problems uncovered by the consultant for this project created policy changes and process changes in the mortgage loan services provided by Megatech.

Research

The most important problem revealed in the correspondence review of 115 letters was that the information vital to the customer was missing from the letters (28 incidences). This problem was compounded by letters that assumed more than the customer could know (5 incidences) and unclear instructions or information (8 incidences). The problem description and frequency are presented in Table 1. Some letters contained more than one problem, so the total number of errors is more than the number of letters.

Table 1: Correspondence Problem Frequency for Mortgage Letters

ERROR ID#	ERROR DESCRIPTION	FREQUENCY
1.	Information missing	30
2.	"Thank you" used as a crutch	18
3.	Unnecessary negatives	17
4.	We-centered rather than customer-oriented	15
5.	Failure to sell services	12
6.	Overly legalistic wording or bank-ese	11
7.	Impersonal wording	9
8.	Wrong or poor format more than basic letter formatting	8
9.	Instructions or information unclear	8
10.	Error in creating a list	6
11.	Assumes more than a customer will know	6
12.	Direct request buried	5
13.	Good news submerged	4
14.	"Enclosure" missing	2
15.	Selling services in wrong letter	1
16.	Unnecessary information	1

The correspondence was freer of surface errors than informational errors. The letters contained five spelling errors, four spelling errors, and one grammatical error. After a 100 percent format change to personalize the salutation, 95 percent of the letters required changes to correct passive voice, institutional-centered writing, and iciness or rudeness of expression.

Missing Information: What to Do

The most common error in the messages was neglecting to tell customers how to take effective action in response to the letter and neglecting to say whether a response was necessary. For example, in a letter responding to a customer's request for an amortization schedule, the BBMS letter said, "Thank you for your request for an amortization schedule. Please send the $15.00 fee to cover for this service." The customer could only guess where to send the $15.00. The letter made no mention of a self-addressed, stamped envelope because the customers' needs were not part of the relational database, and further computer programming would be required to sort and stuff SASE envelopes. The customer was also given no further instructions to prevent confusion in fulfilling the financial center's request. The customers' logic would include questions like, "Should a new request be sent with the $15.00 fee?" "Will BBMS hold my request until the $15.00 fee arrives?"

The consultant asked BBMS if amortization schedules were available free of charge at the Big Bank website. Because the website was under development, no one knew except the liaison between Megatech and the Big Bank. Free amortization schedules had been available on the web site for a month, and the customer's letter could have said, "You can find a free amortization schedule for you loan on the Big Bank website." Changes in the correspondence were not keeping pace with changes in the website, and a process to keep the correspondence and the website capabilities current with each other were only pending. Moreover, the computer program at Megatech used to create the correspondence did not accept changes using word processing programs: all changes had to be re-entered into the relational database by hand. The database was viewed as static unless a law or rule governing BBMS changed, a reflection of techno-philosophy in the creation of the relational database.

The amortization letter, which provided all the information the database held, created a situation requiring a phone call for clarification. At the same time, the tone of the letter was so confrontational that customer service could expect a dissatisfied customer on the phone.

In another letter about a loan payment sent to the wrong address, the letter simply said, "Recently, we received one of your loan payments at a post office box that is no longer valid." The letter gives instructions for further payments but neglected to tell the customer that the payment under discussion was located and processed, therefore leaving the customer without information until he or she received the next statement.

Missing Information: What to Expect

Another problem in the letters was neglecting to tell customers what to expect. In a letter terminating automatic mortgage payment deductions, the customer was told, "Please mail in your monthly payment until we receive corrected information for your ABA routing number and your bank account number." In this case, customers were left wondering if they should supply the missing ABA routing number and bank account number. They also were left wondering if they will be notified when the automatic payment deductions will begin again.

Missing Information: Negatives and Requests

In a related problem, the request from the financial services company to the customers to respond with an action was buried in negative words and was almost lost. The letter explained that the life, accident, or disability insurance had been terminated because the customer neglected to pay both it and the mortgage payment. The letter's intent was to say in the first sentence, "Please bring your account up-to-date, and reapply for Life, Accident, or Disability Insurance." Instead, the customer had

to must wade through negatives: "This letter is to notify you that your life, accident, or disability insurance has been terminated for non-payment of premium and cannot be reinstated. We were unable to pay the premium due since your account was not current. You may reapply for coverage when your account is current." This choice of attitude and wording reflects the set of rules held by the database governing what happens **to the account** when payments are missed. This is both database to database knowledge and correspondence. It ignores the account holder as a customer (user).

Confused Information

An important letter about new mailing addresses for BBMS attempted to tell customers that different mortgage matters like payments, hazard insurance, or taxes each required different addresses. The letter led customers astray because the database producing the letter was programmed for one column. Therefore, in order to make a list of addresses fit on one page, the computer opted to omit "Big Bank Mortgage Services" from each of the five addresses listed and put headings at the top of the addresses so they appeared like this:

> Payment mailing address
> P.O. Box 12345
> Charlotte, NC 28272-0000

Obviously, customers would use these exact words, "Payment mailing address, until the instructions letter was reprogrammed to provide the first line, "Big Bank Mortgage Services."

Similarly, another letter responds to customers' requests to cancel the required flood insurance. Because the computer knew it was writing about insurance, it neglected to write the word "insurance" in the opening sentence of the letter, resulting in the strange statement, "Thank you for your request to cancel the flood requirement on your loan."

The problems in these and other letters created additional phone calls to the customer service center. These additional phone calls are clearly an expense for the document generating company since they receive all customer complaints, a labor-intensive and expensive situation, and for the Big Bank in the long run. For example, when BBMS made a major announcement of the outsourcing of services using a computer-generated letter, it expected approximately 400 phone calls of inquiry, based on the relational database's other experiences with outsourcing announcements, and it provided enough staff to answer all 400 calls. The letter, however, was re-written by the Director for Corporate Communications who re-aligned the letter with good business communication principles, and only 50 phone calls were placed by customers to inquire about the outsourcing announcement. This episode became the impetus for hiring the consultant to review all the other outsourced BBMS letters.

Format Revisions

In response to reading the relational database generated correspondence, BBMS decided that customer-friendly letters needed many changes, and the first was format. The salutation, "Dear Valued Customer:" was dropped. The traditional "Dear Mr." or "Dear Ms.," however, is a very difficult programming problem. Because the customer (s) name is available in the inside address, the salutation became the first inside address line, for example, "Dear Monica E. Allen."

The signature line, which read "Customer Administration, Big Bank Mortgage Services" was reduced to simply, "Big Bank Mortgage Services." The customer service center at Megatech answers all calls with, "Big Bank Mortgage Services," so this was a logical change and simplification.

The most important change in the format was first sentence of the last paragraph that read, "If we may be of further assistance, please call…." At times, the letter had not provided assistance. Also, the sentence's placement was a logical place for information or cross-selling. Sentences now read, for

example, "If you have questions about re-starting your insurance coverage, please call…." "As you evaluate options other than a loan assumption, we will provide you with any assistance or information you need. Please call…."

Policy Changes

The review of the editorial changes made to the BBMS correspondence resulted in policy reviews and changes. For example, the policy of adding any unidentified additional mortgage payments to the principal, a policy under discussion, became a statement of practice in relevant letters.

The loan assumption process, described originally in a two-page letter that included warnings about non-compliance, underwent review to align the process with a customer-centered mission. Also, the 90, 60, and 30 day warnings about balloon mortgages maturing, which as a matter of policy asked the customers to phone the bank, now include language about details of the original note (Some notes may be assumed; some may not.)

An important policy change was the addition of an inside address, salutation, complimentary closing, and signature line to notices like the Verification of Mortgage Notice that were sent as documents rather than as letters. Also, notices already using an inside address such as an Interest Rate Change Notice were given a salutation, complimentary closing, and signature line. These changes changed the factual notices, some of them bearing bad news, into personal letters.

The customer service policy of sending a self-addressed, stamped envelope when Big Bank requested documents from a customer was re-instated.

Conclusion

Big Bank's reliance on its database, or in this case, on Megatech, reflects the 21st century reliance on database as knowledge. In the case of computer generated correspondence, everyone involved was being forced to rely on the database's database—documents from government and legal departments. The only intervention offered was by an interpreter/writer at the correspondence generating company, a legal/technical person hired by Megatech. The user(s) needs, the human requirement for complete and friendly or at least, non-offensive information, were therefore being ignored in this situation.

When BBMS shifted its communication problem of customer unfriendly correspondence back to the user(s) as knowledge, it located itself in a more humanistic philosophy than the techno-philosophy it was pursuing.   The change created a closer awareness of the link between correspondence with customers and financial company's success. Also, it extended the humanist philosophical change because the new correspondence was entered into the relational database that serves all Megatech customers, not just BBMS. Moreover, both the Big Bank and Megatech will continue to examine new correspondence using strong communications and business criteria: First, does the correspondence reduce further customer contact by being accurate and complete? Next, does the correspondence keep pace with changing technology in the financial institution? Finally, will the correspondence create more profit for BBMS and Megatech by saving money through fewer calls to customer service?

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INTERNET-BASED VIRTUAL WORKGROUPS

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Abstract

E-mail has the potential to bring about a revolution in how workgroups interact. But, in order for this to happen, proper use of e-mail is a basic assumption. Therefore, this project's main goal is to observe virtual workgroups as they operate in practice and to come up with solutions to improve interaction by means of this new vehicle.

Introduction

The convergence of computing and telecommunications and the use of PCs, the Internet, and e-mail has changed communication in business as well as how firms are organized. This convergence allows for the development of network structures, where projects are developed by small, globally dispersed teams. Dell Computer Chairman CEO, Michael Dell, states that virtual integration enables firms to grow much faster: there is less to manage and less to go wrong (Magreta, 1998). In the United States, most firms (51%) already have some sort of telecommuting program under way and for 8% of workers, the traditional workspace is already a memory. Efficiency, costs reduction, and the pursuit of qualified professional are the causes that led to the growth of telecommuting.

Why do firms establish Telecommuting programs?
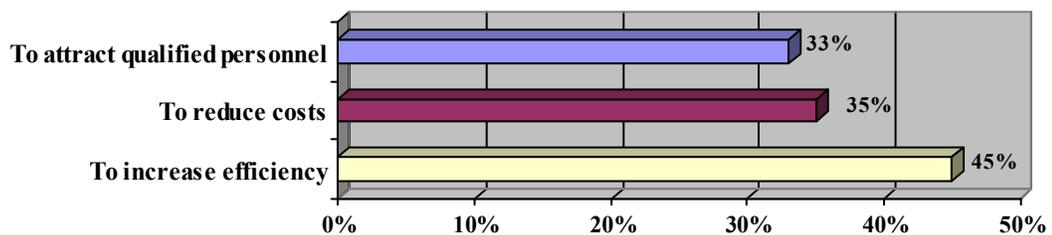
Source: Olsen Corp.

The expansion of telecommuting programs is largely due electronic mail or e-mail, which offers high-speed, low-cost global communication. However, while these advantages are well-known, it is worth discussing the potential impact of this new tool for tasks performed by virtual, geographically dispersed workgroups. The emergence of new and efficient modes of communication affects the structure of organization (Knoll, 1995). This new organizational format, made up of small workgroups that do not share the same physical facilities, can be rapidly modified in response to environmental demands. The speed with which these groups can be created and dismissed allows employing the individuals best able to add value to a certain task, regardless of where they may be located.

The effective use of e-mail creates a less hierarchical and more flexible organizations, and virtual workgroups can replace personal meetings to solve problems (Kinsley,1997). Such virtual organizations will endure reduced operating costs and may employ more productive and capable personnel, individuals able to perform tasks in shorter timeframes. But for e-mail to truly revolutionize how value is added, the basic assumption is the proper use of the tool in question. Therefore, the main purpose of this paper is to observe virtual workgroups in practice. From this observation, we expect to draw conclusions that can contribute to the improvement of virtual interaction at organizations.

The Practical Exercise

A practical exercise was proposed to test the potential for virtual workgroups. No personal contact among members was allowed. The activity was to perform a previously unstructured task for which group members were supposed to come up with a solution conceived with asynchronous e-mail communication. Ahead, we will describe the proposed exercise with participants from five different schools, with EAESP/FGV as coordinating institution. Participant schools were: FGV's São Paulo Business School – EAESP/FGV, Campinas Pontifical Catholic University - PUCCAMP, Instituto Tecnológico da Aeronáutica – ITA, Fundação Armando Álvares Penteado – FAAP, and the São Paulo State University – UNESP.

We selected an exercise involving Brazilian schools with the purpose of making an unprecedented experiment in Brazil: we know of no similar project in Brazil. A group of 137 students participated in the exercise, divided into 25 five- or six-member groups. After the establishment of the groups, a common task was given to all: to execute a Business Plan with the purpose of releasing a product or service into the market. A three-week schedule was provided to carry out the task. During this period, the members of each group were to be in contact in order to define what their chosen product or service would be and to compose the business plan. All the messages exchanged by the members of each group were monitored. Therefore, all the messages sent in the course of the exercise were read by the monitors with the purpose of evaluating the exercise and of identifying possible technical problems that might hinder the project, problems that might not always be evident to group members.

Evaluation of the Practical Exercise

In more general terms, the advantages and disadvantages of e-mail communication according to Faria (1997) were identified during the practical exercise.

On the positive side, we noticed that e-mail:

- **Provides more flexible activities scheduling and convenient (24-hour) access to group members** – students communicated at the times of greatest convenience to them, as evidenced by the following monitored messages: "*(...) It is now 3:22 P.M. I'll check my e-mail again at 5:00 P.M. After, that only tomorrow. If possible, answer today.*" and "*Seeya, I'll connect again at 3:00 P.M.*"

- **Does away with time and costs expenditures caused by meetings, and allows work with geographically disperse students** – the participating students, based in different regions in the State of São Paulo, concluded the exercise without ever meeting in person; all the interaction took place virtually.

- **Produces and egalitarian atmosphere, allowing ideas to be shared by increasingly large communities** – all participants had the same tool – e-mail.

- **Stores communications for convenient access, reflection, and response** – in most cases, communication within groups fostered a proactive, rather than reactive, behavior: when members exchanged criticisms, they had time to assimilate them and respond accordingly.

On the negative side, we observed:

- **The need for a dedicated "staff"** - certain individuals had to monitor the messages to evaluate the progress of work, as well as to find solutions for technical problems. Traditional – visual and verbal – interactions do not require such monitoring.

- **Effective participation requires familiarity with computers** – many students were unable to communicate with their groups due to their lack of familiarity with e-mail. More than a lack of ability by some students, this is proof that this tool is still little used in the school environment.

a. Group Performance Analysis

To analyze each student's level of participation, we conceived the following evaluation criterion: participation was considered low for students who sent from zero to three messages; medium for those who sent between four and eight messages; and high for those who sent nine messages or more.

We noted, therefore, that a large share of students had low participation: 63.5% had low participation level; 24.82% had medium participation and only 11.68% sent 9 messages or more.

All these figures were lower than expected, denoting lack of interaction within groups, be it due to technical problems, inability in the use of e-mail, or disinterest as regards the exercise.

For the purposes of an even more detailed analysis of the project, we decided to define the number of useful messages exchanged during the exercise. By useful messages, we mean those that added value to each group's project, except for those exchanged during the "ice-breaking" period. This was necessary because many of the messages sent were merely interjectory requests for the work to begin or indicating irritation with the work progress.

Of the 500 messages sent, 209 were regarded as useful, indicating that only 49.8% of the messages added some value to the development of Strategic Plans.

All of the groups submitted their final projects concerning the release of a product or service, even those with a low number of useful messages. In some cases, we observed that the low level of interaction caused the final project to be prepared by only part of the group members.

Grades from 1 to 5 were assigned to each project, using the following criteria: originality (30%), plan format (20%), and general aspect (50%). The highest grade was 4 and the lowest was 1.7. The average grade was 3.02.

The originality of the final projects was considered low. The average product/service originality grade was the lowest among the evaluated criteria. Few groups chose to develop innovative products, such as Internet-related ones, for example.

b. Collaboration Level Analysis

One crucial aspect of proper teamwork development is collaboration among group members. Such collaboration was below our expectations in the practical workgroups exercise.

More than a third of the groups submitted their final projects attached to messages with complaints concerning the lack of participation from other members. Two groups submitted more than one final project, developing a single product/service with different ideas. We offer, as example, a message from a student to the project leaders: *"Given the group's internal dissent, group members A and B submitted a project that has nothing to do with group 02's final paper, debated over the past two weeks, that is, the group's final report, prepared by the group members C and D, will differ from the version that has already been submitted by the other two members (A and B).*

The low level of collaboration is also reflected by discussions between members, as can be seen from the following examples:

"Dear colleagues Student A and Student B, your position is completely unacceptable. To state, on the deadline for submission, that you disagree with the "incoherent group members Student C and Student D", as you did, is completely unacceptable. No offense meant, but you should grow up and only then discuss professionalism with others (...) [sic]".

"Therefore, given that NO INTERACTION took place among group members (despite my insistence), the main goal of the project (learning how to work in a virtual environment) was not achieved, and given that we have little time to come up with something overnight, I will prepare the project BY MYSELF... [sic]".

c. Lessons to Be Drawn from the Exercise

The low number of useful messages reveals the trouble students have dealing with flexible contexts and unstructured tasks. A large part of the messages regarded as not useful pleaded with group members for the work to begin, but with no initiative to do so. The following message illustrates the point:

"Not to be a nag, myself and Student A are waiting for you to get in touch, as the initial part of the project is due this Friday (Sep. 4th). Please answer by tomorrow (Sep. 3rd). Thank you. [sic]"

Still in regard to lack of initiative, many members limited their action to observing the development of the project, sending messages that merely stated agreement with what was being prepared by more active group members. This is exemplified by he next message: *"I find Student A's idea excellent and believe that this product would be of great use to computer users. Knowing little of the Internet, I don't have many ideas to offer (...) [sic]".*

These comments by the students depict the trouble they had working in an environment without rules. This show that many students are unprepared to work under flexible formal structures, in which each must have initiative and discipline.

Technological Alternatives

One possibility to improve control and interaction in the game to overcome possible technical difficulties is to use new tools available to manage the exercise, that is, to implement more versatile group software, and to provide an e-mail address for each participant in the project.

Use of software that manages group interactions would allow increased control over the groups and the flow of their work, leading to virtual projects even closer to reality and to increased productivity.

This tool would also do away with the lack of connection among the members of a virtual workgroup, as it would enable all to exert control over the task, with access and power to change the file that contains the project.

Trends and Conclusions

The exercise served to show that much is left to be done for e-mail to truly realize its potential as a working tool to leverage virtual workgroups.

Particularly, it became clear that we must strengthen schools' capacity to develop activities that assist in creating environments to prepare students for virtual workgroups. At the root of the problems described previously lie the lack of technical expertise, training, and vision concerning the potentialities of e-mail.

Still, the experiment served to establish some important parameters to structure exercises of this type. Given that most participants had a positive assessment of the exercise, as long as the problems experienced were solved, we deduce that new attempts are desirable. About 75% of students that voluntarily answered the project evaluation questionnaire declared that they would like to take part in it again.

Intense participation of all members was also considered a major constraint as regards better performance in the context of virtual work. The most important aspect for collaboration to take place among the members of a virtual workgroup is participation (Knoll, 1995).

Work in virtual groups is affected by the absence of trust, as noted by Furuyama (1997). It cannot be assumed that people will cooperate and share information with strangers they have never met; for discoveries to be shared, there must be trust, a characteristic that is rare in virtual workgroups.

For the level of collaboration to increase, certain recommendations can be made: for the group members to create rules to guide teamwork; the democratic selection of a leader for each team; and the commitment of all members to access and read their e-mail daily.

Still, it is worth noting that although e-mail integration fails to establish trust-based relationships, on the other hand, it overcomes the barrier of geography and allows people to work asynchronously.

Therefore, e-mail is not to be regarded in any extreme way as a substitute for fax, telephones and other means of communication; each instrument adapts to a context, and e-mail is an effective tool to unite disperse workgroups.

Therefore, the Virtual Workgroups Exercise is an excellent exercise for implementation at schools and firms. Also, the exercise demonstrated the positive and negative aspects of this new means of communication: e-mail.

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DEVELOPING INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS COMMUNICATION SKILLS LONG-DISTANCE

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Abstract

With the increasing need for students to have international business communication skills, this paper describes an experientially based project used at three colleges in the US, Peru, and France. The project was based on internet activities linking classes in two countries that successfully developed students' understanding of the international communication process. Student learning came when they reflected on the process. A successful multinational on-line activity requires close instructor coordination, flexibility, and in-class instructor support of student activities.

Introduction

International communication is important to international business success (Sheikh & Kenny, 2001; Charles & Marschan-Piekkari, 2002; St. Amant, 2001, Liu & Vince, 1999), and companies are looking for students with cross-cultural communication skills rather than foreign language (Wright and Borst, 2001). In reviewing international business job placement advertisements, Wright and Borst discovered that for the majority of businesses "communication and computer skills seem to be most important, along with critical thinking and cultural sensitivity (p. 56)."

In addition, Beamer (1992) identified five levels of activity in developing cultural competence. Any experiential activity for international business communication should integrate these levels, which include: *being aware of diversity, identifying stereotypes, challenging stereotypes, analyzing communication interactions, and developing a negotiated understanding of the cultural interaction.*

Educational researchers and theory demonstrate that experiential learning activities help students to connect to their fields of study, thus making learning more relevant (Land & Hannafin, 2000; Barab & Duffy, 2000). One way to create these communities of practice internationally is to use technology (Visser & Berg, 1999).

The paper will look at an international project between classes in the US and France, and later replicated with classes in the US and Peru. This project was first established between Siena College, a small liberal arts college near Albany, NY, and CEFAM, a college of American management in Lyon, France. The two schools had a long-term exchange program (albeit small) between students, with occasional visiting Siena Faculty at CEFAM.

The project used all of the elements listed above to develop cross-cultural competence for students otherwise unable to interact internationally, and to further define culture specific competence for those students with international backgrounds.

Background

Siena College developed the project to give its students international experience and produce more realistic views of global business. The instructor identified this need through student surveys, which indicated 75% of the students had no international experience (including foreign language study), and through projects, which often had unrealistic time frames, analyses based on stereotypes, and distorted perceptions of foreign markets. CEFAM wanted to give its students practice working with Americans. Unlike Siena, CEFAM has a multi-national student population from Europe, Africa, Asia, and North America. However, students have few opportunities to practice management concepts with Americans. So while they learn theories of international business, many of the students have unrealistic expectations as to the implementation of such concepts.

With these goals in mind, two professors from Siena and CEFAM developed an international negotiation project that would be conducted entirely by e-mail. Each professor integrated the project into her own class as a basis for content instruction. The project was implemented the Spring Semester, 2001 and the project is currently in its fifth semester. (None of the professors have ever met. All the planning was done via e-mails, and in the case of Peru, with phone calls.)

This project was replicated in the Fall Semester, 2002 with classes in Peru and at Siena. The goals in Peru were to give students a realistic simulation of the international business process, with a focus on trade logistics. The situation was different in a number of ways than the project with CEFAM and Siena.

First, students in Peru had limited language ability compared to CEFAM. Since CEFAM is a college of American management, classes are taught in English. As a result, all students have a good command of business English. The program in Peru is taught in Spanish. Even students with a good command of English do not necessarily have the business vocabulary needed in a negotiation project. There was also less students able to participate because of their language ability. On the other hand, those students at Siena with foreign language ability for the most part knew Spanish. As a result, there was more focus on language skills with the Peru project.

Second, the CEFAM professor was an American born and educated expatriate. The professor in Peru was Peruvian educated at an AACSB certified University in Peru. As a result, there was more explanation required with the Peruvian professor than the CEFAM professor.

Third, the school year for Peru does not correlate with those in the northern hemisphere. Their school year begins in March, with the first semester ending in July, the second semester beginning in August and ending in November. While the semester dates do not correlate directly between the US and France, the beginning and ending of the school year is in the same season. This means that there are different time references in integrating the project between Peru and Siena each semester (9 weeks of overlap at the beginning of the Fall Semester and 5 weeks overlap at the end of the Spring Semester).

Finally, there was a greater range of technology available when developing the project with Peru than the initial CEFAM project. Siena had installed courseware for asynchronous discussions and postings. Spring semester 2003, Peru had access to satellite technology for teleconferencing. This expands the negotiating venues for students, providing greater opportunities for long-distance interaction.

Project Description

Each class is divided into groups. The number of groups depends on the size of the class and the number of English speakers. In the case of CEFAM, there are usually two American groups to each French group. The instructors decide on 6 industries at the start of the project. These are usually New York based industries that have a lot of background information available. Each group becomes a company. Students may receive a company description (including products, company history, international experience, and basic business statistics such as number of employees and annual sales) from which they develop a company profile.

Students then are given a project to negotiate. In the past, these projects have included: a distribution agreement, a business plan, a joint-venture agreement, an RFP for advertising, a sales order, and a research proposal. Professors agree on the type of project depending on the courses they are teaching. The project will reflect the course content. However, the goal of the activity is to develop international communication skills, so the final product is not as important as the process used to develop it.

The groups are given a specific timeframe for negotiation (usually 5-8 weeks). They may negotiate by e-mail, in which case professors are copied on all correspondence. We have also used Prometheus, a courseware that facilitates asynchronous discussions on-line, and allows the instructors to monitor participation while not actually editing the communication process. Students are expected to select communication strategies (including the language of negotiation and time frames), deal with communication breakdowns, and develop options to maintain channels of distribution. The instructors intervene only if there is background information groups need to know (i.e. flooding in Lyon which prevented the French students access to the internet for a short period). However, instructors may discuss the process as part of their class, discussing contexts, potential reasons for the problems, and general communication options.

At the end of the project, students give a presentation on what they have learned from the process. The focus of the presentation will vary from instructor to instructor. If a negotiation has been unsuccessful, however, students are not penalized as long as they learn from the process. This final presentation is important for students to reflect on what they have learned. It also gives them an incentive to complete the project.

Outcomes

Despite the differences in projects from semester to semester and country to country, there were similar outcomes for each group. The most visible outcome was an awareness of the difficulty of international communication. For the most part, all students suffered some degree of frustration when negotiating. Often these were caused by differences in time, technology limitations (access, breakdown, and learning how to use new technology), and language or cultural barriers. In some cases, students learned that they were not cut out for international business because the frustration level was too high.

In the case of the Siena students, the understanding of the amount of time necessary to do international business was very important. Students also learned that simple typing mistakes could really disrupt communication. They also began to be aware of the assumptions they make when communicating with non-Americans. Their presentations included recommendations for future international activities to avoid communication problems. These included:

- Do not rely on the internet exclusively. Telephone and direct person-to-person communication may have been more effective.

- Make sure there are definite due dates. This date should have time built into it since many other cultures do not have the same sense of time as the US.

- Do not assume that non-native English speakers will understand all that is written. It may be better to have someone who also speaks the target language.

Guidelines for Setting Up International Negotiation Activities

Based on our experience, we have come up with the following guidelines in developing a project to improve international communication skills:

- Because of the level of cooperation between instructors, there needs to be a lot of planning between the professors who will actually be using the project in class. The size of the class does not matter as much as the number of groups that can be coordinated.

- There needs to be agreement on the structure of the activity between both instructors. The structure should be adaptable enough to work with any content and unforeseen factors (i.e. natural disasters, technology failure, change in courses).

- Each group must have a company profile before negotiations begin. The instructors need to agree on industries that will be represented and which groups will negotiate together. Although this part may be time consuming in the beginning, students will have an unrealistic experience if they are not grounded in an actual business setting.

- Professors need to continually update the progress of their classes. They also need to have a mechanism where they can monitor the groups' progress. This may take the form of copying e-mails, progress reports, on-line discussion areas, or regular briefing meetings.

- Students need to clarify misunderstandings and be encouraged to communicate with the other country in a timely manner. The professor should not resolve individual groups' misunderstandings, but rather discuss communication strategies on a general basis.

- The professors need to agree on the form of the final product. However, students should not be graded on the final product only, but on their participation in the process. For this activity to be successful, there needs to be an incentive, such as a grade, so students will participate.

- Some activity, such as a presentation on the results of the project, needs to be used to help students reflect on what they have learned.

Conclusion

As a result of this project, students have a much more realistic impression of the international business process. Student presentations demonstrated that many, if not all, went through Beamer's (1992) five stages of developing cross-cultural competence. This is one way to introduce students who normally would not have the opportunity to the international marketplace. The activity does not require a lot of technical knowledge, nor monetary investment. The outcomes, however, are invaluable and worth the time.

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LISTENING AND CONFLICT LEADERSHIP

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Abstract

Active listening can help reduce conflict and enhance leadership. The S-I-E-R Model focuses on resolving conflict through understanding and making ourselves understood. Specific principles and an action plan provide tools for effective leadership.

Listening and Conflict Leadership

In his best-selling book, *Good to Great*, Jim Collins and his researcher identified 11 companies that had become "great." Based on extensive research and using rigorous standards, they then identified what those 11 great companies do differently from others. One key difference is how the leadership teams in those companies foster creative conflict. Some of the expressions and phrases that Collins captured in his interviews on how these companies use conflict included, "had a penchant for intense dialogue," "loud debate," "heated discussions," and "healthy conflict." These organizations don't avoid conflict, employ win-lose strategies or seek compromises. Instead, they harness the power of vital conversations around conflicting ideas to continuously shape themselves to be the best they can be. (Collins, 2001)

Conflict is a natural part of our professional and personal lives. For years, the term "management" has been connected to conflict in describing a systematic approach to resolution. But why not align the term "leadership" with conflict? After all, the eminent Peter Drucker defined leadership in one word – influence. Is not the goal in conflict resolution to influence a beneficial outcome?

Listening is a complex and comprehensive behavior. Ralph Nichols, who established the study and development of the "field of listening" in the 1940's at the University of Minnesota, relates listening to conflict. In an address given at the first convention of the International Listening Association, Nichols made the following points (Nichols, 1980):

> *"How can we help ourselves and others to become more fully human? The answer would seem to depend directly upon what we now know; upon what we have already learned. Almost everyone in this room, perhaps all of us, has been much concerned with interpersonal problems from a perspective that is essentially <u>internal</u> to the culture in which we live and operate. I have tried to glean from all the sources that I could reach a list of things, which it seems to me, we already know, have already learned. My thought has been that perhaps we have at hand some useful tools or guiding principles we can put to work in the years ahead. Permit me to read my list of items of things I think we already know:*
>
> 1. *The most basic of all human needs is to understand and to be understood.*
> 2. *It is almost impossible to hate a person whom we fully understand.*
> 3. *The best way to understand people is to listen to them.*
> 4. *We are at the mercy of those who understand us better than we understand them.*
> 5. *When people make a decision, it is for their reasons, not ours.*
> 6. *The wise listener is attentive, and non-evaluative; he asks only un-slanted questions, and praises those statements by an adversary which he can honestly praise.*
> 7. *We must face with courage the fact that when we succeed in "hearing a person out," our own position may become quite modified.*
> 8. *Loyalty is not the highest of all virtues, normally being surpassed by honesty, compassion, and justice.*
> 9. *Common human needs do provide our best basis for the resolution of conflict.*
> 10. *When truth and falsehood are presented with equal skill, truth is always more persuasive."*

S-I-E-R Communication Stages Model

Listening pioneer Lyman K. Steil developed the S-I-E-R Communication Stages model of listening, a systematic approach for helping individuals to enhance their listening awareness and applications (Steil, Barker, & Watson, 1983). In the S-I-E-R model, listening involves four connected activities—*sensing, interpreting, evaluating and responding.*
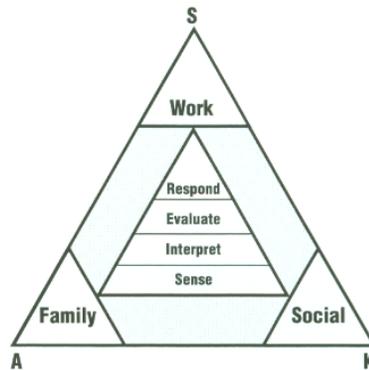
Good listening begins at the level of sensing the sender's message. Sensing (hearing) is basic to the other three activities involved in listening—if the listener does not sense the message, he or she can do nothing further with it. After sensing the message, the listener interprets it. Here we encounter semantic problems—the sensitive listener asks, "I heard the words used by the speaker, but am I assigning a comparable meaning to them?" Effective listeners remember that "words have no meaning, people have meaning." The assignment of meaning to a term is an internal process, but since our attitudes, knowledge, and experiences differ, we may misinterpret each other's messages while under the illusion that a common understanding has been achieved.

After a listener senses and interprets a message, then he or she evaluate it. This means sorting fact from opinion, weighing the evidence, then deciding whether or not to agree with the speaker. Poor listeners begin this activity too soon, often hearing something they disagree with and tuning out the speaker from that point on. When this occurs, sensing and interpretation stop — so does listening. The best delay judgment until the message is fully presented.

Finally, to be complete, the listening process must result in response. Responses can be of many kinds, ranging from non-verbal cues to the speaker showing that we've received the message (smiling, frowning), to giving the speaker feedback, asking questions, and requesting clarification. Ultimately the listener asks, "What's expected of me now? What action, if any, should result?"

Every effective listener realizes the critical importance of responding. The response stage of listening is especially crucial for judging the success of the listening act as a whole. This is true because the first three stages — sensing, interpreting, and evaluating — are internal acts. They take place inside of us — no one can directly observe them. Until the listener makes a concrete response, it's often difficult to determine whether the speaker has been successful in getting the point across. The response stage is the first to include behaviors we can see and measure. If there is a breakdown at any stage (S,I,E, or R), it will not be apparent until the *response* stage.

In summary, using the S-I-E-R model in professional and personal situations can be an effective leadership tool in helping to reduce external and internal conflict and enabling us to become more fully human.

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BUSINESS COMMUNICATION AND CLASSROOM PERFORMANCE
BASED ON SOCIAL PERCEPTIONS AND BELIEFS

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Abstract

This study combines work from Business Communication and Educational Psychology, demonstrating the effects of psychological attitudes toward learning in social context. It presents the practical educational dilemmas in business communication and the theory and research knowledge-base of human learning, memory, and instruction. By combining these fields, sound theory and research analyses can resolve educational dilemmas, specifically in business communication.

Introduction

This exploratory study examines the interplay among four major sets of variables: Cultural Views on Social Interactions, Attitudes Toward Thinking and Learning, Beliefs About Knowledge and Learning (Epistemological Beliefs), and Classroom Relational Beliefs.

Three major questions are addressed in this study: Which variables predict students' reaction between student-to- student and teacher-to-student interactions? Which variables predict students' academic performance? And, which is a plausible causal-chain among the predictor variables that ultimately affects students' academic success?

Cultural Views on Social Interactions

This aspect of the study focuses on two segments of social relationships in learning situations: (1) The degree of psychological closeness among people and (2) The degree of perceived status difference. The degree of closeness dimension explores the extent to which individuals feel they should be independent or interdependent. The status differentiation dimension explores the degree to which people emphasize hierarchical status or equal status. Cross-cultural research in social psychology (e.g., Hofstede, 1986; Markus & Kitayama, 1994; Singelis, 1994; Triandis, 1994; Youn, Yang, & Choi, 2001) provides the most well developed conceptions of degree of closeness and status differentiation among people within a culture.

In cross-cultural research, degree of closeness is commonly referred to as the difference between individualistic versus collectivist societies. Cultures with individualistic patterns stress the needs and goals of the self as most important; whereas, cultures with collectivist patterns emphasize the needs and goals of a core group. The individualistic pattern encourages autonomy and emotional detachment. The collectivist pattern encourages group identity and emotional attachment (Triandis, 1988; 1994). Collectivists prefer to suppress negative communications and tell others what they want to hear rather than the truth, which might engender harmful feelings.

By contrast, individualists have no difficulties "telling it like it is." Because collectivists know much about the other person, the quantity of communication is diminished; they defer to the "silence is golden" approach.

Classroom Relational Views

Even though one can classify entire cultures with specific views on relationships, these are views of the dominant group within the culture. Individuals within any culture will vary from the cultural norm. Thus, knowing an individual's views on relationships becomes important when dealing with individuals from the same culture.

In response to the need to evaluate social relationships between people within the classroom culture, Schommer-Aikins and Duell (2000) developed the Classroom Relational Belief questionnaire. This instrument assesses students' beliefs of appropriate social interaction in the classroom between peers, and by implication between students and teachers. Five Classroom Relational Beliefs are assessed: (a) Classrooms should have group work, (b) Groups should have distinct leaders, (c) People should show concern for others, (d) Be competitive, and (e) Discuss conflicts openly. These Classroom Relational Beliefs predicted students' reactions to classroom scenes, such as cooperative learning, debating, teacher's unpredictable questioning, and sharing personal information.

Attitudes Toward Thinking and Learning (Ways of Knowing)

There is evidence that the degree of closeness between people in the same culture affects learning. Less sophisticated learners assume a strong hierarchical relationship to experts. That is, they assume that knowledge is handed down to them by omniscient authority. More sophisticated learners are able to relate to experts on a more level plane of status. They assume knowledge comes from empirical evidence and reason, activities that they, themselves are capable of pursuing (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986; Kitchener & King, 1990). Furthermore, students' comfort level for asking questions or accepting criticism is related to their perceived degree of closeness with their instructor. Some students feel that an instructor who keeps his or her distance is insensitive to their needs and cannot understand their perspectives. Other students chose to keep their distance from instructors, thus being guarded behind a veil of anonymity (Baxter Magolda, 1992).

Recently an instrument has been developed to assesses students' ways of knowing as either Connected Knowing or Separate Knowing (Galotti, Clinchy, Ainsworth, Lavin, & Mansfield, 1999). Separate Knowing assumes that to know something involves analytical, detached understanding. The process of knowing entails playing the devil's advocate and 'shooting holes' in another position, in other words, trying to evaluate before one completely understands the someone else's point of view. Connected Knowing embracing someone else's point of view. In other words trying to understand before an evaluation occurs. Scores on these two scales predict descriptive adjectives for the ideal teacher, such as helpful, open, patient, demanding, tolerant, enthusiastic, and analytical.

Beliefs About Knowledge and Learning

In the mid 1950's, Perry (1968) surveyed college students and concluded that undergraduates enter college believing that knowledge is simple, certain, and handed down by authority. However, by the time they reach their senior year, many students believe that knowledge is complex, tentative, and derived through reason and empirical evidence.

Many of Perry's followers studied personal epistemology by focusing on single dimensions. For example, King and Kitchener (1994; 1990) studied how students justify knowledge. Their Reflective Judgment Model describes a seven-stage developmental path. Early in development, students believe that reality is concrete and knowledge is absolute. Midway through development, students believe that reality is variable and one opinion is as good as another. In the final stages, students acknowledge tentativeness in knowledge, yet they also realize that not all knowledge is equally credible.

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LEARNING, TEACHING AND CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT STYLES: THE COMPLEXITIES OF DIVERSENESS

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Abstract

Studies indicate that both students and instructors have diverse learning and teaching styles that affect student classroom performance and management. Therefore, pedagogy must be structured in a manner that effectively combines these styles to achieve optimal performance.

Introduction

Studies abound on the effect of student learning styles and their impact on classroom performance (Ross & Schulz, 1999; Solomon, 1992; McCarthy, 1981; Dunn, Dunn & Price, 1981; Dunn & Dunn, 1978). Research further indicates that instructors' classroom management and teaching style equally affect student performance; therefore, it is imperative that pedagogy be structured in a manner that effectively combines these diverse learning and teaching styles to achieve optimal performance (Bradford & Analoui, 1995; Sarasin, 1998; Corno and Snow, 1986; McCarthy, 1981).

Keefe (1982) defines learning styles as the "cognitive, affective, and physiological traits that serve as relatively stable indicators of how learners perceive, interact with, and respond to learning environments" (p. 43). In essence, learning styles are the way people distinguish, arrange, process, and comprehend information. Just as learning styles differ from people to people, pedagogical or communication styles of instructors also differ. In this essay, we discuss both the learning styles and characteristics of learners, and pedagogical and management styles of instructors, and suggest ways in which the gap between these styles can be bridged to produce optimal results in the classroom.

Learners and the Learning Style Philosophy

The learning style theorists explain that students have unique learning or information processing styles, and teachers should develop profiles of learners that identify their strengths and weaknesses. Given that it is impractical to develop such profiles for every learner in every classroom, grouping learners into categories that best describe their personalities and learning styles appears to be a good alternative. Experts have developed a variety of categories to describe learners. Felder and Soloman (2001) group learners into dichotomies of active and reflective learners, sensing and intuitive learners, visual and verbal learners, and sequential and global learners, though they believe that every learner has some elements of all the styles:

- Active learners learn by doing, while reflective learners comprehend by thinking through an issue.

- Sensing learners prefer to learn facts, while intuitive learners delight in "discovering possibilities and relationships." As a result, sensors "like solving problems by well-established methods...while intuitors like innovation."

- Visual learners, according to Felder and Soloman, learn and retain information best when visuals are part of the instruction, while verbal learners understand better when the information incorporates written and oral explanations.

- Sequential learners comprehend materials presented in a sequential or logical order, while global learners learn in a circuitous manner.

Kolb's (1999) typology, somewhat similar to Felder and Soloman's, categorizes learners as accommodators, divergers, assimilators, and convergers:

- The accommodator derives strength in doing things. This person is action-oriented, a risk taker and solves problems in an intuitive manner. He or she is able to deal with mistakes that arise as a result of trying different approaches to problem solving.

- The diverger is the harmonizer. This individual has multiple perspectives on a given issue, is a good brainstormer, and has broad cultural interests. This individual can also be emotionally attached to issues.

- The assimilator's strength is his or her ability to create theoretical models using inductive reasoning. The assimilator is focused more on ideas than on people, and prefers abstract concepts to practical approaches to problem solving.

- Finally, the converger is good at deductive reasoning, problem solving, decision-making, and solving technical problems as opposed to finding answers to social issues (Kolb, 1999).

Regardless of the category that learners find themselves, studies indicate that some students perform better when *visuals* are incorporated into the learning process, and poorly when their instruction is all *auditory* (Sarasin, 1998). On the contrary, students who are auditory depend on spoken words for information that determines their behavior. Yet others are *kinesthetic*, they feel their way through their experiences.

As we consider the learning styles, the characteristics of learners by generation reveal some useful information for pedagogy. Seniors, those born before 1945, are deemed orderly and steady. Thus, the learning environment should consist of formal presentations. Baby boomers, those born between 1945-1960, seek personal development and knowledge. Generation X (GenX), those born between 1961 and 1980, prefer to learn by doing and want to have fun in the process. Generation Y (GenY) or those born between 1980 and 1988, are more technologically savvy and prefer learning that is interactive.

Understanding these characteristics should enable instructors to overcome the challenge of designing course materials that incorporate the diverse learning styles of students. However, before that can be achieved, it is important to consider the classroom management and teaching style of instructors.

Instructors' Management and Teaching Style

Effective teaching cannot occur in a poorly managed classroom. A 1998 study by Young, Helton and Whitley indicates that students considered their instructors effective if they perceived the instructor as knowledgeable, enthusiastic, friendly, organized, and engaging students in class discussions. Richmond and Gorham (1992) state that a well managed classroom also "can produce students who have exceptionally high levels of cognitive, affective, and psychomotor learning...can learn on their own and will continue to use the materials they learn...and have high affect for the teacher, which leads to high teacher affect for students" (p. 169). Classroom management is both increasing appropriate student behavior and decreasing inappropriate behavior (Richmond and Gorham, 1992). We increase desired behavior by matching our teaching style to the learning styles of students.

We use the concept of the Medicine Wheel to understand instructor's pedagogical style. The Medicine Wheel, derived from Native American culture, is a widely used metaphor to understand individual differences and group strengths (Collaborative for Excellence in Teacher Preparation [CETP], 2003). Based on the traditions of the Lakota Indians, the Medicine Wheel or Wheel of Life uses "elements of the natural world," such as the "major compass directions that differentiates individual learning styles. Each compass or teaching/learning style is associated with an animal, color and a season that describes four different styles of relating with each other:

- *North-Buffalo-White-Winter:* These are people who like to take control of a task and quickly work through it towards a goal. They are full of courage and endurance, they take risks and are good motivators of others. Buffalo may become autocratic and unaware of others' feelings, pushing them beyond their limits.

- *East-Eagle-Yellow-Spring:* These are people of creativity and innovation, visionaries with new ideas. They are expansive thinkers, easily able to see the big picture. Eagles may lose track of the practical steps towards a vision, ignoring the details of the follow through.

- *South-Deer-Green Summer:* These are people known to be collaborative and supportive. They are trusting, careful of other's feelings, and concerned with creative positive work environments. Deer may become mired in interpersonal relationships, losing track of the task at hand while they busy themselves "saving" others.

- *West-Bear-brown-Autumn:* These are people who are analytical, methodical, and introspective. They are careful and pragmatic, basing their decisions on data and logic. Bears may fall prey to "analysis paralysis" and be unable to make decisions. They may be stubborn and unwilling to accept new ideas (CETP, 2003)

While the Medicine Wheel concept provides the compass to enable one to understand personal teaching styles, it is widely agreed that the dynamic nature of individuals ensures that people can move around the wheel, using elements of each as the occasion merits.

Communicating the teaching style is equally important. Richmond and Gorham (1992) describe the teaching communication style (TCS) as "ability to verbally and nonverbally communicate effectively and affectively with the learner so that the learner's opportunity for optimal academic achievement is enhanced" (p. 202). They identify the communication styles as friendly, precise, attentive, lively, animated, , relaxed, and dramatic (p.202). However, teachers must develop these communication styles; and assess and match their personality types with the learning styles of their students if they are to enable their students to achieve optimal comprehension.

Matching Teacher Style and Learner Style

Many colleges and universities have designed instructional development programs that support a diversity of pedagogy and classroom management styles. Some programs suggest that instructors explain how classroom instruction and assignments relate to course objectives, choose a variety of course presentation and assessment approaches, and clarify course expectations. Ediger (2001) proposes a combination of lectures, discussion methods, problem solving, use of critical thinking, and creative thinking.

Instructors can learn from these diverse learning styles of students and adapt their pedagogy to match them. For instance, Felder and Soloman (2001) suggest that active learners can help themselves by engaging in group study where each group member explains or discusses the topic to others. Instructors can translate that to mean that group discussion and "problem-solving activities" should be part of their teaching styles to accommodate the active learner. Reflective learners who often enjoy working alone, can be helped by posing questions or situations in which they would have to reflect on the answers or solution before presenting it to the class.

Sensing learners who focus on facts and details, and prefer a linear approach to learning, can be helped by enabling them to see the nexus between theories taught in class and the real world. Experiential learning exercises or case studies would be helpful to such students. Intuitive learners on the other hand, comprehend new ideas better and are more innovative than sensors. Instructors can help intuitive learners by explaining theories or abstract information in ways that the details or facts are connected. Visual learners retain best what they see and verbal learners learn best by getting a thorough oral and written presentation of the material. Instructors can help these students by incorporating visual and written elements in instruction. Sequential learners comprehend better when material is presented in a logical manner, whereas global learners do best when they learn "randomly without seeing connection, and then suddenly 'getting it.' " Instructors can help students with these learning styles by organizing and presenting materials in ways that accommodate their learning styles.

Ross & Schulz (1999) suggest multimedia approaches to engage students with the diverse learning styles described above. They propose creating a *System Web*, via the World Wide Web, online animation and video clips, online lectures with sound, and kinesthetic web. They also suggested the *Social Web*, whereby "collaborative learners seek out peer interaction." This non-intrusive approach in the form of electronic bulletin boards, chat rooms, discussion boards, and list serves, allows shy students to participate as much as their assertive classmates. It also provides multiplicity of uses for students with diverse learning styles. Additionally, the authors note that the approach positions the instructor as a "facilitator' as opposed to just a "content disseminator."

The Challenges and Opportunities for Diverseness in Learning and Teaching Styles

We find Ross and Schulz (1999) use of the Gregorc Style Delineator, a measurement of learning style based on "mediation ability theory" appropriate for engaging diverse learners, especially younger learners. Regardless of the instructor's teaching and classroom management style, instructors can adapt the authors' approach for use in any course. The Gregorc Style Delineator presented by Ross and Schulz (1999) centers on learners' perception and ordering of information. Perception refers to how learners are able to understand information, and ordering is how they organize and dispose of information. The authors systematically detail how the Internet can be used to accommodate the diverse learning styles described by Felder and Soloman (2001). The challenge and opportunity is that both teachers and students can and should adapt to diverse learning and teaching styles that would benefit both (Thompson, 1997).

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BUILDING LITERACY FOR KNOWLEDGE ECONOMIES: READING AND WRITING ABOUT TRENDS AND ISSUES IN BUSINESS WEEK

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Abstract

Knowledge economies require highly skilled workers to perform complex, information-based tasks with minimum supervision. Yet, studies in Canada and the United States show that even college-educated workers often lack the information literacy skills necessary to perform their jobs. In this session, we will discuss how reading and writing about business trends and issues can help to improve business students' analytical and critical thinking abilities.

Description

The dawn of the Knowledge Economy has changed human resource needs in the workplace. In his article, *The Age of Social Transformation,* Peter Drucker (1994) notes that knowledge workers who are highly educated and adaptable drive business competitiveness and productivity. As work becomes more technology and information intensive, workers must perform complex tasks with less supervision and fewer directions. As more companies empower their workers to make business decisions, they also expect such workers to be able to interpret and evaluate the information available from various sources and communicate decisions with co-workers, customers, and supervisors. A survey conducted by American Express (2000, p. 12) found that 86% of small businesses felt verbal communication skills were very important; 77% said that interpersonal skills were very important; 62% math skills; 59% written communication; 52% basic business skills; 41% computer skills, and 18% Internet knowledge. In essence, literacy skills are important to an organization's competitiveness and an individual's performance.

But the increasing workplace illiteracy concerns many in government and the business sector. The National Institute for Literacy, an agency created by the United States Congress back in 1993, reported that over one-third of applicants for jobs in a cross-section of American companies lacked the skills necessary to perform the jobs they sought (Stein, 2000). Canada's National Literacy Secretariat reports a similar state of affairs (2001). All three agencies conclude that poor literacy skills cost employers and industry billions of dollars a year in poor quality control, lost orders, and poor communication. At the core of the literacy problem lies the inability of many current and prospective employees to keep up with the rapid pace of information and technological changes in the knowledge economy.

As business communication instructors, we have an opportunity to help students navigate information resources and develop the "requisite critical-analytic faculties" (McGuinness, 2000) so that they will be more effective workers and managers. This includes teaching them to scan (read) the information environment to better understand issues and trends, and to interpret the multitude of data and statistics available. They should also understand that the plethora of "social statistics" that are generated to describe business and environmental conditions are the "products of our social arrangements," and that those who publish such data may have agendas not readily evident (Crossen, 1994). These literacy skills h skills will become invaluable in their careers.

Using Business Week

In the one required Business Communication course in the curriculum we introduce students to the business information environment and the importance of developing literacy skills using a single issue of *Business Week*. Every student is required to buy the same issue of the magazine, usually in the first week or two in the semester. That issue is used as a "text" along with other support material related to specific skills such as making presentations or managing meetings. Students have positively commented on the use of such a popular periodical in the course. Several assignments related to articles in the magazine are spread throughout the term.

These assignments usually begin at a relatively simple cognitive level, such as summarizing the issues presented, then move on to more complex levels, such as analyzing the cause and effect of a particular issue and/or trend. Later assignments may include their evaluation of claims and evidence presented in the articles, and their response to arguments in those articles. In addition, they research a trend or issue depicted in the articles using electronic and other library resources as well as individuals who are experts relevant to the issues (from industry, government, etc.) They present their findings in an informative three-minute speech. We have found that using this sequence of assignments helps students to develop the needed critical/analytical faculties that so many stakeholders have suggested.

The appendix included here is an example of writing assignments based on a relatively short article that appeared in the magazine. The topics, therefore, need not be selected from the longer or featured articles, but can be from more concise or thought-provoking material. Note how the first sequence of questions in assignment A asks for students to simply identify information, chose a key sentence and, then, make inferences or projections from the data provided in the article. Assignment B asks students to compose a letter and a memo based on the rhetorical context of the "case" we created based on facts from the article. Such varying of writing assignments and formats provides the instructor with flexibility and allowance for creativity.

Finally, the magazine may be used for a number of in-class assignments. For example, in one early exercise, students are asked to review selected articles and find words or phrases which they do not understand or for which they may need clarification. After silently recording their list, in round-robin fashion, their words and phrases are put on the board or overhead. Students discuss and articulate definitions and share meanings, and especially appreciate the viewpoints of different academic majors in the class. Students soon recognize the complexity of many business concepts and the fact that this popular business publication assumes that readers should understand them.

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COMMERCIAL BUILDING: No Office Party This Year

Two years ago, Webcor Builders, Inc. was one of the busiest general contractors in Northern California, with projects in the works for many of Silicon Valley's biggest names. One by one, however, the developments were scaled back or canceled as demand for office space plunged. Webcor still has a couple of big projects in San Francisco. But with vacancy rates topping 20% in San Jose, it is making ends meet by moonlighting as a concrete subcontractor for public-works projects. "Commercial building has practically stopped," says Webcor President and CEO Andrew J. Ball.

Another object lesson from the dot-com bust? Not entirely. All across the U.S., office markets are in deep trouble. Vacancy rates have leaped most significantly in high-tech centers, such as Austin, Tex., suburban Boston, Seattle, and Silicon Valley. But they also exceed 20% in Atlanta, Columbus, Ohio, Dallas, and Salt Lake City--and are in double digits in New York, Chicago, and every one of the top 10 markets except Washington, D.C., where the federal government acts as a buffer. It's the worst period since the 1990-91 recession. Rents, meantime, are sliding.

So when will commercial building rebound? Not until office-sector payrolls rise steadily by at least 1% for 12 months or more and companies begin refilling all the space they've emptied in the past couple of years, says Richard D. Kincaid, chief financial officer of Equity Office Properties trust, the nation's biggest office landlord. He doesn't see that happening before 2004. Until then, he adds, "It doesn't make any sense to build." Note to contractors: This might be a good time to brush up on other skills.

Article from *Business Week*, January 13, 2003

Assignment A

After reading the article, *COMMERCIAL BUILDING: No Office Party This Year*, answer the following questions. Except for question 1, you should write the answers in your own words. That is, do not look for an exact quote to answer the questions.

1. From the article, choose **ONE** sentence that BEST summarizes the issue described in the article. (It must be the exact sentence and not rephrased.)

2. State the occupancy rates, in percentage, for the following cities?
   a) San Jose
   b) Atlanta
   c) Washington DC

3. To what would you attribute the occupancy trends in the following cities?
   a) San Jose
   b) Atlanta
   c) Washington DC

4. What is the relationship between payrolls and office occupancy rates?

5. Explain one way in which contracting firms have been responding to the drop in office occupancies.

6. What is the occupancy projection for 2004 across the U.S.?

Assignment B

Based on your understanding of the issues discussed in the article, *COMMERCIAL BUILDING: No Office Party This Year*, respond to the following scenarios.

Scenario 1

Imagine your company, Flexcorp, is a tenant in an Orlando office complex, operated by Orlando Office Park Management. The complex has experienced a 50% drop in occupancy since 2002, as companies have gone out of business or moved to less expensive buildings. Your company occupies about 15% of their total space. They are responsible for all building and grounds maintenance as well as trash pick-up. Your lease agreement expires at the end of the year and you plan to renew, but at a lower lease rate.

As physical plant director for Flexcorp, you have read the article, *No Office Party This Year*, and see an opportunity for your firm to negotiate a lower lease rate for the next three years.

Using information in the article, *write a memo (three to four paragraphs) to your boss*, the vice president of operations, urging her to negotiate a lower rate with Orlando Office Park Management and explain to her why this is feasible.

Scenario 2

Imagine your company, Flexcorp, is a tenant in an Orlando office complex, operated by Orlando Office Park Management. The complex has experienced a 50% drop in occupancy since 2002, as companies have gone out of business or moved to less expensive buildings. Your company occupies about 15% of their total space. They are responsible for all building and grounds maintenance as well as trash pick-up. Your lease agreement expires at the end of the year and you plan to renew, but at a lower lease rate.

In the last three months your company has experienced problems with trash pick-up. As physical plant director for Flexcorp, you have called the manager of Orlando Office Park Management three (3) times to complain about this, and he said he would resolve the situation. However, trash still piles up near your entrance and looks bad to customers and staff.

Write a letter (three to four paragraphs) to Orlando Office Park Management explaining the trash problem and that they should rectify it immediately.

RESEARCH(ING) DOLLARS: SUSTAINING THE COMMUNITY THROUGH COLLABORATION

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Abstract

This paper examines a community-based partnership between an introductory class in professional writing and a local nonprofit organization. The center of the project involves an examination of an inquiry- and experientially-based service-learning model of teaching centered on grant writing. Key issues highlighted are the tension between workplace preparation and civic literacy and the challenges of nurturing and mediating partnerships.

Background

For some practitioners and educational theorists, service-learning has become almost a mantra, holding out one of the real opportunities to ensure that students are able to apply what they learn and work toward becoming better citizens (Dorman and Dorman, 1997; Henson and Sutliff, 1998; Mansfield, 1993; Rehling, 2000). For others, it is a very attractive way to achieve "praxis through engaging in 'critical teaching'" (Swanson, 1994), a form of social action with an ultimate goal of creating an egalitarian, democratic society (Giroux, 1992). The distinction we make here may seem small, but it is not. The teachers who want to change the world through their teaching see their overall goal as *social and political*; they are working to transform society. The other teachers also see a social function, but their emphasis is on *individuals*. For them, "the term *service-learning* [describes] the combination of the performance of a useful service for society and the disciplined interpretation of that experience for an increase in knowledge and in understanding one's self" (O'Connell, 1972).

These two positions in the discussions about service-learning pedagogy have their roots in the work of Thomas Dewey and Paulo Freire. Thomas Deans (1999) explains that both Dewey and Freire had social agendas and believed in doing and reflecting: Dewey through "active experimentation and reflective thought" (p. 16) and Freire (1970) through *praxis* or "action-reflection" (p. 69). However, despite many similarities, Deans (1999) also points out that there are significant differences. While "Dewey's emphasis [was] on the social ends of education--even as he celebrates individual freedom" (p. 18), his focus was cultural rather than political; his pragmatism was a "philosophy not of grand ambitions but of little steps" (p. 19). On the other hand, Freire (1970), coming from a different culture where democracy didn't exist, felt a need for more sweeping change. His orientation was far more political than cultural, as he sought ways to give learners (in his instance, adult learners) a voice in their society and its policy.

To illustrate this distinction, Deans (1999) presents two examples, both of which accurately present teachers whose practice could be said to follow the tenets of one of these educational theorists. The first example, focusing on a course entitled *Writing in Sport Management*, emphasizes, in the teacher's own words, "exposure to a real client relationship where [the students are] tailoring their writing to an exceedingly clear audience" (p.23). The second, focusing on a two-semester sequence of a first-year composition classroom, emphasizes, in the teacher's own words, an "effort . . . aimed at democracy and social justice . . . to make schools function . . . as radically democratic institutions, with the goal not only of making individual students more successful but also of making better citizens" (qtd. on p. 25).

These examples illustrate each teacher's underlying pedagogy and their respective course goals. In the first, the teacher looks to give the students opportunities to learn about writing by doing it, opportunities that they normally wouldn't have in a traditional classroom. The teacher clearly has a service orientation; she chooses clients in the non-profit sector and asks her students to write "*for* the community" (Deans, 1999, p. 23 emphasis in original). Deans points out such writing falls in line with Dewey's goal of making school "more active, more full of immediate meaning, more connected with out of school experience" (qtd. on p. 23). The second teacher also has a service orientation, but the service comes not so much from doing as from reflecting. In the teacher's own words, "questions about social structures, ideology and social justice [are not] automatically raised by community service" (qtd. on p. 25). Instead, he must raise them himself or get the students to do so by encouraging reflection through discussion and writing. This kind of questioning, with a "reformist" orientation, is in line with Freire's more political model.

We summarize Deans' examples as a way to lead into our presentation, one focused on our collaboration which emphasized both doing *and* working toward change. Our goal in this paper is to outline the practical dimensions of our *partnership for change* to demonstrate the kinds of value that can emerge from such work: value for students, faculty, and the community. Like the teachers who seem to be descendents of Dewey, we are interested in the students' personal development; we provided opportunities for them to write *for* the community to give them experiential practice and gain a general social perspective. In addition, we are concerned about the problems community organizations face, and we want students not only to gain the experience of writing for someone, and by so doing, learn the skills they will need in the workplace; we also want to expose them to the issues that face the communities in which they will live. Our goal is to help them become more effective communicators and "understand how social issues are structured in a specific community, in a specific place, at a specific time" (Snarr, 2002) by writing *with* the community. Thus, we encourage civic engagement with an eye toward change.

Overview of Course Project

With operating budgets at 10-year lows, community organization administrators are struggling to fund their projects and staff their offices. As Loka Institute Executive Director Dr. Richard Sclove explains, "We live in an era of decentralized government, yet communities can't get their hands on the resources they need to fend for themselves" (qtd. in Wattenmaker, 1998). To address this resource problem, the two of us, a faculty member who directs the professional writing program at a large, state university, and the director of a local nonprofit organization (a museum of natural history), engaged in a semester-long partnership built around service-learning pedagogy. The immediate tasks were to engage students in inquiry-based, public, problem-solving projects and help them gain what Boyte (2002) calls "civic muscle," a sense of popular power, which is derived from learning civic skills and confidence and mixing with people (p. 1). Our general goals included--

- Linking academic learning objectives with the service experience.
- Enhancing the personal growth and development of students.
- Promoting a life-long commitment to service and civic involvement.

Specifically, students were asked to assist the museum find and obtain funding by researching and writing grant inquiry letters and short proposals. This funding would further the museum's mission, which includes assisting local K-12 teachers teach their students about the environment, as well as help to prepare those students for the state's standardized testing.

Our reasons for using service-learning pedagogy were consistent with those outlined by most faculty who use it, believing that students learn more by doing than they do in a conventional classroom and they have an opportunity to strengthen their sense of social responsibility and civic values (Dubinsky, 2002; Ehrlich, 1997; Huckin, 1997; Youniss & Yates, 1997).

We followed a problem-solving model for situated learning (Lave and Wenger, 1990). We met several times prior to the beginning of the semester to discuss and establish course and project objectives, develop the parameters for the student projects, and outline schedules/deadlines. These objectives were built around the aforementioned resource/funding problem and had clear learning outcomes. We choose the specific problem and focused on a specific partnership, rather than giving students the opportunity to find their own problems and clients, which some faculty recommend (Redd, 2002). While there are some disadvantages of this method, we believe they are outweighed by the advantages, which include ensuring that the scope of each student's work is the same and their schedules are consistent. More importantly, by maintaining some control over the project's definition and scope, as well as the choice of the partner, the classroom has a unified focus, even though there are separate group tasks.

Having a focus centered on the specific organization, its place/role in the community, and its needs, enabled us to create both an educational forum and a workshop environment. The nonprofit director came to class several times. In his first visit, he introduced the project and outlined the needs of his organization. During subsequent visits, he discussed the specific project proposals with each student group, and, at semester's end, he listened to and helped to evaluate the group presentations. In addition, he worked behind the scenes with the faculty member by sharing in the reading and evaluation of the written projects.

Partnership

One of the key strengths of our work was the emphasis on partnership, an emphasis that makes service-learning work different from client project work (Dubinsky, 2002) and helps to frame the projects in a way to engage the students' "civic muscle." We formed this partnership to share resources, expand the potential for student learning, and challenge the students to engage in civic discourse for the common good. Both of us believe that although students "can learn a great deal from their involvement in the community, . . . the learning is not automatic, and only a fraction of them are formally prepared to enter the community" (Checkoway, 2002). As a result, we worked together to prepare students for their tasks, setting up the partnership so that students would learn about the process of moving from the academy to the workplace. Nearly every project in the course was integrated into this process (e.g., job application, proposal, progress report, audience analyses, final grant proposal/letter, and oral presentation). Beginning with the job application process, in which students applied for a job as a grant writer at the organization, and ending with the final presentation of their collaboratively written grant proposals, students focused on the organization, its needs, and how they could use their talents and skills to assist it in meeting those needs.

This kind of a collaborative partnership is critical if goals include student learning and change. It is not uncommon in some community service models for faculty to conduct research geared to improving the community, but in the process, to treat community participants as subjects and passive recipients of information (Checkoway, 2002). Thus, in these models, even if students are writing "for" the community, they are doing so from a bit of a distance. Stoecker makes the case that such "service learning, with few exceptions, is about providing service rather than social change" (2002). While we would argue that he overstates the case, we would agree that, in a class dedicated to teaching students to be more effective writers, it can be easier and less problematic to focus on service rather than change.

Our goal, however, was more expansive. We wanted to have a participatory model, in which the research was, in effect, controlled by the community organization (Brown and Tandon, 1983). This kind of participatory model is based on examples set by Tandon and Freire, and promoted by researchers such as Gaventa (1993). In such a model, the ultimate goal is both to teach problem-solving and to provide the necessary foundation to facilitate change. In such an environment, students, even if they are not working for grass roots organizations directly, bring their expertise and apply their efforts on behalf of the community because they want to help solve a problem or meet a need and not because they simply want to build their resumes or meet a course requirement.

Partnerships are not without challenges. In our case, because the organization serves the community and falls under the category of what Stoecker calls "service provider(s)," students couldn't just focus on the organization's staff. They had to identify the organization's stakeholders and external partners, interview them to determine their needs, and then coordinate with them as they researched and wrote the grant letters and proposals. Because the major stakeholders in several of the grant projects were K-12 teachers, students had to study and consider options for implementing state and federal learning standards into the K-12 teachers' curricula. This work, in turn, led to the K-12 teachers re-visioning their curricula in order to help the students create arguments for the resources and strategies necessary for them to implement those standards in their classrooms. Everyone in the partnership had to learn how to fulfill basic learning standards while seeking out creative ways to use outside resources, resources provided by the organization in question.

Re-visioning was even more important due to larger social issues, such as the aftermath of the terrorist attacks and the downturn in the economy, which have led to shrinking state and local budgets and the need for more security. One specific example: Typically, to teach key standards of learning, science teachers rely on field trips, but because of the economic downturn and the problems with security, these trips became harder to fund. Therefore, teachers have been forced to come up with ways to replicate the learning that occurs on field trips. Because our audience included science teachers who were used to going on field trips and using the paper version of the museum's field guide, one alternative was to re-create learning environments online by offering the field guide online. Thus, one of the grant projects the students engaged in was working with both the museum and the teachers to plan and seek funding for such innovative initiatives, work that would normally have fallen to teachers during their premium time at home. Saving the teachers time, solving problems, and researching innovative methods and sources of funding were ways our partnership helped to effect change.

Building partnerships, then, between university faculty, community organizations, and school teachers and administrators can be beneficial to all involved. By sharing expertise and resources, the burden on any one individual or group is lightened, and the focus on teaching and learning is enhanced. Partnerships create excellent opportunities for students, immersing them in inquiry-based learning, where they follow a curriculum based on discovery and solve problems by applying tools and strategies they learn in class. Partnerships set up a perfect environment for a true "service-learning" experience where students gain academic credit while also getting experience. In addition, while students are learning, they are also testing out community-based projects.

Critique and Response

Community-based partnerships relying on service-learning clearly have advocates. Recently, however, teacher-scholars advocating transformation have been criticized for "violating the principle of liberal neutrality associated with educational institutions" (Lisman, 1998). More to the point, Jeremy Leeds argues that there is no evidence that service-learning is an effective vehicle for social transformation (1999, p. 119).   Leeds' main point seems to be not that any one of the rationales he examines is wrong, per se. Rather he argues that they inflate the goals beyond what any pedagogy can deliver. Progressivism, citizenship, and social transformation and change are fine just so long as we make realistic promises about the deliverables.

We agree with him on that point, and we want to emphasize that we are talking about a process more along the lines of Dewey's small steps than Freire's revolution. Our goal is much closer to a sense of what Boyte (2002) calls "democratic renewal" (p. 20). We also are trying to move away from an "instructional paradigm" and towards a "learning paradigm" (Barr & Tagg, 1995). Doing so benefits everyone involved and is reasonable given students' goals, the university's mission (particularly land grant universities), and the community's needs. Students are involved in the kind of experiential learning Dewey (1916) advocated; the university fulfills its service mission; and the community gains power as it directs and uses the university's resources to meet real needs.

There are historical precedents for our argument. In their fine book on the pioneers of service-learning, Stanton, Giles, and Cruz explain that "the earliest definition of service-learning--the accomplishment of tasks that meet genuine human needs in combination with conscious educational growth--can be found in publications of the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) (1969). In defining and trying to establish service-learning, SREB practitioners were concerned with developing learning opportunities for students that were related to community service, community development, and social change" (p.2).   In order to better understand service-learning, we examined some of the historical documents in the field such as the publications of the Southern Regional Educational Board (SREB).

In the "Introduction" to *Service-Learning in the South: Higher Education and Public Service 1967-1972*, Peter Meyer outlined the need to "reflect upon some of the issues emerging from the growth of service-learning" (1). In this short volume, a number of practitioners attempt to answer some of the essential questions, including "What is service-learning?" and "What is experiential education?" (p.1). Just looking at these questions, we see the roots of the quandary we face. Here, in the opening page of a volume that describes the SREB's program, one often cited as the birthplace of service-learning, is a critical junction between civic idealism and practicality.

Even more fascinating is an article by O'Connell, who was the Director of Special Programs at the SREB in 1972. O'Connell (1972) explains that service-learning is linked to "field work, internships, and cooperative education of varying types that have long been a part of most professional education" (p.4). According to O'Connell, the program the SREB began was designed to "provide college students opportunities to combine social and economic development programs with their college programs" (p.4). Thus, in this historical survey of the roots of service-learning, we find that the concept is tied to both "education and vocation" (p. 5) and the initial objectives listed by the SREB were—

- To give immediate manpower assistance, through the work of students, to agencies concerned with economic and social development;

- To provide constructive service opportunities for students seeking to participate in the solution of social and economic problems;

- To encourage young people to consider careers and citizen leadership in programs of development and provide a pool of trained personnel for recruitment in public service;

- To allow students, agency personnel, and faculty to engage in a shared learning experience from which all can benefit;

- To provide additional avenues of communication between institutions of higher learning and programs of social and economic development by making the resources of the universities and colleges more accessible to the community and providing a means for relating curriculum, teaching, and research to contemporary societal needs. (p. 5)

These goals highlight what Bill Ramsey, one of the original members of that organization, explains was the purpose:

> *We decided to call it service-learning, because service implied a value consideration that none of the other words we came up with did. . . . It was more of an attitude, more of an approach to be of service. . . . It had to be real service--not academics, not made up, not superficial, not tangential, but real--that's why it had to be agency based. It also had to be something that involved disciplined learning, not just casual learning. (Stanton, Giles, and Cruz, 1999, qtd. on p.67)*

This kind of work may be transformative, but it happens in small steps, one student at a time. Also, and perhaps more significantly, it happens by creating partnerships with agencies in the community.

Outcomes

Success of community-based partnerships can be measured by how their products overcome challenges. A successful partnership will provide better access to resources for team members. Successful projects designed to meet state learning standards would provide information on how well learning standards improve student learning and whether community-based partnership projects enhance, lessen, or have no measurable affect on student learning.

Community-based partnerships can also be assessed to see if they are improving access to teaching and learning resources. While it can be difficult to argue that staying at school is better than visiting a museum or a mountain-top ecosystem, projects designed to use the schoolyard as an outdoor laboratory (such as the Virginia Tech Museum of Natural History's award-winning MINTS—**M**odel **I**nquiries into **N**ature in **T**he **S**choolyard—curriculum) can be developed and assessed to afford teachers resources without having to leave school grounds.

Funding projects based on community partnerships can by improved by sharing volunteer staff that provide resources and flexibility. If coordination is good, "People-Power" can be increased. One common mistake is to send university students out into the K-12 arena with little or no training. This "free labor" can be a mixed blessing for teachers who end up having to take valuable time and energy to teach and train these students. Community partners are often quite adept at integrating University students into their programs if given the opportunity and resources to do so. By sharing expertise in a partnership, information on time and effort by any one entity can be measured. In a good partnership, workload and expertise is shared so that strain decreases on any one team member.

Conclusion

In the past decade, more and more scholars have been trying to address what Ernest Boyer (1994) called a loss of overall direction, a nagging feeling that [the university] is no longer at the vital center of the nation's work. In addition, students are seeking to find ways both to prepare themselves for the workplace and to address silences about questions of virtues and values (Brooks, 2000). Teachers are struggling to make course content relevant, and community organizations are fighting for enough resources just to stay open. Service-learning pedagogy has the potential to address each of these issues. The key to its success, however, lies at the heart of its application, the creation of community-based partnerships, which emphasize the hyphen between service and learning and bridge the space between the university and the community. Our project was one such attempt.

While we can't claim complete success (several of our students—3 of 23—did, indeed, feel "put upon" for being told what kind of project to choose), in general, the results were positive. Most students had responses similar to the following—

> For this project, we had to research the county, the school system, and the teachers themselves. Teacher input provided us with valuable information. Amy S., science teacher at Independence Secondary School, gave us insight into inquiry-based lessons and how they would benefit the classroom. In addition, Kim L., Montgomery County Science Coordinator, gave us information regarding the school system. Finally, we gathered information about the Virginia Standards of Learning (SOL) scores. Through this research, the assignment transformed from a paper project to a people project.

> We gained real life experience that we will later be able to apply to the workplace. More importantly, by emphasizing the partnership with Montgomery County Schools and the museum, we were able to help the museum . . . better fulfill its mission. (Toshiba Grant Group)

We posed problems for the students to solve and offered both a framework and guidance, modeling, in the interactions between us, what we hoped would be a paradigm for collaborative work in the spirit of change. Each of the six student groups completed the service-learning project, and each of the grant letters/proposals they created addresses a need that the museum and / or its community partners have. We have submitted two grants thus far, with no response yet. Even if we do not get funded, the overall benefits derived from this work will add value to the museum and its constituents. By facilitating participatory research and sharing expertise, we have turned students, faculty, and community leaders into public workers dedicated to creating a democracy that uses the talents, intelligence, and skills of its citizens.

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