Coming up with New Ideas by Talking to Others:  Linking Work Relationships

to Caring Communication

by

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Dedication & Acknowledgement

Dedicated To:

My Mother, an exceptionally creative innovator in her most important teacher role

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Abstract

This study used Social Information Processing (SIP) to develop a model of

predictors related to the perceived acceptance of new ideas (PANI).  We specifically

focus on the role of supportive communication within three types of work relationships—

coworkers, supervisors, and others outside the organization.  Forty-eight questionnaires

were obtained from two organizations.  The findings suggest that the only work

relationship that has a significant impact on PANI, is that with others outside the

organization.  Controlling for an individual's desire to innovate, the social support

received from others outside the organization accounted for an additional 33% of the

variance.  The overall model explained slightly over half (54%) of how people perceive

the acceptance of their new ideas.  We link these findings to the boundary spanning

literature, suggest future research directions, and discuss limitations of the study.

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Introduction

Scholars in many disciplines have studied innovation in the workplace for the past

five decades (Burt, 1987: Conway, 1995; Herzberg, 1968; Jayaratne, Himle & Chess,

1988, LaRocco, House, & French, 1980; Blau & Katerberg, 1982; Van de Ven, 1986). Of

particular interest to communication scholars is the notion that communication is central

to how innovations happen through processes of change.  Rogers (1971) identified four

key factors in innovations:1) the nature of the innovation 2) related social systems 3) time

and 4) communication about the innovation. This led organizational communication

researchers to study how new ideas are expressed to members of the organization (Rogers

& Eveland, 1978) and they found that focusing on how an innovation is discussed before

implementation  is important (Cheney, Block & Gordon, 1986). This progressive research

led Van de Ven (1986) to define innovation as a process where new ideas are developed

by people who engage in transactions with others over time.

Albrecht and Ropp (1984) recognized that "innovativeness is a product of the

complex interpersonal interactions among members of a system" (pg. 78). Subsequently,

one can deduce that an organization with a job description that mandating the

development of new ideas (i.e. engineer, scientist, entrepreneur or teacher) should

recognize the high relational need between their idea generators (McGrath, Vance &

Gray, 2003: Johnson, Meyer, Berkowitz, & Ethington, 1995). But not all organizational

roles require innovation.  Some people believe that the need to innovate in their

environment is not their job because innovations come from the top of a hierarchy down

to the level of the individuals. Workers without specific requirements for new ideas believe their individual opportunity and sometimes job requirements for generating innovations are limited; therefore, they choose not to communicate about their new idea (Cheney, et al., 1986). This can prove detrimental for some organizations, especially when there are misunderstandings concerning who is responsible for generating innovations. Some organizations do not nurture innovations because they do not utilize capacities of the workers; thus resentment can build from the workers (i.e. the workers think, "I could have told them how to do that years ago!").

Change that occurs from the implementation of a new idea can lead others to a state of uncertainty, which is potentially "face threatening" (Albrecht & Ropp, 1984). Thus, an environment conducive to innovation is best expressed in relationships where uncertainty is low and trust is high. The risky nature of idea sharing demands encouragement and reinforcement from the social system to support these idea generators.

Cheney and his colleagues (1986) acknowledged the need for a continued examination of the processes (both formally and informally) in which ideas are discussed, diffused, and adopted or rejected. There is a gap in the research to date that explores the link between idea sharing and communicative social networks. It is likely that communication partners like supervisors and co-workers provide some type of emotional support during the generation of those new ideas. Sharing new ideas is a particularly vulnerable situation for employees, in which there is significant potential risk in sharing, such as politics or competition.

Carol Gilligan introduced the theory of an Ethic of Care in her 1982 book, *In a Different Voice*, which challenged the traditional justice-based approach in moral discussions. An Ethic of Care is applicable in examining the innovation needs of an organization because it views the relationships made in the organizations in terms of partiality. This is contrary to the traditional justice theory in which a universal impartiality is applicable to all.  In the reality of an organization, there are some workers who have a high willingness to innovate and others who have a low willingness to innovate. If a justice ethic is implemented then these two groups of individuals are treated equally. If an organization expects its workforce to generate new ideas, it must provide an environment in which those employees trust the organization enough to express those ideas without fearing negative repercussions. In Care Ethics, this would constitute a necessary partiality to those workers who need emotional support for the generation of new ideas. The perceived social support of co-workers and supervisors is necessary to promote an organizational climate capable of fostering an innovative environment (Albrecht & Ropp, 1984).This is not to say that those who do not innovate do not need social support. There are other types of social support (i.e. instrumental and informational) that all organizational members likely need. But innovation specifically must be tied to high levels of emotional social support because innovation comes when people trust that their ideas will be valued.

The purpose of this study is to explore the role that emotional social supportive system in a work place which demands innovation from its employees. In the following paper, I will review theoretical literature and previous relevant studies. Next, I will

present the methods by which I conducted my study. Finally, I will share the results and offer a discussion of the findings.

<div align="center">Literature Review</div>

*Social Information Processing*

Salancik and Pfeffer (1978) introduced the theory of Social Information Processing (SIP) to emphases the effects the social context of an organization have on the individual members and their satisfaction with that organization. In SIP, "Individuals, as adaptive organisms, adopt attitudes, behaviors and beliefs to their social context and to the reality of their own past and present behavior and situation" (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978, pg. 226). SIP views the needs of individuals as unstable. These needs change with a new context and with new information presented to the individual. The changing needs are integrated into the existing experiences of the individual and a new outlook emerges. Thus, the job characteristics established to satisfy these needs are socially constructed realities of the individual, rather than a fixed set of needs provided by the organization. These realities are shaped and constructed from the social information cues provided by the organization and the notions pre-existing in the individual. The context in which one thrives is highly dependent on the realities constructed by the individual. This construction is influenced from both the particular individual and the other members (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978). So, if an organization's members generally construct their reality as satisfied in the organization, this will resonate with other individuals exposed to that information cue. Those exposed to the positive cue will then generally have a reality of satisfaction in their membership within the organization.

*Innovation*

When sharing new ideas in an organization, individuals not only face the possibility of conflicting political and economic power bases within the organization, but also criticism from superiors and colleagues. These realities can force innovation in organizations into a collaborative process, in which, trust between the innovative group members becomes an overarching emotion to create a comfortable climate for successful expression and implementation of new ideas. Albrecht and Hall (1991) studied the relational conditions in which an organization may allow innovation to flourish. They found personal relationships and variety in content of conversations between co-workers a necessary condition for innovative talk. The best relationship for idea sharing proved to be those who considered each other close friends. They also found a negative correlation between innovative talk and gossip/gripping behaviors.

Innovation can be viewed through the lens of SIP as a job characteristic that meets the needs of individuals who have a desire to innovate and a job role that requires them to innovate. These members might feel satisfaction directly from the perceived acceptance for their new ideas. Yet other individuals might have a low desire to innovate and view the organization's request to innovate as a means of unnecessary control.

For those organizational members who have a desire to innovate and are in a job that requires them to innovate, the social support that they receive might help them in their innovative process. Accordingly, if the organization's informational cues communicate an environment of social support and the individual is willing to innovate, then the reality will be constructed as a supportive and innovative environment. So, if an organization sets expectations for their members to innovate and the existing membership

re-enforce this expectation to other members by showing social support it should have the desired constructed reality of high job satisfaction.

Teachers are a particularly interesting case for studying innovation. Teachers' environments are in a constant state of change. These professionals are accustomed to changing students, policies, procedures and administration on a routine and sometimes sporadic basis.  Although innovation does occur in a formalized top-down process from administrators, school boards and the State, for the purpose of this study we will focus on the informal, random innovation used to adapt to the rapidly changing environment by the teachers themselves.

Teachers have much control over their classrooms; it is here they are responsible for the full implementation of any innovations they see fit. The organizational structure of a school must "take into account the 'organic,' 'natural,' or even 'wild' side of innovation" that results from the teacher's self-contained world in the classroom (Kanter, 1988 p. 170). The personal, informal innovation in any organization may go unknown to upper management and other members (Cheney, et. al., 1986). But many times the innovation is not created alone.

*Informal Information Sharing*

Kanter (1983) acknowledged the collaborative nature of the most effective innovation comes through complex ideas from multiple individuals, who provide more information and more sources to tackle the given problem.  In her 1983 study, Kanter found informal innovative talk happening in casual conversations in day-to-day activities between members of organizations. These innovative conversations are not formally sanctioned by the organization, yet they are likely the lifeblood of educational innovation.

Teachers share information often (Albrecht & Ropp, 1984). Some may teach the same subject matter and form lesson plans together. Others may share the same problematic student and share behavior experiences from their given classrooms in order to find ways to most effectively teach the student. This collaboration of information sharing can lead to collaborative innovation. The support and perceived competency of co-workers in this collaborative process is likely essential.

*Communication Competency*

A variety of disciplines have noted the centrality of communication competence in an organization (Monge, Bachman, Dillard, & Eisenberg, 1981; Sypher & Zorn, 1986; Hass & Arnold, 1995). While most studies examine interpersonal communication competency (CC), Monge et al. (1981) recast the concept of communication competency into the setting of organizations. Their study suggests that organization members hold perceptions of their coworkers, colleagues and supervisor/subordinate competence levels, which play an important role in the impression of the organization as a whole. For the purpose of this study, we conceive CC as a receiver's perception of appropriateness and effectiveness within a given work context (Cooper & Husband, 1993; Monge et al, 1981; Stephens, Malone, Young, & Hudson, 2000). Studies have shown that communication has a significant impact on organizational outcomes including job satisfaction, motivation and intent to leave (Lee & Jablin, 1995; Scott, Connaughton, Diaz-Saenz, Maguire, 1999; Sias & Jablin, 1995; Pollock et al., 2000). We focus on the perceptions of the CC of coworkers as antecedents of types of communication adequacy and the outcomes of job satisfaction and perceived acceptance of new ideas.

Monge et al. (1981) identified two aspects of CC, encoding and decoding. Encoding involves active listening behaviors and decoding includes speech and non-verbal immediacy cues. Their study was the first to illuminate the importance of CC in the work context, while still imbedded in interpersonal. The superior-subordinate relationship is unique because it links the accomplishments of the individual tasks to the organizational goals (Dansereau & Markham, 1987; Jablin, 1985, 1987; Lee & Jablin, 1995; Eisenberg & Goodall, 1993; Waldron, 1991; Stephens et al.2000). Subordinates evaluate the CC of their supervisor on an individual level and not on the general execution of the communication (McFall, 1982).

Focusing on an individual's perspective is not a new concept in organizational communication and has been shown to influence outcomes, such as increased motivation (Richmond & McCroskey, 2000) and job satisfaction (Baird & Diebolt, 1976; Richmond & McCroskey, 2000). Sias and Jablin (1995) study highlights the effects of differential treatment by superiors towards their subordinates and how that further affects the relationships and perceptions of coworkers. This fairness perception has an effect on the communication that occurs among the coworkers. Differential treatment of subordinates can "influence coworker communication relationships and may lead to the erosion of trust among group members and decreased group cohesion and influence the nature of the work group communication climate" (Jablin & Sias, 2001, p. 33).

Hass and Arnold (1995) found that females tend to put more value on listening and males tend to focus on speaking when evaluating others on their CC. This is of particular interest for the current study because of the predominately female subject pool. Teachers, like other groups of coworkers, communicate frequently. When surrounded

daily by a certain group, they will undoubtedly make judgments on other worker's

competence. High competence levels among coworkers foster a greater opportunity for

those workers to perceive their colleagues as supportive.

*Social Support*

Both formally and informally, organizations utilize worker's interpersonal

relationships to reach organizational goals. The satisfaction or dissatisfaction of the

behaviors of coworkers and supervisors has significant effect on the satisfaction of the

work environment (Richmond & McCroskey, 2000, Baird & Diebolt, 1976). These

behaviors and the reception of the provider's behavior helpfulness are termed social

support.  Albrecht and Adelman (1987) clarify social support as "verbal and nonverbal

communication between recipients and providers that reduce uncertainty about the

situation, the self, the other or the relationship, and functions to enhance a perception of

personal control in one's life experience" (p. 19) The level of personal control a worker

has over their work environment has an instrumental effect over their personal well-being

(Albrecht, Burleson, & Goldsmith, 1987; Hobfoll, 1990).

The perceived support given by others (i.e. coworkers, supervisors, family,

friends) to a particular individual, at a particular time, in a particular organization is

highly dependent and relative phenomena that can be problematic to measure with

consistency. Researchers have developed a number of typologies for categorizing social

support in organizations. Cutrona and Suhr (1992) separate social support into two broad

categories: 1) action-facilitating behaviors that attempt to solve the recipients problem,

and  2) nurturant support behaviors that are meant to comfort or console without offering

a designated solution to the problem. Action-facilitating support can include advice,

factual input and tangible aid. Nurturant support includes emotional, network and esteem

builders for the recipient. This necessity of nurturant behavior is the key to an Ethic of

Care, mentioned in the introduction.

Other scholars (Miller, 2006; House, 1981) separate social support into three

behavioral outcome categories of instrumental, informational and emotional support.

Instrumental support is the distribution of resources or a service to help alleviate a

stressful situation. Behaviors of instrumental support can range from cooking dinner for a

loved one who has to work late to offering a personal reference for someone seeking a

new position. Informational support includes any information that one can offer to assist

another in completing a task. These informational behaviors can include offering a

helpful resource for research to warning a new employee about the temperament of the

boss.

Emotional support is very similar to the concept already discussed as nurturant

behavior. People exhibiting emotional support will offer words of encouragement or give

recognition for a job well done. For this reason, emotional support is a likely precursor to

both job satisfaction and the perceived acceptance of new ideas. Because the generation

of new ideas is a sensitive area, where personal connections are needed between workers

for support (Albrecht & Hall, 1991; Albrecht & Ropp, 1984), it is especially important to

focus on the perceived amount of emotional support offered by coworker, superiors and

others outside of the organization.

Coworkers are more likely to engage in emotional and informational support and

supervisors in informational and instrumental supportive behaviors (Miller, 2006; Ray,

1987). But, because supportive behaviors are diverse and contextually specific across

organizations, it is important not to box people into these stringent supportive roles

(Burleson, 2003). Sharing new ideas is an example of a particularly vulnerable situation

for employees, in which there is significant potential risk in sharing. As a result, the

perceived social support of coworkers and supervisors is necessary to promote a climate

for fostering an innovative environment, especially the perceived emotional support of

trusting (Albrecht & Ropp, 1984).

Organizational supportive communication can provide many forms of support for

an organization's workforce to continue quality work while attempting to deal with

possible chronic stress from that work (Miller, 2006; Jones, 2004). Coworkers meet on

the common ground of a shared code and a system of values that nonmembers do not

share (Ray & Miller, 1991). So, it becomes especially important to analyze the support

systems of coworkers in a rapidly changing environment, in which many workers become

stressed from the required tasks on-the-job (Ray, 1987).

Traditionally, social support has been studied along with stress and burnout.

There has been significant research on the strong ties between supervisor and coworker

support and stress (Ray & Miller, 1991; Starnaman & Miller, 1992; Blau, 1981; LaRacco

et al., 1980; Jayaratne et al,. 1988). Ray and Miller (1991) point out that "supportive ties

require that interactants trust each other to respond appropriately in situations of

vulnerability."(p. 508) Ray and Miller's work suggest that work stressors are not a direct

effect of workload, but are highly influenced by perceived social support of co-workers

(1991). They found that an increase in participative decision making and an increase in

link strength (frequency of interpersonal communication) are correlated with an increase

in perceived social support of those relationships. This increase in social support can have

mixed effects on workplace burnout. Decision making has emerged as a key method in participative leadership that has been found to increase satisfaction on the job. When people feel that they make a contribution to their work environment, possibly through the generation of new ideas, they are more invested in the work and thus, more satisfied.

*Outcomes*

    *Perceived acceptance of new ideas.* As previously discussed, participating in innovation within an organizational context is a potential risk. Albrecht and Ropp (1984) found in studies of the manufacturing and human service industry that it was because of this vulnerability that innovative talk seemed threatening and only occurred on rare occasions between people in friendly relationships. Successful interaction between coworkers is highly dependent on a perceived environment of credibility, influence, trust and supportiveness (Dansereau & Markham, 1987; Jablin, 1979; Redding, 1972). These qualities reduce relational uncertainty, which leads to strengthening relational bonds and reducing potential risks. Albrecht and Hall (1991) contend that this allows an environment for "frank discussions of problems and risk taking, both of which are critical for innovation" (pg. 276). Thus, the perceptions of the predicted consequences for speaking about new ideas with others are instrumental in determining if the innovation process will occur. In this study we build on this assumption by testing the following:

    H1: A higher perceived emotional social support and communication competence in organizational relationships will lead to a higher perceived acceptance of new ideas.

    *Job satisfaction.* Job satisfaction and job dissatisfaction are not two different sides of the same coin. Herzberg et al.(1968) proposed that job satisfaction and

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dissatisfaction were separate outcomes and are affected by different factors. Job

satisfaction or "motivators" include recognition for work, achievement, responsibilities,

advancement and the work itself. Job dissatisfaction or "hygienes" are elements such as

relationships with coworkers, company policies, pay, administration and the working

environment (Herzberg et al., 1968; Beam, Kim & Voakes, 2003). Others, whose

research is more in line with SIP, indicate that job satisfaction is a function of the

characteristics of the individual who holds the job and the nature of the position held and

the social environment (Griffin, 1983; Blau & Katerberg, 1982; Burt 1987).

Traditionally, organizational communication researchers have studied

superior/subordinate relationships and their effects on job satisfaction (e.g. Falcione et

al., 1977; Baird and Diebolt, 1976; Chiles and Zorn, 1995; Roach, 1991; Richmond and

McCroskey, 2000; Beam et al., 2003). Although these studies have not specifically linked

a perceived socially supportive environment, which fosters innovation, to job satisfaction,

they have given evidence of a relationship of a high level of communication competency

linking to job satisfaction. Richmond and McCroskey (2000) found that nonverbally

immediate supervisors are strongly correlated to increased job satisfaction of their

workers. If a supportive supervisor/subordinate relationship influences job satisfaction

there should be no reason to believe that a perceived supportive coworker relationship

should not yield the same results. In this study we build on this assumption by testing the

following:

H2: A higher perceived emotional social support and communication competence

in organizational relationships will lead to higher job satisfaction

*Expanding Work Relationships to Those Outside the Organization*

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We know much less from the literature about how others outside of the formal organization might offer support that leads to innovation. We do know that boundary spanners tend to rely heavily on information sources outside of their own organization (Adams, 1980). While teachers are not typically considered boundary spanners, we do know that they attend workshops regularly and tend to keep in touch with friends who also teach (DeWine & Pearson, 1989). It is reasonable to assume that teachers rely on others outside of their organization for social support during innovation, but considering the lack of literature linking these concepts, we pose this as a research question.

RQ1: To what extent do social support and the perceived communication competence received from others outside the work organization influence the perceived acceptance of new ideas and job satisfaction?

Method

*Procedure and Participants*

A questionnaire was distributed to two South-Central, Texas Public Schools; an elementary and a high school. A total of 48 subjects participated (a 46% response rate for the elementary school and 13% from a high school). The subjects represented experienced teachers with an average tenure in their profession of 13.7 years (SD= 8.6) and the average tenure with their current organization of 7.4 years (SD= 6.6). Only 13% categorized themselves as newcomers. Subjects were 83% female and 14% male and 94% had a college degree.

Along with each questionnaire, the participants received and signed a consent form that explained the nature of the study, instructions for participating in the study and contact information of the researchers. Paper and pencil were the sole means by which

the data was collected. Anonymity was maintained because the researchers asked the

participants to detach the consent form from the questionnaire.

*Measurement*

 *Desire/Motivation.* Desire to innovate was measured using questions adopted

from Schmisseur and Stephens's (2000) scale. Three items (M= 4.34, SD= .54)

including: "I find it stimulating to be original in my thinking and in my behavior," "I

would rather have a job where I did not need to be creative" (reverse code), and "I enjoy

creating new ways of doing things." Each item was measured on a five-point Likert type

scale, ranging from very little to very great, asked participants to tell us how much they

wanted to produce innovative ideas. The previous reliability of this scale was .74. The

current reliability of this scale is .74.

 *Role expectations.* Perceived innovation role expectation was measured from the

adapted Schmisseur and Stephens's (2000) scale. Four item (M=3.49, SD=.89) including:

"As part of my formal job description, I am expected to come up with new ideas,"

"Although not explicitly stated, my supervisors expect me to find new ways of doing

things," "A significant portion of my performance evaluation is based on my ability to

innovate," and "As long as I do a good job, it is not important for me to be creative in my

job" (reverse coded). Each item measured on a five-point Likert type scale, ranging from

very little to very great, asked participants for the degree of innovation they are expected

or required to formally assume in their organization. Previous studies found an alpha of

.77 and the current study's alpha was .77.

 *Innovation Organizational Climate*. Perceived innovation organizational climate

was measured using questions adapted from Hurt and Teigen's (1977) PORGI (Perceived

Organization Innovation) scale. Four items (M=3.41, SD= .79) including: "The

organization rewards creativity and inventiveness among its employees," "The

organization is open to adopting new ways of doing things," "The organization

encourages employees to share ideas with one another," and "The organization is

generally cautious about accepting new ideas" (reverse coded). Each item measured on a

five-point Likert type scale ranging from very little to very great) asked participants to

tell us how much they agreed with statements regarding their organization's overall

support for innovation. Previous overall alpha was .82 and the current alpha is .76.

     *Communication Competence.* Perceived co-worker, supervisor and others'

communication competency were assessed using items adopted from Monge's (1981)

scale.  Nine items including: "My (appropriate role) are good listeners," "Can adapt

communication to changing situations," "Give appropriate feedback," "Are awkward in

conversation" (reverse coded), "Are effective communicators," "Are well informed when

they speak," "Are trustworthy," "Are sincere," and "Are honest." Each item measured on

a five-point Likert type scale, ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree, to

determine the participant's perception of their co-workers (M=4.14, SD=.48), supervisors

(M=3.53, SD= .82) and others outside of the organization's (M=3.80, SD= .69)

communication competence. Nine items produced an alpha of .91 for supervisor and .94

for others. One item was dropped to increase the reliability to .88 for coworkers. These

reliabilities are similar to those found in other studies using variations of this scale.

     *Emotional Social Support.* Perceived emotional social support of co-workers,

supervisors, and others were assed using a scale adopted by Ray and Miller (1991). Three

items including: "My (appropriate role) pay attention to what I say about new ideas,"

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"Stand up for each other to outsiders," and "Are willing to listen to me about my new ideas." Each item measured on a five-point Likert type scale, ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree, asked participants how much emotional social support is provided by co-workers (M=4.03, SD=.62), supervisors (M=3.49, SD=1.00) and others (M=3.70, SD=.80). Three items produced an alpha of .86 for supervisors. One item was dropped to increase the alpha of coworkers to .82. One item was dropped to increase the alpha of others to .84.

  *Perceived Acceptance of Ideas.* The dependent variable of perceived acceptance of new ideas from others in the organization and the participant's perception of their personal ability was adapted from Schmisseur and Stephens's (2000)scale. Three items (M=3.69, SD=.56) including: "People in my organization consider me an innovator with good ideas," "I believe I have the personal skill and ability to innovate," and "I am person who typically has good ideas." Each item measured on a five-point Likert type scale, ranging from very little to very great, asked participants how much others in their organizations accepted and used their ideas. The reliability of this scale is .76. Previous reliability was .75.

  *Job Satisfaction*. The dependent variable of job satisfaction was measured using a scale adapted from the Job Descriptive Index ((JDI; Smith, Kendall, & Hulin, 1969). To limit the length of the survey and focus on satisfaction likely related to innovation communication, we focused specifically on the work dimension of the JDI. Participants were asked to place a Y in the blanks beside items that described their jobs, a N in blanks beside items that do not describe their jobs and a ? beside items that were uncertain. Prior scale reliabilities have consistently removed items to improve reliability (e.g., Scott et al.,

1999), therefore, we included eight of the items (M=1.15, SD=.20) including:

"fascinating," "good," "pleasant," "gives me a sense of accomplishment," "on my feet,"

"satisfying," "creative," and "boring" (reverse coded). One item, "routine," was removed

from this scale to improve reliability and this produced a scale reliability in this study of

.76.

## Data Analysis

We analyzed the data using a series of regressions designed to account for

theoretical relationships.  In addition to the theoretical guidance, we also removed

variables from the models that were not correlated with the dependent measures.  Finally,

due to multicollinearity between our social support and communication competence

predictors, we examined the correlations and chose to enter only the most highly

correlated predictors into the model.  The significance level was set to $p < .05$ for all

regressions.

## Results

The first hypothesis and research question predicted relationships between

communication variables and the perceived acceptance of new ideas (see Table 1 for the

correlations).  Because prior literature suggested that a desire to innovate is a necessary

precursor to the perceived acceptance of new ideas, we entered this variable first into the

multiple regression model and it was significant ($R = .49$, $p < .001$), accounting for 22%

of the variance.  In the second step we entered supervisor social support, others social

support, and role expectations to innovate.  While the model was significant ($R^2_{change} =$

.38, $p < .001$) and accounted for 56% of the variance in perceived acceptance of new

ideas, the only significant individual predictor was others social support ($B = .51$, $p <$

.001). We re-ran the regression including only the significant predictor and the resulting

model accounted for 54% of the variance with $R = .75$, p<.001, $R^2_{change} = .33$, $p < .001$,

and an overall model of $F(1, 38) = 24.89$, p < .001.

In addition, in hypothesis 2 we also predicted the relationships between

communication variables and job satisfaction. Here we also used prior research to guide

our hierarchical regression and entered perceived organizational climate into the model

first. It was significant $R = .47$, $R^2_{adj} = .20$, p < .001. In the second block we entered

supervisor communication competence, and role expectations to innovate into the model

to predict job satisfaction. This model was also significant, but supervisor

communication competence was the only individual predictor ($B = .41$, $p < .05$). Re-

running the model only including the significant predictor resulted in a significant overall

model F $(1, 40) = 10.17$, p < .001, and an R = .58, $R^2_{adjusted} = .30$, and an $R^2_{change} = .12$ $p <$

.01).

Table 1

*Correlations of Variables*

| Variables | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Job satisfaction | 1.00 | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 2. Intent to leave | .59** | 1.00 | | | | | | | | | | |
| 3. Others emotional social support | -.09 | -.10 | 1.00 | | | | | | | | | |
| 4. Other communication competence | -.19 | -.23 | .79** | 1.00 | | | | | | | | |
| 5. Supervisor emotional social support | -.35* | -.34* | .42** | .39** | 1.00 | | | | | | | |
| 6. Supervisor communication competence | -.54** | -.41** | .36** | .33* | .80** | 1.00 | | | | | | |
| 7. Coworker emotional social support | -.09 | .02 | .10 | .24 | -.13 | -.01 | 1.00 | | | | | |
| 8. Coworker communication competence | -.025 | .13 | -.18 | -.23 | -.25* | -.19 | .59** | 1.00 | | | | |
| 9. Perceived acceptance of new ideas | -.05 | -.16 | .58** | .51** | .34* | .33* | .16 | -.12 | 1.00 | | | |
| 10. Organizational climate of innovation | -.47** | -.43** | .27* | .21 | .54** | .56** | -.08 | -.21 | .09 | 1.00 | | |
| 11. Role expectations to innovate | -.38** | -.26* | .28* | .20 | .35* | .54* | .40 | .33* | .27* | .38** | 1.00 | |
| 12. Desire to innovate | .155 | -.04 | .11 | -.04 | .00 | -.14 | .13 | .01 | .41** | -.35** | .01 | 1.00 |

*Note.* *p<.05, **p<.01

Table 2
Descriptives on Study Variables

| Predictor Variables | Mean | SD | Items | Scale Alpha | N= |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Supervisor Social Support | 3.49 | 1.00 | 3 | .86 | 46 |
| Coworker Social Support | 4.03 | .62 | 2 | .82 | 48 |
| Coworker Communication Competence | 4.14 | .48 | 8 | .88 | 48 |
| Communication Competence of Others outside of Organization | 3.80 | .69 | 9 | .94 | 42 |
| Innovative Organizational Climate | 3.4 | .79 | 4 | .72 | 48 |
| Role Expectations to Innovate | 3.49 | .89 | 4 | .77 | 44 |
| Supervisor Communication Competence | 3.53 | .82 | 9 | .91 | 48 |
| Desire to Innovate | 4.35 | .54 | 3 | .74 | 47 |
| Social Support from Others outside of the Organization | 3.69 | .80 | 2 | .84 | 42 |
| Outcome Variables | | | | | |
| Job Satisfaction* | 1.15 | .20 | 8 | .76 | 43 |
| Perceived Acceptance of New Ideas | 3.69 | .56 | 3 | .76 | 48 |

*Note.* S.D. = Standard Deviation.  Scale from 1-5. *Scale from 1-2.

## Discussion

This study explored the relationships between organizational member's

perception of communication competence and social support of others inside and outside

of the organizations and their subsequent job satisfaction and perceived acceptance of

new ideas.  First, we will review the findings and explore the conclusions of the tested

hypotheses. Next, we will consider the implications of this research for scholars in

organizational innovation through our research question. Finally, we will explore the

pragmatic application of our findings for these educational institutions.

The first hypothesis, which predicted perceived acceptance of new ideas as a

likely outcome of the communication competence and social support of coworkers and

supervisors showed no significant support when controlling for desire to innovate.  The

disconfirming results for coworker support might be explained through prior research in

education that indicates teachers do not look to their peers for support in change

(Bacharach, Bauer, & Conley, 1986; Dedrick et al., 1981). Starnaman and Miller (1992) noted, "coworker support is rarely cited as a significant intervening variable in the lives of teachers, perhaps because of the self-contained nature of teacher's work" (pg.42). This concept can be applied to perceived acceptance of new ideas, in that teachers innovate primarily in their own classrooms. Thus, our findings are similar to studies of the past.

Further research may explain the lack of significance between supervisor caring communication and worker's perceived acceptance of new ideas. Albrect and Ropp (1984) explain this finding because of the variation and unpredictable nature of sharing new ideas. This innovative talk does not always occur in pre-prescribed hierarchically defined role relationships (Albrect & Hall, 1984). Cheney et al. (1986) found that teachers perceived their organization to be less innovative than other service organizations tested. In their study, the teachers perceived their innovations as an individual level concern and not related to other organizational members (Cheney et al., 1986). This might explain why the support and communication competency of both supervisors and coworkers of teachers proved insignificant to their perceived acceptance of new ideas. They innovate on an individual level and do not require the feedback of support from others in the organization.

The second hypothesis, which predicted job satisfaction as a likely outcome of communication competence and social support, was partially supported. As maintained by past literature (Baird & Diebolt, 1976; Richmond & McCroskey, 2000; Chiles & Zorn, 1995), we found that supervisor communication competency was significantly correlated with job satisfaction. Similarly, Stephens, Malone, Hudson and Young's (2002) study of not-for-profit agencies confirmed a positive significant relationship between supervisor

communication competency and subordinate job satisfaction. Coworkers and others outside of the organization was not found to significantly predict job satisfaction. Therefore, it is interesting to note that out of all of the relationships in one's working environment, it is the supervisor's communication competency that is of utmost significance to the determination of job satisfaction.

The most promising findings to add to existing organizational communication literature came through the research question. We found that the social support provided by others outside of the organization did predict how innovators perceive their ideas are accepted. Above and beyond an individual's desire to innovate, the social support from others outside the organization explains 33% of the variance in the perceived acceptance of new ideas. Essentially, others outside the organization along with an individual's desire to innovate explains slightly over half of the total variance (54%) in the perceived acceptance of new ideas. Conway (1995) found that the relationships formed by boundary spanners played an important role in 23% of organizations innovations and 46% of input of innovations. He also noted that informal relationships or friendships matter in the innovation process (Conway, 1995). Our findings show that, indeed, teachers use those outside of their organization to talk about new ideas. The caring communication, via perceptions of communication competency and social support, that are a result of these voluntary, informal relationships foster a perceived acceptance of their new ideas, thus reducing the uncertainty of the idea generator.

Our findings also add to the supportive literature of the social information process theory. Salancik and Pfeffer (1978) see each worker as an individual with "adaptive attitudes, behaviors and beliefs to their social contexts and to the realities of their own

past" (pg 226). These teachers have spanned the boundaries of their school into forming

relationships with others, perhaps from past memberships in other organizations. The

teachers use these adaptive informal relationships to generate or "bounce off" new ideas.

Our findings have added significant empirical evidence that these adaptive boundary

spanning behaviors contribute to a worker's perceived acceptance of new ideas within

their own organization.

The pragmatic application of these findings suggests that others outside of the

formal organization might play a crucial role in how innovative ideas are developed. The

data suggest the relationships formed outside of the organization may have more

importance over perceptions of acceptance of new ideas. These relationships may be

formed through any number of activities (i.e. former employments, conferences, personal

lives).

*Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research*

Although this study is a contribution to help us understand the importance of

boundary spanning relationships in innovation to organizations, several limitations exist.

First, there was limited participation from both schools, which resulted in a small sample

size. The elementary school had a participation of 46%, which is adequate and possibly

generalizable for that particular school. This school was also going through a significant

amount of change and pressure on the single organizational supervisor that may have

contributed to the workers job satisfaction. The high school response rate was 13% and

not generalizable for the entire school. This lack of participation could be attributed to

traumatic events that took place over the course of data collection. It would be helpful in

future research to re-asses this school and do a possible analysis of pre-trauma and post-trauma job satisfaction.

The pragmatic application of the two tested schools is limited. It proves difficult to make generalizations about either school due to the limited sample size. We can say because of past literature in addition to our own study that the perception of supervisor's communication competency is an important determining factor of job satisfaction. We can also suggest the importance of developing boundary spanning relationships such as conferences and interschool activities for the fostering of innovation.

Another limitation, and one common in many social science studies, is the use of self-report data in measuring the variables. Future research may want to conduct longitudinal observation studies with defined typology of socially supportive and commutatively competent behaviors to have a trained outside perspective on these variables effects on workers job satisfaction and perceived acceptance of new ideas.

While this study generically asked about how "others outside the organization" influence talk about new ideas, future studies should explore who these "others" are, and the type of talk that is encouraging innovation.  I suggest future researchers to conduct a network analysis that focuses on how others outside of the organization influence worker's perception of acceptance of new ideas.  Find out if it is friends or family who are influencing this more.  Is it others in a similar occupation?  Where did they meet these others?  Taken together, this type of a study can help us further elaborate on how communication scholars can make practical recommendations that can influence innovation in the workplace.  We might also be able to contribute and develop the boundary-spanning literature that has received little attention in the past two decades.

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Appendix 1: Measurement Device

Appendix 2: Project Update in March

Appendix 3: Power Point Presentation for Update in March

Appendix 4: Final Power Point Presentation