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What Is the Relationship Between Conflict Management and Employee Empowerment? A Message Design Logic Perspective and its Importance for Managers and Supervisors

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Rochester Institute of Technology

School of Communication

College of Liberal Arts

What Is the Relationship Between Conflict Management and Employee Empowerment?

A Message Design Logic Perspective and its Importance for Managers and Supervisors

by

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A Thesis presented

in partial fulfillment of the Master of Science degree in

Communication & Media Technologies

Degree Awarded:

August 12, 2017

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Degree Awarded: Summer term 2017 (2168)

Abstract

This study focused on how conflict management between employees affects employee empowerment. Conflict naturally occurs between individuals, and its management in organizations can result in positive or negative consequences. Employee empowerment influences greater job satisfaction and commitment to organizations. Based on the theory of message design logic, it was hypothesized that employees who employ rhetorical design while managing conflict will experience greater levels of empowerment. The sample consisted of 196 employees at an educational institution who completed a short, online survey. Results showed no relationship between levels of perception of empowerment and message design logic, thus not supporting the hypothesis.

Keywords: conflict management, message design logic, employee empowerment

What Is the Relationship Between Conflict Management and Employee Empowerment?

A Message Design Logic Perspective and its Importance for Managers and Supervisors

Successful conflict management and resolution create a stronger workplace. Businesses that apply effective conflict resolution techniques benefit from greater stability, better performance, and higher profits (Masters & Albright, 2002). Nevertheless, there is limited research explaining the relationship between the communication styles employed during conflicts and its impact on employee empowerment. This study aims to increase our understanding of how different types of message construction used between employees during conflict affect perception of empowerment.

On an individual and organizational level, the implications of this study suggest that employees can develop their communication styles to reach multiple career goals such as financial gain, advancement, or satisfaction (Quagliata, 2012). Furthermore, understanding the process of conflict management and its effects in the workplace allows organizations to reap the rewards of strategically managing communication between employees. By applying this knowledge, organizations could reduce legal costs, reduce turnover, avoid negative publicity, prevent future conflict, and maintain a motivated workforce. Additionally, by learning the effects of different communication styles, managers and supervisors could take advantage of the potential benefits of conflict such as promoting creativity, improving interpersonal skills, increasing productivity, and stimulating healthy competition.

Receiving negative remarks during conflicting situations may cause discomfort and difficulty between superiors and subordinates. Managers who do not learn to address dissent constructively may risk leaving the conflict unresolved and consequently create an unhealthy work environment. O'Keefe (1988) explains that message variation occurs more likely in conflict situations; hence, that is why the theory of message design logic (MDL) has been most frequently used in studies within the context of conflict. MDL allows us to study how messages are structured. Using this theory, this study explored

how the various forms of message construction affected conflict management between employees and, consequently, employee empowerment.

Literature Review

Conflict Management

Conflict in human interaction occurs naturally, existing whenever there is a disagreement over opinions, beliefs, values, priorities, and situations (McManus, 2006). It develops as a result of two or more interdependent parties perceiving incompatibility, as well as possible interference from other parties (Folger, Poole, & Stutman, 2005; Masters & Albright, 2002). This threat must be psychologically perceived by at least one of the parties (Masters & Albright, 2002). Due to the parties' interdependence, the cessation or continuation of the conflict will depend on the mutual effort of those involved.

Evolution of Conflict Research

Conflict studies from the communication perspective initially relied on models outside of the field. Models used for conflict studies included distributive and integrative negotiation (Walton & McKersie, 1965), the dual concern model (Blake & Mouton, 1964; Kilmann & Thomas, 1977), and mediation competency models (Putnam, 2001). The distributive model advocated using strategies and tactics in a win-lose orientation, while the integrative model sought a win-win approach to problem solving (Putnam & Poole, 1987). Thus, analyses of communication patterns revealed that messages can serve multiple and varying functions as conflict evolved over time (Putnam, 2001). The approach to conflict changed with the dual concern model (Blake & Mouton, 1964; Kilmann & Thomas, 1977), which focused on styles of conflict management based on two underlying dimensions: concern for self-interest or concern for the interest of the other party. The mediation competency models went beyond the two parties in conflict and included a third party assisting in managing conflict between disputants, while using communication skills to lead discussion and resolution (Putnam, 2001).

Different theories from other fields of study have also been employed to understand conflict and communication over the years. Such was the case with game theory, in which players were viewed as rational beings making strategic moves aiming to maximize gains and minimize losses (Bostrom, 1968). However, communication scholars encountered a challenge to this theory, explaining that motives and intentions remained ambiguous due to the lack of explicit communication between players (Steinfatt & Miller, 1974).

Social exchange theory was considered similar to game theory in that its participants used an economic approach (focusing on gains and losses) to maximize their self-interests based on social resources. Communication scholars considered resources such as affection, status, or control to be symbolic (Putnam, 2001). Through any social interaction process, disputants exchanged these multiple resources with one another (Putnam, 2001; Roloff & Campion, 1985). The difference with game theory, however, was that profits were maximized based on rewards minus costs.

Different schools of thought about conflict have developed over the years. Traditionally, conflict has been negatively perceived by various cultures (Bakhare, 2010). Early scholars focused on conflict as primarily negative, suggesting resolution or avoidance as preferable strategies, typically focused on preventing destructive conflicts (Putnam, 2001). It was known that conflict could degrade relationships, cause communication to decrease, and produce resistance and stalemates (Coser, 1956; Deutsch, 1973). However, it is simplistic to view conflict as being generally bad. Therefore, early scholars moved away from the predominant view of conflict as a creator of imbalance or disruption of the equilibrium of a system (Gamson, 1968).

Conflict has many positives when managed effectively and equitably as it occurs. Conflict often produces necessary change and growth in individuals, teams, and organizations. Conflict can be functional or dysfunctional. This view has evolved as scholars questioned the need to preserve existing

systems, exploring the role of conflict in the process of change, as well as investigating its benefits (Miller, 1974).

The positive aspects of conflict were recognized, such as its ability to promote cohesiveness (Coser, 1956), maintain power balances (Blake & Mouton, 1964), and facilitate change and prevent stagnation (Litterer, 1966). In later years, the constructive view of conflict considered it to be functional and necessary (Mathur & Sayeed, 1983). Conflict also provided an opportunity to express problems. Bakhare (2010) explains that an ongoing minimal level of conflict is necessary for social groups to perform healthily, as a means for balancing interests and meeting mutual needs. Scholars also criticized the linear, sender-oriented view of communication, which assumed that communication would directly impact the state of a conflict (Bowers, 1974b; Ruben 1978). Thus, conflict became viewed as a cyclical process, laying the groundwork for systems-interaction views of communication (Putnam, 2001).

Organizational Conflict

Conflict is ubiquitous, occurring in a wide variety of settings of which the workplace is no exception. It is common to find conflict within organizations, where a different number of priorities, tasks, and personality types must interact on a daily basis. It can occur between individuals in an organization when mutual interaction is required among them (Jaramillo, Mulki, & Boles, 2011), as well as between people of unequal rank, such as superiors and subordinates.

Organizational conflict studies focus on two facets. The first is that organizational conflict takes place in a specific workplace setting and can include different individuals in an organization. The second is that organizational conflict occurs during the process of organizing employees toward a common goal, which is often linked to communication and conflict in organizations (Deetz, 2001). However, there are numerous causes of conflict in the workplace.

When an employee perceives that he or she could be negatively affected by another party, conflict occurs due to incompatible or opposing desires (McManus, 2006) as well as the potential interference with the realization of goals, aims, or values (Putnam & Poole, 1987). Conflict between employees can also result over the contradiction of facts or methods, out of differences in professional opinion, or through role changes (Timmins, 2011). Since employees often make decisions based on different information, according to the positions' roles and responsibilities, differences of opinion are bound to happen. Thus, conflict is unavoidable in situations in which employees from diverse backgrounds and with individual differences come together to achieve common goals (Kudonoo, Schroeder, & Boysen-Rotelli, 2012). As a result, superiors are often presented with the challenge of managing conflict within organizations, yet with little or no training in conflict management, they can also be the cause of conflict.

Furthermore, members of different power groups tend to use their power during conflict differently. Members of high power groups (HPG) have longer time perspectives, tend to be more satisfied than those in lower positions of power, like to use power, and justify their right to have and protect it (Coleman & Deutsch, 2000). Those in low power groups (LPG), however, have a short time perspective, are generally more discontent, try to eliminate negative feelings associated with their experiences of powerlessness and dependence, and are therefore likely to project blame on other members of the LPG with less power (Coleman & Deutsch, 2000). Therefore, during conflict, superiors and subordinates' approaches to the disagreement and their openness in communication may be affected by their position of power.

Studies suggest that successful managers spend more time managing conflict than unsuccessful ones (Luthans, Rosenkrantz, & Hennessey, 1985). One classic study (Thomas & Schmidt, 1976) showed that managers spend about 20% of their time managing conflicts. According to Bakhare (2010), managerial actions that cause workplace conflict include poor communication, leadership problems,

improper delegation, and insufficient resources. Additionally, when communication is unclear and there is confusion about what is expected and what will be rewarded, conflict occurs between superiors and subordinates. In order to prevent unnecessary confusion, it is the superior's responsibility to state clear goals and expectations to subordinates (McManus, 2006).

Managers typically respond to conflict in one of the following modes: competing, avoiding, accommodating, compromising, or collaborating (Bakhare, 2010). Furthermore, numerous conflict management strategies have been studied and are suggested for individuals, groups, and organizations. Alternative means of resolving conflict include negotiation, facilitation, mediation, arbitration, or a mix of two or more strategies.

Since managers and supervisors are in relative positions of power, they can be perceived as intimidating. When employees feel intimidated, they often act defensively. Managers who practice effective conflict management must be aware of problems and implement timely conflict-resolution plans, as well as ensure workplace environments where employees feel free to express themselves when difficulties arise (Timmins, 2011). When supervisors manage conflict effectively, they facilitate the social exchange process with their subordinates and influence positive work attitudes, while building trust in the superior-subordinate relationship (Chan, Huang, & Ng, 2008). Communication is an important management skill, therefore Rosenblatt and Davis (2009) suggest that managers become more aware of the way their communication is perceived by evaluating and monitoring their communication behavior, which would allow them to adjust their messages in order to minimize conflict.

Mixed-status relationships often encounter obstacles in the communication process, whether they are related to the ambiguity of tasks and responsibility assignment, different personalities and values, or perceptions of others' intentions. Superiors must apply different strategies to manage these challenges; effective leaders can only maintain authority if followers believe in that authority (McManus, 2006).

When managers include staff in decision-making and shared governance, it causes employees to improve their communication strategies, increase their job satisfaction, and feel empowered (Notara, Koupidis, & Vaga, 2010; Thyer, 2002). If parties perceive that the benefits of continuing the conflict outweigh their costs, communication directed at solving the conflict may be ineffective, possibly making it worse (Coleman & Deutsch, 2000). However, with little or no training in conflict management, managers may view conflict as a rejection to their authority and, therefore, identify it as abnormal behavior that should receive punishment. Thus, managers sometimes overlook that individuals in conflict situations often have mixed feelings of affection and hostility, and a desire to reach an agreement (McManus, 2006).

The consequences of conflict can greatly affect the workplace in several ways. On the downside, poorly managed conflict is costly in both financial and human terms. It can be destructive and costly to organizations, especially when it results in litigation or negotiation, causing an organization to spend large sums during the process (Cummings & Worley, 2014). This could result in wasted time and resources, counter-productive work behavior, and increased costs, including health and litigation expenses (Freres, 2013).

When interpersonal conflict causes emotional exhaustion, it affects job attitudes, resulting in lower performance (Jaramillo et al., 2011). Furthermore, a professional relationship that lacks empathy, trust, and support negatively affects the work environment (Peterson & Albrecht, 1996). It is unlikely for feedback to occur in an organizational culture that lacks trust. It is also more likely for interpersonal conflict to lead to the participation in subversive acts (Liu, Spector, & Shi, 2007) and workplace aggression (Hershcovis et al., 2007), especially by employees who prefer to avoid direct confrontation (Jaramillo et al., 2011).

If not managed adequately, conflict may have a disruptive influence in the workplace. Thus, in order to promote healthy conflict, an organizational culture must build individual competency, provide

feedback, and create an open environment for transparency during conflict (Kudonoo et al., 2012). In sum, effective conflict management strategies such as setting clear goals and expectations (McManus, 2006), implementing timely conflict-resolution plans, ensuring employees feel free to express themselves during conflict situations (Timmins, 2011), and promoting professional relationships that provide trust, empathy, and support (Peterson & Albrecht, 1996) are necessary to ameliorate conflict and promote employee empowerment.

Employee Empowerment

Employee empowerment is the process by which superiors strengthen subordinates' beliefs of self-efficacy (Conger, 1989) and their ability to exercise choice (Velthouse, 1990), based on the conviction of possessing decision-making control (Parker & Price, 1994). Zemke and Schaaf (1989) believed that this requires encouragement and rewards for employees to generate ideas and use their imagination. Chiles and Zorn (1995) separated the concept of empowerment into two main categories: the perception of self-efficacy or competence and the perception of control ability or decision-making. Competence focuses on an individual's sense of ability to carry out a job, while decision-making authority focuses on the shared power and freedom to make decisions. Theorists held that individuals will feel more empowered if they perceive the abilities to perform a job effectively, thus having a significant impact on their work environment (Conger & Kanungo, 1988; Spreitzer, 1995). Similarly, other scholars believed that having freedom or authority to make decisions to carry out work-related tasks was necessary to achieve empowerment (Albrecht, 1988; Kanter, 1983; Parker & Price, 1994).

Previous management research has shown a positive relationship between employee empowerment and work attitudes, general job satisfaction, loyalty, affective commitment to organizations, and performance (Barroso Castro, Villegas Perinan, & Casillas Bueno, 2008; Bhatnagar, 2007; Brown & Peterson, 1993; Fulford & Enz, 1995; Hechanova, Alampay, & Franco, 2006; Kirkman

& Rosen, 1999; Laschinger, Finegan, & Shamian, 2001; Wang & Lee, 2009). Empowerment can also motivate employees to accomplish tasks and objectives (Conger & Kanungo, 1988) as well as affect the creation of quality employee-customer relationships (Anderson & Huang, 2006).

Empowered employees who can exercise freedom in decision-making have been found to be more satisfied with their jobs and exhibit more commitment to their team and company (Kirkman & Rosen, 1999). Additionally, employee involvement in decision-making is more likely to produce good feelings about the organization (Fombrun, 1996). Similarly, those who perceive a stronger sense of competence contribute to a work environment that is nurturing, engaging, transparent, and participative (Spreitzer, 1995).

The more employees feel competent or perceive having an authority in decision-making, the better they perceive their relationships with their organizations and the higher the level of trust, commitment, and satisfaction they have with their organizations (Men, 2011). Similarly, their evaluation of organizational reputation will be more favorable (Men, 2012). Empowered employees also indicate stronger management commitment to service quality (Babakus, Yavas, Karatepe, & Avci, 2003). Furthermore, when employees feel psychologically empowered by their superiors, they experience greater confidence and meaningfulness in their achievements, and in exerting influence (Spreitzer, 1995).

A study by Jha and Nair (2008) showed that superior-subordinate relationships that exhibit trust positively influence employee empowerment. In order to gain employee trust, commitment, and satisfaction, management must empower employees by sharing power, allowing autonomy in decision making, and improving employee feelings of competence (Men, 2011). Therefore, effective superior and subordinate relationships work to develop trust and open the channels for feedback to occur (Heisler, 2004). This requires that both parties have at least one channel to contact one another that they feel comfortable using (Bakhare, 2010).

Listening is also a key aspect of any successful communication practice and a skill required for effective leadership, management, and conflict resolution. Taking an employee's preference into account regarding how tasks should be performed has been linked to substantial organizational benefits, including greater employee satisfaction and empowerment (Biron & Bamberger, n.d.). Additionally, through empowering employees, transformational leaders create the perception that the employees are being valued as members of the organization as well as being respected and listened to (Epitropaki & Martin, 2005). Furthermore, perceived supportive communication in mixed-status relationships can alleviate the temporary negative climate caused by conflict (Albrecht & Hasley, 1992). Previous research has also shown that employees who receive greater support from supervisors show increased levels of job satisfaction and security, lower stress, and a higher sense of organizational worth in subordinates (Peterson & Albrecht, 1996). Additionally, perceptual congruency in mixed-status relationships, where both parties report receiving high amounts of support, has been linked to high perceptions of relational trust, higher performance ratings, and frequent discussions of innovations (Albrecht & Hasley, 1992). Hence, how employees communicate during decision-making processes, such as conflict situations, affects employee empowerment.

Role of Communication

Communication plays a key role in conflict management. Message design logic (MDL), the message structure which results from patterns of expressed thoughts (O'Keefe & Lambert, 1995), may have related consequences and effects in conflict resolution. According to MDL, mixed-status relationships are, in part, a function of relational patterns (Peterson & Albrecht, 1996). The theory of MDL takes its name from the influence that a person's understanding of communication has on the way messages are structured (Hullman, 2004; O'Keefe, 1988). According to O'Keefe (1988) there are three general types of MDL: expressive, conventional, and rhetorical.

The simplest form of message production is expressive design logic. In this structure, language serves simply as a medium for expressing thoughts and feelings. The communication process consists of people expressing what they think or feel, so others will know what they think or feel. In this design logic, the only purpose of a message is that of expression, therefore it sometimes contains pointless content. Additionally, the message does not have a specific structure and can be honest, reflecting the speaker's truth accurately, or it may be distorted (O'Keefe, 1988). Expressive messages contain emotional content and fail to directly address the situation (Hullman, 2004).

The second type is conventional design logic, which holds that communication is a cooperative game based on conventional social norms and procedures. In this design, language serves as a means of conveying propositions, which are dictated by the social effect the speaker wants to achieve rather than the thoughts the speaker has. Therefore, the speaker adopts the correct social position in a given situation in order to successfully achieve one's ends, causing the listener to enact the corresponding appropriate action. Conventional messages have characteristic content and structure (O'Keefe, 1988), and they are organized to elicit a specific response from the recipient (Peterson & Albrecht, 1996).

Rhetorical design logic is based on the premise that communication is the creation and negotiation of social selves and situations. In rhetorical design logic, knowledge of conventional social forms, relationships, and situations are viewed as mutable rather than fixed. It is the most elaborate way of constructing messages. In this view, context is created by the message, or at least by the process of communication. The fundamental function of this type of message is negotiation. Hence, instead of providing meaning, the context of communication becomes a strategically managed resource that is intentionally exploited. Rhetorical messages also include characteristic content and structure (O'Keefe, 1988).

According to Peterson and Albrecht (1996), a person using a rhetorical message design is more likely to create supportive messages and manage supportive interactions. However, more recent research (Hullman, 2004) does not support that a more complex message design necessarily enhances communication effectiveness. Using MDL as a theoretical context, this study examines the different forms of message structure and explores their relationship to conflict management. We focused on the communication aspect regarding conflicts between superiors and subordinates, examining how the message structure is related to employees' perceptions of empowerment and job satisfaction.

Hypothesis

Employees who feel empowered can motivate others to accomplish tasks and objectives (Conger & Kanungo, 1988), can exercise freedom in decision making, and exhibit more commitment to their team and company (Kirkman & Rosen, 1999). Also, they contribute to a work environment that is transparent and participative, experiencing greater confidence and meaningfulness in their achievements and in exerting influence (Spreitzer, 1995). These characteristics would suggest that employees with a higher level of empowerment would be more likely to communicate using a rhetorical message design, since the fundamental function of this type of design is negotiation and moves towards accomplishing the task by collaboratively working towards a solution (O'Keefe 1988; Quagliata, 2012). Therefore, the research literature leads to the following hypothesis:

H1: Employees who employ rhetorical design while managing conflict will experience greater levels of empowerment.

Method

Participants

The data for this study was collected by administering a self-report survey. The sample was comprised of 196 full-time employees of Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT), with ages ranging

from 26 to 65 years ($M = 47.87$, $SD = 9.96$). In terms of gender, 128 (65.3%) participants were female and 68 (34.7%) were male. Regarding education level, 97 (49.5%) participants had completed a graduate degree, 23 (11.7%) had some graduate school education, 46 (23.5%) had graduated from college, 14 (7.1%) had some college education, 4 (2.0%) had graduated from high school, and 12 (6.1%) had another degree of education level. Finally, the participants had work experience ranging from 5 to 45 years ($M = 24.64$, $SD = 10.75$).

Measures

A modified version of O'Keefe's (1988) "Ron-Test" (RT; Quagliata, 2012) was used to assess the message design logic of each participant. Two hypothetical conflict scenarios between a superior and a subordinate (RT1 and RT2) were presented. Each participant read the scenarios and wrote what their response would be in each situation. In RT1 the participant responded from the perspective of the superior and in RT2 from the perspective of the subordinate. Two coders classified the responses as Expressive, Conventional, or Rhetorical. Additionally, a brief Likert-scale questionnaire based on Spreitzer's (1995) model was used to measure employee empowerment.

Procedure

This study was approved by the Human Subjects Research Office of RIT. A recruitment message (Appendix A) was sent to all employees of RIT via email through the institution's Messaging Center inviting them to complete a questionnaire (Appendix B) on a secure website. In order to encourage participation, respondents had the option to be entered into a raffle to win one of two \$50 Amazon gift cards. The first part of the questionnaire included an informed consent form which participants were required to agree to before completing the questionnaire. Participants' responses were then filtered according to the inclusion criteria of age (22 to 65), employment status (full time), and years of work

experience (5 to 45). In order to ensure confidentiality, no information that could personally identify subjects was recorded.

Results

In order to test H1, a comparison of median scores across the different types of MDL in the dimensions of empowerment was carried out using the Kruskal-Wallis non-parametric test. The dependent variables consisted of four dimensions of empowerment and general empowerment. The independent variables were the design logic choice of Expressive, Conventional, and Rhetorical in the Ron-Test 1 (RT1) and Ron-Test 2 (RT2). This test was selected since there were three groups in the independent variables, and the dependent variables were of an ordinal level of measurement.

According to the results provided by the Kruskal-Wallis tests, no significant differences of empowerment levels were found between the groups of Expressive, Conventional, or Rhetorical by individual dimensions or by the general measure of empowerment in either RT1 or RT2 since the p values for all groups ranged from .072 to .912 (see Tables D1 and D2). These results do not support the hypothesis proposed in the current study.

The contingency table for RT1 and RT2 is shown in Table D3. The McNemar-Bowker test was used in order to test if the proportions across the MDL categories were the same for RT1 and RT2. This test was employed because the RT1 and RT2 variables had more than two categories and because the same participants responded to both scenarios, meaning that the proportions were dependent. The results of the McNemar-Bowker test showed a significant difference in the proportions between RT1 and RT2 ($\chi^2 = 31.93, df = 3, p < .000$).

The McNemar test was used to determine for which MDL categories the proportions were different between RT1 and RT2. To carry out these analyses, the categories that were not the focus of each test were collapsed in order to create 2 x 2 tables. For example, to test if the proportions for

Expressive were the same between RT1 and RT2, the Conventional and Rhetorical categories were collapsed.

Regarding the equality of proportion test for the Expressive category, the McNemar test showed a significant difference between RT1 and RT2 ($\chi^2 = 25.13, df = 1, p = < .000$). In this case the percentage of Expressive for RT1 was 22.96% and for RT2 was 5.61%, which results in a difference of 17.35% (95% CI = 10.93% to 23.93%).

Regarding the equality of proportion test for the Conventional category, the McNemar test showed a significant difference between RT1 and RT2 ($\chi^2 = 25.81, df = 1, p = < .000$). In this case the percentage of Conventional for RT1 was 50.51% and for RT2 was 73.98%, which results in a difference of -23.47% (95% CI = -31.64% to -14.77%).

Regarding the equality of proportion test for the Rhetorical category, the McNemar test showed a non-significant difference between RT1 and RT2 ($\chi^2 = 2.67, df = 1, p = .103$). In this case the percentage of Rhetorical for RT1 was 26.53% and for RT2 was 20.41%, which results in a difference of 6.12% (95% CI = -1.27% to 13.46%).

Discussion and Conclusion

There is ample research concerning conflict management in the workplace; however, the same is not true for the research regarding the relationship between employee empowerment and conflict management. This study sought to confirm whether or not an employee's perception of empowerment would have a direct relationship with the choice of conflict management from a message design logic perspective. Specifically, it was hypothesized that employees who employ rhetorical message design logic while managing conflict would experience a higher perception of empowerment.

Certain qualities of employees who feel empowered would suggest that those who experience a higher level of empowerment would be more likely to select a rhetorical message design, since its

fundamental function is to negotiate and move towards accomplishing tasks by working collaboratively towards solutions (O'Keefe, 1988; Quagliata, 2012). Such qualities include motivating others to accomplish tasks and objectives (Conger & Kanungo, 1988), exercising freedom in decision making, exhibiting greater commitment to their team and organization (Kirkman & Rosen, 1999), and contributing to an environment that is transparent and participative, experiencing greater confidence and meaningfulness in their achievements and in exerting influence (Spreitzer, 1995). However, the findings of the present study indicate that there is no relationship between levels of perception of empowerment and message design logic, thus not supporting this hypothesis. On the contrary, the current results are congruent with those of Hullman (2004), which showed that a more complex message design does not enhance communication effectiveness. A possible explanation for these findings may be found in the implicit goals theory, which states that explicitly communicating a person's goal is not necessary because it can be inherently understood (Hullman, 2004; Meyer, 1990).

Additionally, the proportions across the MDL categories for RT1 and RT2 were compared, showing that employees in the role of supervisor tend to be more Expressive, while employees in the role of subordinates tend to select Conventional more often. A possible explanation for this result could be that superiors are less afraid of negative consequences when communicating in a threatening way, thus they are more likely to use the Expressive MDL. On the contrary, subordinates may use a more Conventional approach because there is less risk involved. Indeed, Coleman and Deutsch (2000) stated that during conflict, superiors and subordinates' approaches to the disagreement and their openness in communication may be affected by their position of power. Further studies should be conducted to test this hypothesis.

There are some limitations in this study that should be noted. First, the sample of this study was restricted to the employees of one university, thus the results obtained from that segment cannot be

generalized to the population. Also, in the second scenario offered in the questionnaire (RT2), one of the groups was composed of a very small number of participants ($N = 11$ for Expressive), which considerably reduced the statistical power to detect differences in the medians.

Future studies would benefit by obtaining a greater number of participants and a more representative sample of the general population. Additionally, further research is needed to explain the nature of the relationship that was observed between MDL selection from the perspectives of the superior and the subordinate.

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Appendix A

Recruitment Message

Michelle Maura is a candidate for a Master's of Science degree in Communication & Media Technologies at the Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT). Under the direction of Dr. Rudy Pugliese and Dr. Andrew Quagliata from RIT, Michelle is conducting a survey about communication style in the workplace. If, after reading the message below, you are willing to participate, please click on the following link: (link included here).

In order to participate in this study you must meet the following criteria:

You must be currently employed full-time.

Participation in this research project requires a time commitment of 15 to 20 minutes. You will be asked to complete a short survey that asks you to respond to a hypothetical scenario, share information about your employment, and answer a few demographic questions. Your participation is entirely voluntary; you may skip any questions that you do not want to answer.

For your participation in the study you will have the option to enter a raffle to win one of two \$50 dollar gift certificates for Amazon.

If you choose to participate, all of your information will be kept confidential. The only personal information that will be collected is your first name and telephone number. This information will only be used to contact you to inform you if you have won the raffle. No one other than Michelle and Gabriela Sosa (trained coder) will be able to see your responses and no identifying information will be included in the analysis.

If you have any questions about the survey, please feel free to email Michelle at mmm1668@rit.edu.do.

Thank you!

Michelle Maura
Candidate for M. S. in Communication & Media Technologies
Department of Communication
Rochester Institute of Technology

Appendix B
Questionnaire

1. Informed Consent:

You are invited to join a research study that seeks to understand differences in communication styles within the workplace. You will be asked to complete a short survey that should take approximately 15 to 20 minutes. You may stop participating at any time without penalty.

Risks: There are no anticipated risks from completing this study.

Benefits: This study will result in a better understanding of the use of communication styles in the workplace.

Confidentiality: Your name will not be associated with the data obtained from this study and will not be published. Every effort will be made to keep your responses and other personal information confidential. Information regarding the study will be stored on a computer protected in accordance with RIT's information security policy.

Incentives: Participants will be compensated for their time by having the option of entering a raffle to win one of two \$50 dollar gift certificates for purchases at Amazon.

Rights as a Research Participant: Participation in this study is voluntary. You do not have to participate and you may leave the study at any time. Deciding not to participate or deciding to leave during the study will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits, nor will it will harm your relationship to the individuals conducting the study or RIT. If you decide to leave the study, simply exit the survey website.

Contact Information: You may contact the investigator at mmm1668@rit.edu if you have questions or concerns.

Click on Agree to continue.

2. Are you currently employed?

Yes

No

If so,

Full-time

Part time

3. How old were you on your last birthday?

4. How many years of full-time work experience do you have? ____

5. Using the following 5-point scale,

- 1= Strongly Disagree
- 2= Disagree
- 3= Neither Agree Nor Disagree
- 4= Agree
- 5= Strongly Agree

Rate your level of agreement with the following statements:

- A. The work I do is meaningful to me.
- B. I am confident about my ability to do my job.
- C. I have significant autonomy in determining how I do my job.
- D. My impact on what happens in my department is large.
- E. My job activities are personally meaningful to me.
- F. I am self-assured about my capabilities to perform my work.
- G. I can decide on my own how to go about doing my work.
- H. I have a great deal of control over what happens in my department.
- I. The work I do is meaningful to me.
- J. I have mastered the skills necessary for my job.
- K. I have considerable opportunity for independence and freedom in how I do my job.
- L. I have significant influence over what happens in my department.

6. Imagine that you are working on a very important team project within your current job. Your annual merit increase will depend to a great extent on how well the team project turns out. You were assigned to your group by your supervisor who also designated you to be the leader of the team. Your duties as group leader will include reporting to your supervisor about the individual contributions of each person on your team.

One of your teammates (whose name is Ron) has been causing some problems. Ron seldom makes it to team meetings on time and entirely skipped one meeting without even letting the team know in advance. When Ron missed that meeting, you overheard some of your colleagues commenting on Ron's performance, but you decided to give him the benefit of the doubt. At the next meeting Ron arrived late

but apologized for missing the previous meeting and mentioned something about family problems. Ron offered to do all the background work on one important aspect of the project, saying he had a special interest in that area.

The project deadline is next week. The team plans to put together the final details of the report at a meeting scheduled for tomorrow afternoon. Ron stops into your office today and says he doesn't have his background work done and can't get it finished before the meeting. He says he just needs more time.

Use the following space to respond to this hypothetical situation by typing exactly what you would say to Ron.

7. Imagine that you working on an important project at work. This project is in an area of your expertise and you are really passionate about it, so much so that you have been putting in a lot of extra hours at the office lately. Your direct supervisor stops by your office on a Monday morning to get an update on your progress. You inform your supervisor that you have developed a plan to complete the project by Friday and expect to see excellent results. You are excited to complete the project because you are scheduled to take a one-week vacation next week.

Your supervisor, who is very smart but not an expert in the area of your task, suggests an alternate process for completing the project. You believe that your superior's suggestion will result in two additional weeks work on the project, higher costs, and unsatisfactory results.

What would you say to your supervisor? Use the following space and type exactly what you would say. Do not describe the general action you would take—instead try to put in your own words what you would actually say.

8. What is your current job title?

9. How many years have you been working in your current position?

- 1-5 years
- 6-10 years
- 11-15 years
- 16-20 years
- More than 20 years

10. Which level of hierarchy best represents your current position?

- Top Management
- Middle Management
- Lower Management
- Operational (Non-management employees)

11. What is your highest level of education?

- Graduated from high School
- Some college
- Graduated from college
- Some graduate school

- Completed graduate degree
- Other (please specify) _____

12. What is your gender?

- Male
- Female

13. What is your nationality?

14. Please enter your preferred method of contact, in order to notify you in case you win the raffle.
(Entering the raffle is optional.)

Appendix C

Message Design Logic Coding Procedures

The following coding procedures based on Quagliata's study (2012), adapted from O'Keefe (1988) and Caughlin et al. (2008), should be used to determine whether responses are Expressive, Conventional, or Rhetorical. Assign each response a number between 1 and 3 (Expressive=1, Conventional=2, Rhetorical=3).

General Rule: Coding consist of a holistic assessment of the message and its overall characteristics. Statements indicating what the participant would do should be coded as if the person carried out the action. For instance, "I would tell him that there isn't any more time," or "I would ask what I could do to help." Exclude what participants indicate that they would do at a later time.

Signs that the message is Expressive:

- Does not move towards accomplishing the task (i.e., does not move towards solution in any way).
- Includes a non-contingent threat (e.g., "You're fired!", "We'll decide what we'll do to you after this is over.")
- Insults or hurtful comments (e.g. "You're an idiot!")
 - Sarcasm
 - Contentious
- Removal from group (cutting Ron out of the process; "give us what you've got done and we're taking over for the rest!")
- Explicit criticism ONLY (e.g., You did a terrible job managing this part of our project!), without progress towards goal completion) OR DESTRUCTIVE CRITICISM
 - Complaints that the hearer can do nothing about
- Includes a series of questions geared toward one's own interest (e.g., "Do you even care about this project?" "What have you been doing?" How much time do you need? 12 hours? 24 hours? A year?")
- Focuses solely on reacting to prior events (e.g., only talks about what the message recipient did not do or things that cannot be changed)

If YES to any item above, code 1 for Expressive. If NO to each item above, continue.

Signs that the message is Conventional:

- Moves towards accomplishing the task without seeking consensus with Ron.
- Offers ONLY scripted, obligatory, conventional assistance or supportive statements (e.g., "That's too bad", "I'm sorry to hear that") without indicating a commitment to take on the situation together).
- Mentions the responsibility of the hearer (rights, obligations) ONLY or WITH DIRECTIVE to solving task

- Use of “we” or “us” does not automatically make something collaborative. If the speaker is laying down the law and explaining what will happen next, this is directive, even if we/us language is used.
- Can include implied/indirect reference to the importance of people fulfilling obligation.
- Explicit criticism (e.g., “You did a terrible job managing this part of our project!”) is okay, IF COUPLED WITH progress towards completing the task (i.e., holding someone accountable is okay, but needs progress towards goal completion).
- Contingent threats (e.g., “Get this done OR ELSE!”)
- Directs hearer with solutions or commands to solve the problem (e.g., “I don’t know how you’re going to get it done, but finish your work before the meeting!”)

If YES to any item above, code 2 for Conventional. If NO to each item above, continue.

Signs that the message is Rhetorical:

- Moves towards accomplishing the task by collaboratively working towards solution.
- Supports that goes beyond obligatory statements and focuses on exploring, acknowledging, legitimating, or elaborating on the other person’s feelings.
- Can mention the responsibility of the hearer (hold accountable, referencing responsibility, obligation, etc.), but must also move towards resolving the problem by collaboratively working towards a solution).
 - Any threats (contingent or otherwise) preclude Rhetorical
- Elaboration of how to achieve goals
- Indicates a collective remedy (define the situation as “our problem” or “our solution”).
- Attempts to achieve consensus.

Appendix D

Tables

Table 1

Median Scores per Group Across Dimensions of Empowerment

	Ron Test 1		
	Expressive	Conventional	Rhetorical
Meaning	9.00	8.00	9.00
Competence	14.00	13.00	13.00
Self Determination	12.00	12.00	12.50
Impact	11.00	10.00	10.00
Empowerment	11.00	11.00	11.00
	Ron Test 2		
Meaning	8.00	9.00	9.50
Competence	14.00	13.00	13.00
Self Determination	12.00	12.50	12.00
Impact	8.00	10.00	10.00
Empowerment	10.25	11.00	11.00

Table 2

Differences in Empowerment Levels Between Groups

	Ron Test 1		
	χ^2	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Meaning	1.761	2	.415
Competence	1.657	2	.437
Self Determination	.185	2	.912
Impact	1.054	2	.590
Empowerment	1.299	2	.522
	Ron Test 2		
Meaning	5.257	2	.072
Competence	.526	2	.769
Self Determination	1.375	2	.503
Impact	2.946	2	.229
Empowerment	1.887	2	.389

Table 3

*Contingency Table RT1 * RT2*

		RT2				
		1	2	3	Total	
		Expressive	Conventional	Rhetorical		
RT1	1 Expressive	Recount	5	33	7	45
		% within RT1	11.10%	73.30%	15.60%	100.00%
		% within RT2	45.50%	22.80%	17.50%	23.00%
		Corrected residuals	1.8	-0.1	-0.9	
	2 Conventional	Recount	4	81	14	99
		% within RT1	4.00%	81.80%	14.10%	100.00%
		% within RT2	36.40%	55.90%	35.00%	50.50%
		Corrected residuals	-1	2.5	-2.2	
	3 Rhetorical	Recount	2	31	19	52
		% within RT1	3.80%	59.60%	36.50%	100.00%
		% within RT2	18.20%	21.40%	47.50%	26.50%
		Corrected residuals	-0.6	-2.8	3.4	
Total	Recount	11	145	40	196	
	% within RT1	5.60%	74.00%	20.40%	100.00%	
	% within RT2	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	