

MESSAGE DESIGN LOGICS THEORY: TESTING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF RHETORICAL MESSAGES

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ABSTRACT

The theory of Message Design Logics divides messages into three levels: Expressive, Conventional and Rhetorical. The theory predicts that message receivers should perceive the Rhetorical level as most effective. The researchers tested this proposal with 177 subjects who were currently employed or had work experience evaluating the effectiveness of supervisors' corrective feedback messages. Findings have implications for improving supervisors' ability to deliver corrective feedback.

Key Words: Message Design Logics theory, supervisory communication, managerial communication, corrective feedback, performance management

INTRODUCTION

Organizations in the U.S. invest billions every year in improving the skills of supervisors to work effectively with their direct reports (ATD, 2014). Much of this training centers on improving communication. Because organizations often promote those who are best at their work

into supervisory positions expecting that they will be able to transfer their knowledge and skill to their direct reports, assuring the skill and ability to accomplish this transfer requires building skill in delivering feedback, especially corrective feedback. Performance and effectiveness vary widely when it comes to corrective feedback designed to achieve a change in someone else's behavior. If organizations have a reliable way to improve the skills of supervisors to correct the behavior of direct reports, the likelihood increases of improved performance and productivity.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In general, the position of the supervisor as a primary and important source of feedback is well established by research (Vecchio & Sussman, 1991; Becker & Klimoski, 1989). Sullivan (1988) asserted that language and speech acts are the heart of motivating employees, and previous research substantiates that good communication is essential to managing people well (Penley, Alexander, Jernigan & Henwood, 1991; Luthans and Larson, 1986; Wodarski and Palmer, 1985). Communication scholars define corrective feedback as a "regulative message," delivered with the object of changing behavior versus changing attitudes, opinions, or beliefs (O'Keefe & McCornack, 1987; Seibold, Cantrill & Meyers, 1985). Feedback given by a supervisor to a subordinate is, thus, goal-oriented communication.

O'Keefe and McCornack's (1987) theory of Message Design Logics seeks to answer the question of why some situations, such as regulative (corrective feedback) messages, elicit enormous variations in messages. O'Keefe and Delia (1988) agree with other scholars that successful communicators form messages using skills associated with the task at hand. They further state that, as communicators become more sophisticated about the ways in which they communicate, they begin to appreciate that they may call upon characteristics of the audience to accomplish their purposes. In a corrective feedback situation, the desire to improve performance would motivate the supervisor to compose and deliver a message, but this goal does not automatically specify the form of the message. The supervisor would make choices about message formation dictated by his/her communication skill level. This skill level is bound up with individual concepts of how communication processes operate, including specific problems posed by specific targets.

O'Keefe (1988) proposed that messages arise from three fundamental premises in reasoning about communication and called them Message Design Logics. Communicators use these premises to reason from goals to message, that is, to consider what they wish their communication to accomplish and to form a suitable message. She theorized three levels of premises, Expressive, Conventional and Rhetorical, and asserted that they formed a developmental progression with each level a prerequisite to the next. Communicators at the Rhetorical level will thus have progressed developmentally through the Expressive and Conventional levels.

Expressive Logic.

The fundamental premise at the Expressive level is that language is a medium for expressing thoughts and feelings. As defined by O'Keefe (1988), "the idea that messages might be systematically designed to cause particular reactions is alien (and possibly reprehensible) to the Expressive communicator—messages are understood as simple expressions of beliefs" (p. 85). Thus, an example of a message at the Expressive design logic level is the following: "It's important to me that you do your best, but lately your work has been substandard. I'm disappointed in you!"

Conventional Logic.

At the Conventional level, the source conceives communication as “a game played cooperatively, according to socially Conventional rules and procedures” (O’Keefe, 1988, p. 86). Conventional communicators equate communication competence with appropriateness, and consider communication useful “when it is a Conventionally defined means to achieve one’s ends” (O’Keefe, 1988, p. 87). O’Keefe (1988) further notes that messages formed from Conventional logic are identifiable by typical content and structure. That is, Conventional messages often include “mentions of felicity conditions in the core speech act, the structure of rights and obligations that give force to the speech act being performed or the mitigating circumstances or conditions that would bear on the structure of rights and obligations within the situation” (p. 87). Thus, an example of a message at the Conventional design logic level is, “You must wear safety goggles while working in this area. That’s the rule.”

Rhetorical Logic.

At the Rhetorical level, communication is “the creation and negotiation of social selves and situations” (O’Keefe, 1988; O’Keefe and Delia, 1988; O’Keefe and McCornack, 1987). Within Rhetorical Message Design Logic, “knowledge of Conventional social forms and relations is subsumed within a view of selves and situations as mutable rather than fixed” (O’Keefe, 1988, p. 87). Rather than seeing individuals and situations boxed in by a Conventional system of rules, and rather than seeing meaning in messages as fixed, Rhetorical communicators regard all meaning as a matter of social negotiation and of role play in which they may rehearse themselves. Within this view, the process of communication consists of coordination and negotiation. O’Keefe (1988) notes that Rhetorical communicators place primary importance on consensus and interpersonal harmony. For supervisors communicating at the Rhetorical level of Message Design Logic, achieving behavior change is a process of incorporating characteristics of the subordinate so that change is accomplished with minimal damage to self-esteem and relationship. An example of a message at the Rhetorical design logic level is the following: “I’d like to sit down with you and go over your project. I hope that through discussing it, I might get a better idea about exactly what it is that you expected it to look like.”

Kacmar, Wayne and Wright (2009) investigated the role of impression management in achieving positive results from a feedback situation. They cite research demonstrating that, for feedback offered by a supervisor to be accepted and acted upon, the subordinate must view the supervisor as a credible, expert source. The researchers used an experimental design with 84 subjects that manipulated two independent variables: impression management (present, absent) and performance feedback (positive/negative). Their results indicated that impression management tactics influence the impression subordinates hold of their supervisors, and indicated positive outcomes as evidenced by the higher liking, similarity and leadership ability ratings provided by the communication receivers. Building on Kacmar et al.’s (2009) results, the present research investigated whether higher levels of Message Design Logics contribute to the formation of a positive relationship, and, specifically, that use of the Rhetorical level assists the supervisor in creating relationships and credibility.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Since O’Keefe (1988) proposed the theory of Message Design Logics, researchers have used it to test its assertions and to extend its implications. Hullman (2004) noted that most studies involving Message Design Logics focus on persuasive strategies, and her study investigated the effects of motives other than persuasion on college students. The study employed a two-stage

strategy used in many studies involving the theory, with Round 1 producing messages and Round 2 testing the messages. Hullman (2004) found that Message Design Logics may not predict communication competence in friendship relationships, and, so, may be most suited to persuasion. Forrest (2008) applied the theory to a study of secondary school mathematics teachers who ranged in experience and school setting. The study found evidence of all three levels, and, as the theory predicts, evidence of a connection to knowledge and beliefs about verbal communication.

Conflict Situations.

O’Keefe, Lambert and Lambert (1997) applied the theory to the analysis and proposed solution for a conflict situation. The client for their investigation was a Research and Development unit of a pharmaceutical company. They used the theory to assess differences in communicator competence and message levels, and diagnosed the use of discussion rather than authority to resolve conflict as dysfunctional. The theory enabled them to suggest strategies to individuals for improving the communication flow and relationships within the group.

Organizational Situations.

Barbour, Jacocks and Wesner (2013) investigated Message Design Logics as an approach for creating effective messages to implement change. As in O’Keefe’s (1988) original research, their research situation involved a common element of persuasion, and they used the terminology of “message sophistication” to describe the escalating levels in the three Message Design Logics. They found that the communicator’s intensity of belief about the proposed change mediated the relationship between message sophistication and favoring/disfavoring the change. They also found that communicators produced messages that are more sophisticated for receivers of higher status. For future research directions, they recommended the investigation of message design as an ability versus Message Design Logics as a way of thinking about communication. For example, can communicators that are more capable identify when more sophisticated messages are warranted?

These studies extended the uses for the theory, assuming that higher levels of Message Design Logics would be more effective in achieving the communicator’s multiple goals. None of these studies, however, demonstrated the validity of theoretical assumptions of effectiveness in the critical one-on-one corrective feedback conversation between supervisor and subordinate.

Willihnganz, Hart and Willard (2001) applied the theory to a consideration of how organizations can maintain control and efficiency while cultivating an atmosphere of questioning and innovation, in essence, managing competing goals. They asserted that Expressive communication would work against such an atmosphere, while Conventional and Rhetorical perspectives are critical to an organization that values dissensus for reasons of innovation. They concluded that Rhetorical communicators have the capacity to move disputes outside of prescribed norms and to potentially general novel arguments and solutions. The strength of the Rhetorical communicator lies in three of their ideas about communication: (1) they continually seek ways to meet not only their own, but others’ goals; (2) they see intersubjective understanding as a goal; and (3) they can tolerate inferentially incompatible information. All three ideas would increase a supervisor’s opportunity to craft a corrective feedback message with the potential to change behavior.

Message Effectiveness.

Lambert and Gillespie (1994) used a two-stage research methodology to, first, generate messages, and, second, to validate the effectiveness of messages at the three levels. The center of their research was an exploration of the effectiveness of messages produced by pharmacy students to patients seeking compliance from patients with treatment for hypertension. They also identified eleven content themes from the messages produced. They found clear support for the effectiveness of Rhetorical-level messages in gaining compliance with treatment suggestions.

Peterson and Albrecht (1996) also used a two-stage methodology to test the role of empathy, trust, and support in supervisor/subordinate pairs. They investigated communication between eight nurse/managers and 46 staff nurses, matching communication levels between the pairs. They found that individuals using Rhetorical message design logic were most effective in creating supportive messages, but also found that the combination of two Rhetorical-level communicators produced less effective communication. They speculated that the combination of two Rhetorical communicators might produce a potential interaction that could result in perceptions of ingratiation and manipulation on the part of the message receiver.

Caughlin, Brashers, Ramey, Kosenko, Donovan-Kicken and Bute (2008) used the same two-stage research design with a population of college students to investigate effectiveness of HIV-positive disclosure messages, and found that Rhetorical-level messages were perceived as most effective. They also tested O'Keefe's (1988) finding that women produce more Rhetorical-level messages than men, and found that men were more likely than women to produce Expressive messages, and that women were more likely than men to produce Conventional messages. They found no significant difference between men and women for Rhetorical messages. As O'Keefe (1988) noted originally in proposing the theory, they also noted the role of situation in the production of differences in messages.

Scott, Caughlin, Donovan-Kicken and Mikucki-Enyart (2013) used a two-stage study with a population of college students to investigate message differences in the disclosure of a depressive disorder diagnosis, and found that Rhetorical-level messages were most effective. They noted the significance of the multiple-goals perspective in the preference and effectiveness of Rhetorical messages.

MESSAGE DESIGN LOGICS THEORY AND SUPERVISORY COMMUNICATION

O'Keefe (1988) used samples of college students to test Message Design Logics and related theory regarding multi-functional goals by posing a persuasive situation in which the respondents produced a message that was designed to change the behavior of an under-performing group member in a class project.

O'Neill, Hynes and Wilson (2013) applied O'Keefe's theory to actual workplace interactions between supervisors and subordinates. The study collected messages from working supervisors in response to a typical corrective feedback situation centered on tardiness to work, and the researchers classified respondents' messages into the three levels of Message Design Logics. The results of this study indicated that the majority of the supervisors' messages fell into the Conventional category. That is, most of the supervisors attempted not only to correct the imaginary subordinate's behavior but also to discuss the rules and policies set in place for such occurrences in a polite and professional manner.

A second finding of O'Neill, et al.'s study was that length of experience as a supervisor appeared to have an effect on the type of corrective feedback given. The messages classified as using Rhetorical Logic when dealing with the employee's issue had all been composed by

respondents who had at least five years of experience in supervision. This finding supports O’Keefe’s (1988) assertion that the levels are developmentally “stepped.” Additional time and experience on the job would seem to equate to learning and skill development, leading to skills at the Rhetorical level. Less experienced supervisors’ feedback tended to focus on reactionary responses (Expressive Logic) and rule-based responses (Conventional Logic). The researchers concluded from these results that newer supervisors may not understand the dynamics of the work environment yet, which limits their ability to create context with the subordinates that is necessary for Rhetorical Logic.

RATIONALE FOR THE CURRENT STUDY

Previous rounds of research have verified the theory by collecting and classifying messages, and by confirming that the Rhetorical level would be most effective for message recipients, particularly in persuasive situations. While previous research focused on organizational and healthcare settings, none considered in particular the supervisor/subordinate pair in a context of corrective feedback. The current study sought to verify the theory in this situation by asking respondents to evaluate the effectiveness of supervisors’ statements in response to a case situation centered on tardiness to work. The respondents’ task was to evaluate the supervisors’ messages from a subordinate’s perspective. Evidence of the effectiveness of more sophisticated message design would support the value of training invested in improving supervisors’ abilities to manage performance with feedback and would validate the assertions of the theory.

In other words, the respondents were asked to rank order statements that their supervisor might make to them about their own tardiness. The instructions were, “Please rank each set of three statements according to how willing you would be to change your behavior based on the statement.”

Research questions were the following:

1. Which level of message design – Rhetorical, Conventional, or Expressive -- do employees prefer when receiving corrective feedback?
2. How does the amount of work experience affect employees’ preferences for corrective feedback that is at the Rhetorical, Conventional, or Expressive levels?
3. How does employees’ gender affect their preferences for corrective feedback that is at the Rhetorical, Conventional, or Expressive levels?
4. How does their own supervisory experience affect employees’ preferences for corrective feedback that is at the Rhetorical, Conventional, or Expressive levels?

RESEARCH METHODS

The following section describes the current study’s sample and research procedures.

Sample.

The study sample consisted of 177 undergraduate business students attending a public university in the Southwestern U.S. The students were enrolled in a required semester-long, junior-level course in Business Communication. The study was conducted during the first week of the course.

All students who agreed to participate were either currently employed or had past work experience. Demographic information for the research sample appears in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic Data of Respondents

Gender	48.6% male	51.4% female
Current Employment Status	68.9% employed	31.1% unemployed
Supervisory Experience	43.5% yes	56.5% no
Currently Supervisor/Manager	15.3% yes	84.7% no
Years of Work Experience	76% less than 6 yrs	24% more than 6 yrs

As Table 1 shows, the respondents were almost evenly split between male and female. More than two-thirds of the sample were currently working, either full or part-time, while attending the university. The most frequently mentioned type of work that respondents said they do or have done in the past was retail sales (n=102), followed by office work (n=87), food service (n=75), childcare (n=25), and bookkeeping (n=20). The majority (57 percent) had no supervisory experience, and less than 15 percent were currently employed in supervisory or managerial roles.

Procedures.

After reading and signing an Informed Consent document, the respondents completed a brief demographic questionnaire. Next, they were given a brief case that put them in the position of an employee who had been late to work on several occasions (Appendix 1). According to the case situation, their supervisor was giving them feedback that was designed to correct their tardiness. The respondents were asked to react to the likely effectiveness of each of nine statements. The instructions were, “On the following pages, you will find three sets of three statements that the supervisor might make to you about your tardiness. Please rank each set of three statements from most to least effective, using 1 for the most effective and 3 for the least effective according to how likely they would be to change your behavior at work.”

The corrective feedback statements were written by actual supervisors in a manufacturing company and had been collected by O’Neill, Hynes, and Wilson (2013). The supervisors’ statements were presented to the students in three groups of three. One statement in each group was at the Rhetorical level, one was at the Conventional level, and the third was at the Expressive level. The order of statements varied within groups. That is, the first group of feedback statements was R, C, E; the second group was C, E, R; and the third group was E, R, C. By presenting three sets of responses to be ranked, with the levels appearing in varying order, any potential primacy-recency effect was eliminated. The three sets of supervisor statements that respondents were asked to rank appear in Appendix 2.

RESULTS

RQ 1: Which level of message design – Rhetorical, Conventional, or Expressive -- do employees prefer when receiving corrective feedback?)

Table 2 summarizes the overall number of respondents who selected the Expressive, Conventional, and Rhetorical messages as the most effective for the case. The table displays the distribution of responses across the nine (three sets of three) statements. As the table shows, 105 of the respondents preferred the Rhetorical message in each group of three statements as the ones most likely to achieve a change in their behavior. Thirty-five preferred the Expressive message most often, and 33 preferred the Conventional message most often among the nine statements.

Thus, the data provide evidence that the answer to the first research question is “Rhetorical.” That is, 59.3 percent of the respondents in the study chose the Rhetorical statements as the most likely to improve their workplace behavior, compared to the Conventional and the Expressive statements. It is interesting to note that the Conventional responses were selected as the most effective slightly less often than the Expressive statements were, with 19.8 percent of the study sample ranking the Expressive statements as most effective, and 18.6 percent ranking the Conventional statements as most effective. Message Design Logics theory predicts that Conventional statements would be preferred over Expressive.

Table 2. Summary of Statement Rankings

	N	%
Rhetorical	105	59.3
Expressive	35	19.8
Conventional	33	18.6
Undecided	4	2.3
Total	177	100

RQ2: How does their amount of work experience affect employees’ preferences for corrective feedback that is at the Rhetorical, Conventional, or Expressive levels?

Table 3 summarizes results by respondents’ years of work experience. The data indicate that Rhetorical messages were overwhelmingly preferred by respondents whether they had less than six years of work experience (60.7 percent) or more than six years of work experience (54.8 percent). Expressive messages were preferred by just 18.5 percent of the respondents with less than six years of work experience, and 23.8 percent of the respondents who had more than six years of work experience. Thus it appears that amount of work experience was not a factor in the study sample’s evaluations of message effectiveness. Interestingly, the Conventional messages were preferred less often than the Expressive messages by the respondents with more than six years of work experience, which again is inconsistent with Message Design Logics theory.

Table 3. Summary of Statement Rankings by Years of Work Experience

	0 – 6 Years	%	6 + Years	%
Rhetorical	82	60.7	23	54.8
Expressive	25	18.5	10	23.8
Conventional	27	20.0	6	14.3
Undecided	1	.07	3	7.1
Total	135	100	42	100

RQ3: How does employees’ gender affect their preferences for corrective feedback that is at the Rhetorical, Conventional, or Expressive levels?

The respondents’ evaluations of the corrective feedback statements were compared by gender. Results are shown in Table 4. The data indicate that the majority of the respondents -- 60.5 percent of the males and 58.2 percent of the females -- preferred the Rhetorical-level statements. Slight differences by gender were found for the Conventional statements, with 22.0

percent of the female respondents preferring them over the Expressive statements (17.6 percent). On the other hand, the male respondents preferred the Expressive statements over the Conventional (22.1 percent v. 15.1 percent). Thus, the researchers conclude that gender was not a significant factor in the employees' rankings of corrective feedback statements.

Table 4. Summary of Statement Rankings by Gender

	Male	%	Female	%
Rhetorical	52	60.5	53	58.2
Expressive	19	22.1	16	17.6
Conventional	13	15.1	20	22.0
Undecided	2	2.3	2	2.2
Total	86	100	91	100

RQ4: How does their own supervisory experience affect employees' preferences for corrective feedback that is at the Rhetorical, Conventional, or Expressive levels?

The researchers investigated the possibility that respondents' preferences for supervisor feedback might be influenced by their own supervisory experience. Therefore, the researchers compared the rankings of the statements by respondents with supervisory or managerial experience with those by respondents with no supervisory or managerial experience. Results are shown in Table 5. As the table shows, differences between rankings for these two groups were negligible, with both groups vastly ranking Rhetorical messages highest (58.4 percent with experience and 60.0 percent without experience as supervisors/managers. Interestingly, the respondents who had supervisory experience were more likely to prefer Expressive messages (24.7 percent) than Conventional (14.3 percent), while the Expressive messages were least preferred (16.0 percent) among those respondents who had no supervisory experience.

Table 5. Summary by Supervisory/Managerial Experience

	Yes	%	No	%
Rhetorical	45	58.4	60	60.0
Expressive	19	24.7	16	16.0
Conventional	11	14.3	22	22.0
Undecided	2	2.6	2	2.0
Total	77	100	100	100

DISCUSSION

As in previous research in other settings, the results of this study verified the assertion in Message Design Logics theory that a Rhetorical-level corrective message has the most potential for achieving an improvement in employee behavior. Demographic variables of gender, years of work experience, and years of supervisory/managerial experience did not appear to influence these results. That is, both male and female employees, those with little and considerable years of workforce experience, and those with and without supervisory experience preferred Rhetorical-level corrective messages over both Conventional-level and Expressive-level messages. Gender effects noted in previous studies were connected to the generation rather than the reception of messages.

The low ranking of Conventional-level messages across subgroups was unexpected, however. The data indicate that, next to Rhetorical-level messages, the supervisors preferred Expressive over Conventional statements. Males preferred Expressive over Conventional statements, as well. Finally, respondents who had worked more than six years preferred Expressive over Conventional statements. Reasons for this apparent preference for brief, emotion-laden corrective feedback over rules-centered corrective feedback are unknown and bear further study.

Possible explanations might include the interaction of the receiver's Message Design Logics level and the message level, as noted in Peterson and Albrecht (1996). O'Keefe, Lambert and Lambert (1997) also found that combinations of Message Design Logics levels in communicators and recipients can be the source of conflict in a work group. Negative reactions to Rhetorical-level messages might have resulted from the Rhetorical level of the recipient, but the researchers in the current study did not determine Message Design Logics levels of the survey respondents. Additionally, O'Keefe (1988) predicted that women would create more Rhetorical messages than men, and, while this assertion was not supported in subsequent research, an effect may exist in the recipient's gender.

Communication style might also influence recipients' preference for an Expressive message. Lashbrook, Buchholz, Lashbrook and Larsen (1979) characterized people high in assertiveness and low in responsiveness (emotional expressiveness) as Drivers who are aggressive, fast-paced and directive. Leimbach (n.d.) suggested that Driver-style employees want managers to be sincere and direct, so these employees prefer to hear a straightforward message. Lashbrook, et al. (1979) noted that those with differing communication style preferences may have difficulty adapting to each other, so the combination of communicator/receiver can influence the perception of the message. Future research might examine the interaction of communication style with the level of Message Design Logics.

Hart (2002) considered the influence of culture on Message Design Logics, both from the communicator and the receiver points of view. She speculated that the three Logics may differ frequently in intercultural interactions. She asserted that white, middle and upper middle class culture in the United States and similar cultures may be most likely to facilitate development of Rhetorical logics, because this culture tends to value talk, assertiveness, independent thinking and well-managed disagreement. Differences in cultural background of respondents may explain some of the differences in results, since what is regarded as competent may be in the mind of the message evaluator.

LIMITATIONS

Future research might strengthen the design of this study with the addition of more cases for the respondents' consideration. Inconsistencies among the rankings of each set of feedback statements (E, C, or R) in the present study varied widely among the sets. Increasing the number of feedback statements used as prompts might diminish any effects of the case on the subjects' rankings. Future studies might also investigate interaction between the Message Design Logic level of the respondent versus the message level as an explanation for this variation, and investigate the influence of cultural orientation on the effectiveness of messages.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

These findings offer workplace managers and trainers the opportunity, first, to gauge the current level of thinking of candidates for supervisory positions. Existing skill in a critical

supervisory responsibility, that is, managing performance with corrective feedback, can increase early effectiveness of new supervisors and identify promising candidates for promotion. Second, trainers can develop candidates in the training room through the three levels to a skill level that enables more success in the acceptance and application of corrective feedback. These findings validate approaches currently in use in supervisory training that take into account multiple goals, including preserving the quality of interpersonal relationship while gaining improvement in job performance. Organizations training supervisors to produce sophisticated messages that address multiple goals can be confident that they are teaching effective behavior. Better performance from the supervisor in providing corrective feedback ensures better performance from direct reports and improved overall organizational performance.

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APPENDIX 1

CORRECTIVE FEEDBACK CASE

You are one of five employees. The productivity of your group is important to the success of the company, and your supervisor regularly reviews the performance of all members of your group against goals.

Imagine that you have been late to work on three occasions. You are not the top performer in your group, but you make a solid contribution to results. You are the only one in your group with attendance problems, and you suspect that two of the other four employees have spoken to your supervisor about your tardiness. Everyone in your group works together to get the results expected, and, when one person isn't there, the group gets off to a slow start for the day.

You know the company has a policy about tardiness, and you are not surprised when your supervisor asks to speak to you.

On the following pages, you will find three sets of three statements that the supervisor might make to you about your tardiness. Please rank each set of three statements according to how willing you would be to change your behavior based on the statement.

APPENDIX 2

SUPERVISOR STATEMENTS FOR RANKING

Rhetorical Statements

Our group performance is based on everyone's contribution. The performance depends not only on how the group meets goals and expectations from day to day, but also on our attendance. The attendance directly affects our goals. I've noticed that you've been late and I'm certain you don't want to be viewed as someone who lets the group down. The group is very passionate at achieving the goals set in front of us and you don't want us to underperform by not meeting the goal. I'm asking you to think about your attendance and not let the entire group down. I'm willing and ready to help you with anything I could possibly do to assist in attendance improvement. Do you have any questions or concerns?

I wanted to meet with you today to talk about how things are going. How do you think things are going? The group needs the support of everyone to make sure we are doing a great job every time. I've noticed that you have been late a few times and wanted to talk to you about it. Is there anything I can do to help? As we have discussed before, you are essential to the performance of this team. Again, please let me know what we can do to help this situation from re-occurring.

I have it on record you have been late three times this week. Is there something I need to be aware of that is making you late? School? Car? If available, can I offer a later shift? Just to be clear on the attendance and tardy policy, I have brought a copy for us to review. You are a valuable member of this team and being on time makes all of us successful together. When one or more team members are late, we need to work harder to meet our goals. Do you have any questions or concerns? Anything else I can do to help?

Expressive Statements

It has come to my attention that you have been tardy a couple of times. This is unacceptable behavior and will not be tolerated. Should it happen again, I will be forced to write you up. I am going to document this conversation that we are having. It is imperative that you

arrive at work on time so that the team can get off to a strong start. The plant depends on your contribution and we, the team, do not want to let them down. Please let me know your comments, questions, or concerns.

I really need you to start showing up on time. Your tardiness is starting to affect your coworkers and it's beginning to send the wrong message. You're a great worker, and when you miss work or are late it affects our area negatively. I'm not going to give you a disciplinary action at this time, but I need you to be more mindful of your attendance. This is, however, the last warning you are going to receive. If you are late again, I will have to write you up.

If you are late one more time, you will be disciplined accordingly. Not only is your tardiness not fair to me, but it's not fair to everyone else on the team. You are no different than anyone else here. This is a business, and all employees are expected to show up on time ready to perform every day.

Conventional Statements

It's important for our group to abide by the policies of the company and to work effectively as a team. In order for this to happen, we have to be sure that everyone is here on time to begin and end our shifts. I thoroughly enjoy working with you and appreciate having you on my team. If there is anything I can do to help you regarding your tardiness, please let me know and I will be happy to assist. Please remember that you are a vital asset to this team, and I definitely want to see you succeed.

It is important that you show up for work on time for us to get off to a good start every day. Also, in order for us to remain consistently fair to everyone, we need to adhere to the attendance policy as written. It's the only way we can be consistent in the way we treat all employees.

I wanted to let you know that you do a great job. I do not want you to get a name for being late and we need to discuss this concern. As long as we can make sure you and everyone else is on time, we will not impact the teamwork needed for this production line. You let the team down when you are late and others have to fill in for you. It also costs the company money when someone has to stay over. Now that you have a better understanding how your attendance is impacting your team, can you start getting here on your scheduled time?

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Kathryn S. O'Neill enjoyed a career of 30+ years in Human Resource Development in various industry settings, including newspaper publishing, homebuilding, banking, and manufacturing, prior to beginning her career in academia. She earned her M.A. in communication and Ph.D. from Georgia State University, and the B.A. in journalism from Texas Tech University. She teaches business communication and interpersonal skills for business as an Assistant Professor in the College of Business Administration at Sam Houston State University, Huntsville, TX. Her research interests are communication dynamics for corrective feedback and the pedagogy of writing instruction.

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