

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 340 071

CS 507 679

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 TITLE The New Kid on the Block: A Qualitative Analysis of New Employee Communication and Uncertainty Reduction Behaviors.
 PUB DATE 91
 NOTE 38p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Speech Communication Association (77th, Atlanta, GA, October 31-November 3, 1991).
 PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)
 EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
 DESCRIPTORS Communication Research; *Employee Attitudes; *Employer Employee Relationship; *Interpersonal Communication; *Organizational Communication
 IDENTIFIERS Communication Behavior; *Communication Strategies; Research Suggestions; *Uncertainty Reduction

ABSTRACT

A study investigated the manner in which communication strategies (passive, active, and interactive) were used by new employees in the early stages of the employer-employee relationship to gain knowledge of their supervisors, thereby reducing uncertainty. Twenty-six full-time new employees from several organizations in the midwest were interviewed over a 5-week period. The interviews were taped and transcribed, and a content analysis was performed. Results showed that new employees found that, while passive strategies were more valuable than active ones, interactive strategies were superior to both for gaining information about their supervisors, and the use of interactive strategies increased over the 5-week period. Interactive strategies were used more as a method of gaining information about the supervisor as a person than as a supervisor. Findings also suggested that not all uncertainty reduction can be viewed as positive, since if what is learned about another individual is negative, the resulting effect on the relationship may also be negative. Further study on uncertainty reduction within organizational relationships is called for. (Three tables of data and 6 figures are included; there are 28 references listed and 2 appendixes contain the interview schedule and the coding sheet for interviews. (SR)

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THE NEW KID ON THE BLOCK: A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF NEW
EMPLOYEE COMMUNICATION AND UNCERTAINTY REDUCTION
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Running Head: New Employee Communication

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Abstract

This study investigated the manner in which communication strategies (e.g., passive, active, and interactive) are used by new employees in the early stages of the relationship to gain knowledge of their supervisors, thereby reducing uncertainty. Participants for the study included 26 full-time new employees from several organizations in the midwest. This study's results lend additional support to the extensive literature that already exists regarding the importance of uncertainty reduction to relational development, suggesting that further investigation of uncertainty reduction within the organizational relationship is warranted.

The New Kid on the Block: A Qualitative Analysis of New Employee Communication and Uncertainty Reduction Behaviors

In recent years, the study of strategic uses of communication to acquire information has primarily focused on the issue of uncertainty and uncertainty reduction. Born in the interpersonal tradition, the issue of uncertainty reduction and the accompanying strategies have historically centered its investigation on the processes a person uses in the initial interaction phase of a social, non-work relationship to gain knowledge of another person in order to achieve attributional confidence or predictability (Berger & Calabrese, 1975). From this initial work, Berger and others have extrapolated several strategies for acquiring social knowledge during initial (non-work) interactions. Essentially, these included passive, active and interactive strategies (e.g., Berger, 1979; Berger & Bradac, 1982; Berger & Kellerman, 1983; Kellerman & Berger, 1984). The study of such strategies in interpersonal relationships is requisite to understanding uncertainty reduction, which is crucial to understanding the dynamics of relational development (Berger, 1979).

Until recently, the study of uncertainty and the subsequent strategies in interpersonal relationships has primarily been confined to social-type relationships (e.g., marital, friendship, acquaintance). However, given that uncertainty reduction theory was initially developed as an explanation of how strangers use communication to acquire social information in interpersonal settings, it also seems plausible that this theory may be applicable in numerous other relational contexts as well. One type of relationship which parallels other new dyads is the new employee-supervisor relationship. The time has come for organizational scholars to begin testing the tenets of uncertainty reduction theory across types of relationships. Jablin (1987) recognized this need when he suggested the notion of communication strategies that "newcomers use to gather social and work-related information warrants investigation" (p. 723). Similarly, Lester (1987)

argued that the study of uncertainty reduction should be extended to the organizational setting, too. Indeed, numerous other scholars have suggested that uncertainty reduction theory should be examined in other areas of interpersonal communication research, namely organizational relationships (e.g., Falcione & Wilson, 1988; Jablin, 1987; Lester, 1987; Smircich & Calas, 1987).

This study investigated the manner in which communication strategies (e.g., passive, active, and interactive) are used by new employees in the early stages of the relationship to gain knowledge of their supervisors, thereby reducing uncertainty.

Review of Literature

New Employee Communication

When individuals first enter the organization, they are faced with making sense out of the new environment, establishing new relationships, and accomplishing a smooth transition into the organization. Recent studies labeled this as the process of organizational assimilation or socialization (e.g., Jablin & Krone, 1987; Jablin, 1984; Louis, 1980; VanMaanen, 1975). Organizational scholars have conceptualized the new employee's entry experience in two ways: knowledge-gaining and sense-making (Louis, 1980). Both types of experiences emerged from the perceived need created by the inherent lack of information available during the early days of employment, and both lead to the notion of uncertainty.

Using earlier assimilation research, Louis (1980) characterized this entry phase as one of stress and disorientation, whereby new employees learned the culture of the organization, gained needed information, and developed a definition of the situation. In other words, new employees devised a scheme for interpreting the day-to-day events in the organization. However, Louis found that newcomers often did not have access to pertinent information networks within the organization to develop such schemes. As Louis observed, "newcomers hold peripheral rather than central positions in the

inclusionary network. Over time, they may develop access and influence bases, but initially they are usually on the outside" (p. 236). Such findings are consistent with Jablin's (1984) study which suggested new employees experienced communication deprivation during the early days of the encounter phase. In his study, Jablin found that new employees were being deprived of organizational and job-related information.

Besides the inherent lack of information available to the newcomer, Louis (1980) suggested that sense-making was another issue regarding new employees during the entry/encounter experience. He explained that when an individual joins the organization, there is a need to engage in sense-making through accounts and attributions based on information available. These processes are related to both uncertainty reduction research (Berger & Calabrese, 1979) and attributional confidence research (Clatterbuck, 1979).

Louis's (1980) research suggested that the initial framework for sense-making (uncertainty reduction) by new employees may be inadequate due to the absence of relevant information about organizational, interpersonal, and personal histories. Moreover, when the newcomer enters the organization, he or she brings past experiences from other settings and tries to operate initially out of those meanings. As a result, sense-making from these experiences may be initially dysfunctional in the new setting. Hence, newcomers are compelled to plot their own internal cognitive maps through the use of various knowledge-gaining techniques which allow them to restructure and understand the local meanings and culture of the new organization (Louis, 1980).

To summarize, the sense-making of the new employee is one in which he or she assigns or attributes meaning to events happening within the organization, including the behaviors of the supervisor.

Uncertainty Reduction Strategies

In an extensive discussion of uncertainty reduction strategies, Berger (1979) provided the groundwork for three general categories of knowledge-gaining. These

strategies included passive, active, interactive, which might be used by one person to reduce the uncertainty of another.

The passive strategies are those in which the knowledge seeker gains information about a target person (the object of uncertainty) by unobtrusively observing him/her. Although the process of observation itself is not a "passive activity", the notion of passive strategies implies the observer neither interacts directly with the target, nor structures the target person's environment in any way.

Conversely, the active strategy demands considerable more activity. The active strategies involve two primary methods of gaining information about a target person. First, an individual may ask a third person information-gaining questions about the target person in order to reduce uncertainty. Second, the individual may structure the target's environment in order to see how the target person reacts (Berger, 1979). While the active strategies demand considerable more activity than the passive strategies, there is still no direct interaction between the observer and the target.

The interactive strategies are those in which the observer actually interacts with the target individual. Interactive strategies occur when "actors and observers engage in face-to-face communication" (Berger, 1979, p. 139). In this interactive mode, the observer becomes the participant-observer, and interacts directly with the target person. Historically, these interactional strategies have been found most useful for reducing uncertainty (Frankfurt, 1965; Gudykunst, 1985).

While the primary focus of the present study was to examine the nature of the relationship between uncertainty and information-seeking, a peripheral issue was explored concurrently: the potential effects of communication frequency on strategy selection.

Communication Frequency as a Mediating Factor

One of the factors which could mediate the level and type of uncertainty reduction strategies newcomers select is the amount of communication frequency or interaction which normally occurred from day-to-day between supervisor and subordinate. Indeed, when addressing how Uncertainty Reduction Theory could be expanded, Berger and Calabrese (1975) wrote "we feel that one critical construct which might be part of such an extension is frequency of contact" (p. 110).

In the early stages of the relationship, the desire for uncertainty reduction is particularly strong where the parties know little or nothing about one another. However, it is intuitive to say that such behaviors do not occur in a vacuum, but rather operate dependent upon a number of other variables, suggesting certain conditional factors may affect the extent to which a person becomes preoccupied with explaining another's actions or is able to engage in such reduction behavior. As Clatterbuck (1976) noted, "frequency and duration of contact during the period of 'knowing' the person could have significant effects on the possibility of information exchange" (p. 78).

Attempts to establish a consistent relationship between communication frequency and uncertainty have provided only mixed support for the notion. For example, while Gudykunst, Yang and Nishida (1985) and Parks and Adelman (1977) argued for a relationship between amount of verbal communication and uncertainty, only four of eleven tests they conducted were consistent with such a relationship. Further, Clatterbuck (1979) found only a weak, positive relationship between interaction and uncertainty reduction.

In summary, this review of literature examined new employee assimilation and what types of behaviors are expected during the encounter stage. Further, the literature attested to the importance of the subordinate's relationship with his/her superior.

Therefore, the following research questions were formulated for the study:

RQ1 - In what ways do new employees identify uncertainty in regards to their relationships with their supervisors?

RQ2 - To what extent do new employees use passive, active, and interactive type strategies to reduce uncertainty toward their supervisors?

RQ3 - In what way does communication activity affect uncertainty reduction strategy selection?

Methodology

Subjects

Participants for the study included interviewing full-time new employees (N=26) from several organizations in the midwest. These included an electronics manufacturing company, several retirement centers, and a midwestern university. These participants performed a wide variety of tasks, including clerical, assembly, nursing, food service, and sales.

Procedures

The period of analysis included the first five weeks of the newcomer's employment. To ensure representation of responses, the interviews were scheduled in a manner as to provide an even distribution throughout the five-week period, with approximately five interviews occurring each week (e.g., Week 1 = 5 interviews; Week 2 = 6 interviews; Week 3 = 5 interviews; Week 4 = 5 interviews; Week 5 = 5 interviews). A semi-standardized interview format was utilized for the study and validated through a review procedure (See Appendix A).

To make the data more amenable to analysis, a content analysis was performed. To do this, the interviews were taped and transcribed. Three coders were utilized for the analysis. After receiving an initial orientation to the constructs being studied, each coder read and coded one "practice" transcript using the coding frame in Appendix B. Upon

completion, the responses were compared and discussed among the coders to identify where differences in interpretations had occurred. To insure that uniformity among the coders had been achieved, after coding the first three transcripts, the intercoder reliabilities were computed at .87 on the continuous items, and .94 on the dichotomously scored items. These reliabilities were assessed to be sufficient for the coding procedure to continue on the remaining interview transcripts.

Results

The results of the content analysis were tallied and averaged across coders and are presented in Table 1, 2, and 3 and plotted in Figures 1-6.

Passive Strategies

As indicated in Table 1, all interview respondents (N = 26) reported using passive strategies in gaining information about their supervisors. In addition, nearly all (N = 25) had used this strategy to gain information about their supervisor

 Insert Table 1, Figures 1-2

regarding him or her as a supervisor. However, only ten interview respondents reported using a passive strategy as a means of gaining information about their supervisors as a person. When examining the by-week interview data for passive strategies, Figure 1 suggests a relatively stable pattern of usage by the new employees over the five-week period. In addition, the levels of strategy-use during the five weeks appears moderate (e.g., 2.778, 2.687, 2.41, 2.669, and 2.413, respectively). Figure 2 depicts the by-week effectiveness of the passive strategy as a means of gaining information. As shown, the general pattern of effectiveness increased slightly over the five-week period. In other words, while the use of the passive strategy remained relatively stable over the

initial weeks of the respondent's employment, the perceived value of that information increased slightly.

Active Strategies

Table 2 summarizes the interview data regarding the use and effectiveness of the active strategies. As reported, 19 respondents reported using the active strategy over the five-week period. Of those, 17 indicated they had used it as a means of gaining knowledge about their supervisor as a supervisor, while 13 said they used it to gain knowledge about their supervisor as a person. The by-week interview data (See Figure 3) shows a general increase in usage of the active strategy over the five-week period, with a slight decrease at week five (e.g., 1.611, 2.267, 2.456, 3.1, and 2.6, respectively). Even with this slight decrease at week 5, the level was still greater than weeks 1-3. Figure 4 reveals the reported effectiveness of the active strategy. The general pattern over the five week

 Insert Table 2, Figures 3-4

period fluctuated slightly (e.g., 1.222, 1.733, 1.49, 1.15, and 1.6, respectively), but remained relatively low and stable. One noticeable decline occurred at Week 4, however, the general pattern was generally stable.

Interactive Strategies

Table 3 shows the reported effectiveness and levels of usage by interview respondents according to interactive strategies. As with the passive strategies, all 26 interview respondents indicated they had used the interactive strategy. Of these, 21 said they had used it as a means of gaining information about their supervisor as a supervisor. All but one (N = 25) indicated they had used the strategy to gain information about their supervisor as a person. Figure 5 shows the by-week levels of utilization as very high at

Week 1 (4.222), declining to Week 3 (3.108), the inclining to Week 5 (4.6). Similarly, effectiveness also followed a similar pattern in Figure 6 (e.g., 4.056, 3.7, 2.8, 3.533, and 4.5, respectively).

 Insert Table 3, Figures 5-6

Emergent Themes from the Interviews

From the interviews, several themes regarding uncertainty, situational factors, and reduction strategies emerged.

Uncertainty. During the development of the coding frame, it became clear that new employees were presenting a bifurcated view of uncertainty. Interview respondents spoke of uncertainty in two ways: 1) uncertainty about the individual in terms of a supervisor (supervisor-related uncertainty); and 2) uncertainty about the individual in terms of a person (person-related uncertainty). Typical comments included "Well, I don't know that much about her as a person. A little bit, but not too much." Or, "I don't know a lot about her as a person, like I said, but I do know a few things about her as a supervisor." Another new employee commented, "Let me just say that what I do know about her primarily come from knowing her as a boss, not as an individual." Throughout the interviews over the five-week period, the two-dimensional view of uncertainty was prevalent. New employees clearly differentiated between what they perceived they knew about their supervisors as supervisors, and what they perceived they knew about their supervisors as persons.

Another theme emerged from the interview data regarding the nature of uncertainty. This theme addressed the content of the information being gained by the new employees about their supervisors. About one-third of the interview respondents made comments about gaining negative knowledge about their supervisors. In other

words, the information gained was not positive, at least in the views of the new employee. One respondent remarked, "I know she has a temper because she has gotten angry with me." Another new employee said, "I found out that sometimes she get a little impatient."

Situational Factors. Respondents were also asked about the amount of contact they have typically with their supervisor from day-to-day. It was expected that communication frequency could mediate the selection of strategies by new employees as a situational constraint. Furthermore, external factors to the supervisor-subordinate relationship may also affect strategy selection.

Indeed, many respondents mentioned their job situation affecting communication frequency with their supervisor, and communication frequency subsequently affecting the strategies they selected. For example, one employee remarked "I don't work a lot with others. It is a small department, just her and I. So I don't get a chance to work a lot with coworkers per se. Just the nature of the work I do. I'm not in a position to ask others a lot of questions." Another new employee said, "Usually we spend most of the day together. I'm learning from her, so we have a lot of contact. Also, we go on the road together a lot. So, we're with each other quite a bit."

Reduction Strategies. All new employees interviewed were asked "Given the knowledge you have gained about your supervisor, especially this past week, how did you go about getting that information?" The responses from the transcripts were identified and placed into one of the three categories of reduction strategies. Below is a brief discussion on the nature of their comments about each type of strategy and a sampling of new employee comments.

Passive Strategies

As indicated in the review of literature, observational behaviors normally occur in two forms. One form is observing the target person (supervisor) reacting to another

person. The other form is observing the target person (supervisor) in informal rather than formal settings. In the latter, interview respondents did not indicate preferential use of observing the supervisor in an informal setting over a formal setting, nor did they indicate that such an opportunity even existed. However, an examination of interview comments regarding passive strategies suggested new employees are routinely observing their supervisors reacting to coworkers as a means of gaining knowledge. For example, typical comments included, "I guess this first week, I found out a lot about her from watching, seeing how she reacts to other people." Or, "I think the number one source is perhaps by watching her work with others." Another new employee said, "Some of it has been observing, but observing how he interacts with other people." There were also indications from the comments that new employees used the passive strategies more to gain knowledge of the supervisor as a supervisor than as a person. One employee indicated, "The stuff I learned about her as a boss I got from watching her." Yet another said, "Mostly, I observe on-the-job type stuff. I observe her as a supervisor, yes."

Active Strategies

The active strategy involves primarily two methods of gaining information about the target person: asking others and environmental structuring. In the latter, none of the employees implied they had manipulated some aspect of the physical or social environment, and then observed the supervisor's reaction in order to gain knowledge. However, many of the interview respondents indicated they had gained knowledge of their coworkers. One employee remarked "Once in a while, they'll (coworkers) tell me things, like 'be careful, don't do this or that or she'll get mad.'" Or, "Yes, I guess I have heard a lot from other people about her."

One of the clearer themes that emerged from the interview comments regarding the use of the active strategy was the issue of source credibility. Many new employees said they gained information about their supervisors from coworkers, but viewed that

information cautiously. Often, comments were made which indicated what they heard from new employees was taken "with a grain of salt." Typical comments included: "I must say I do hear things from other employees. But, I try not to listen to those cause that tends to be the rumor mill, you know, gossip." Or, "I hear things from others, but, I generally don't pay too much attention to that. You know, I don't like to get the information from others."

Interactive Strategies

The interactive strategies are those in which the new employee actually interacts with the target individual. Many of the interview respondents indicated that this category of strategy was the most effective in gaining information about their supervisors. Some comments included: "Most of what I learned is from talking to her." Or, "The most effective has been interacting. Initially I observed, but now it's directly from the boss." Yet another said, "Basically, most of it (information-gained), an overwhelming majority has been face-to-face contact."

Also, numerous comments were made by new employees about using this strategy to gain knowledge about the supervisor as a person. For example, one respondent indicated that, "This past week, I have had a chance to talk to her a little more about who she is. Not who she is as my boss, but who she is as a person." Another new employee remarked, "Well, most of what I know about her as a person was directly from her. I can't say that I learned it any other way."

Discussion

The Nature of Uncertainty in Organizational Relationships

Substantial research in the area of social cognition has addressed the ways in which interpersonal knowledge is organized, and, of course, how interpersonal knowledge is acquired in the first place (Baxter & Wilmot, 1984). In the present analysis, the results revealed a unique characteristic about the nature of uncertainty in

supervisor-subordinate relationships. The results of this study suggested a two-dimensional view of uncertainty: one, uncertainty regarding their supervisor as a person; and, two, uncertainty regarding their supervisor as a supervisor. While much organizational research over the years has focused on "types" of uncertainty with regard to *task* (Galbraith, 1974), *relationships* (Berger & Calabrese, 1975; Clatterbuck, 1979; Gudykunst, 1985), and, *organizational*. (Holland & Stead, 1976; Huber, O'Connell & Cummings, 1975), none to date has differentiated between two types within the relationship in this manner. This link between the notion of uncertainty and the supervisory role (as opposed to the individual in the role) is virtually absent from the literature.

Another interesting finding regarding the nature of uncertainty was to the negative aspect of uncertainty reduction mentioned by new employees. To this point, uncertainty reduction has primarily been viewed as positive for the relationship. Berger and Bradac (1982) argued the enhancement of the relationship hinges on uncertainty reduction. That assumes, of course, that what one person finds out about another person increases predictability and therefore, increases the relational satisfaction. However, as new employees talked about uncertainty reduction, not all spoke of it in terms of positive information gained. If the reduction of this type of uncertainty affects relational satisfaction negatively or positively, it seems that the content of the uncertainty that is reduced needs to be considered. Therefore, what is being observed in this study, IN SOME CASES, as the new employee reduces the uncertainty of his or her supervisor, and that information is of a negative nature, then satisfaction would not be expected to increase. For example, if a new employee acquires information about the supervisor that suggested he or she is unfair, then the reduction of that uncertainty will not conceivably strengthen the relationship. It may be called "Negative-Outcome Information Seeking."

Kelley and Thibaut's (1978) detailed analysis on relational development is generally regarded as the most comprehensive and universally representative of initial interactions. As in all relationships, the entry phase is usually represented by initial low risk exchanges, in this case between the subordinate and the supervisor. Each person attempts to reduce the uncertainty about potential outcomes and the positiveness or negativeness of these outcomes. However, Kelley and Thibaut noted that these initial interactions are "fraught with problems" (p. 73). They maintained these exchanges are often guided by inaccurate and incomplete information based on stereotypes and expectations. Initial interactions which have positive outcomes will garner expectations of future positive outcomes, while negative encounters will have similar consequences. Framed in the context of organizational relationships, subordinates who experience early positive encounters with their supervisors may anticipate similar encounters in the future and may orient their uncertainty reduction strategies accordingly. The same may hold true for new employees encountering negative initial interactions with their supervisor.

Uncertainty Reduction Strategies

Existing relational research suggests the people maintain multifaceted repertoire of information acquisition strategies (passive, active, interactive), in which to reduce uncertainty about another person. The remaining of the discussion focuses on the implications of that analysis.

Passive. While new employees indicated they gained less by observing than direct face to face interaction with their supervisor, it was nonetheless, more valuable than information obtained from co-workers. As indicated, new employees reported moderately using the passive strategy to gain information about their supervisors. As a strategy, it was used over twice as much as a means of gaining information about the supervisor as a supervisor than as a person. Given the nature of the communication which occurs during the initial stages of employment, such a finding is not surprising.

When new employees faced uncertainty, they attempted to gain information in order to reduce it. However, gaining information was not enough. The new employee needed to make sense of the information as well. To do so, he or she relied on a number of inputs. Louis (1980) suggested past experiences and cultural assumptions or interpretative schemes are two such inputs. In the former one, past histories, newcomers typically did not initially have adequate relational history with the supervisor to appreciate and fully interpret relational events that occurred. In cultural assumptions/interpretative schemes as input, new employees likely used prior knowledge regarding previous supervisors he or she had worked with, and subsequently uses that information to establish the expected behavior of the supervisor. In other words, the interpretative scheme was more useful to the new employee in determining how a supervisor should typically behave as a supervisor. As such, information gained through passive strategies would make sense to the new employee regarding the supervisor-related uncertainty, but not likely person-related uncertainty. The pattern of usage of the passive strategy over the five-week period changed slightly. However, the results showed the general pattern of perceived effectiveness increases over the five-week period. This would also be consistent with the notion just discussed regarding attribution of relational events. Louis (1980) noted that observations made by the new employee during the first couple of weeks may not "make sense" or lead to "overpersonalized attribution" (p. 243) because of unavailable collaborative information. However, as additional information is gained from all three strategies, more accurate interpretations of these observations result and more confident attributions occur.

Active. The active strategy was the lowest in both Waves of analysis. This coincided with Berger's (1979) contention that the issue is not the behavior of asking others or getting information from others, but rather the perceived credibility of the information gained. At face value, it does clearly appear the information new employees

gained from coworkers was not well regarded as a reliable source of information about one's supervisor.

The interview data regarding the use and effectiveness of the active strategies showed new employees gained more information from the active strategy in gaining information about a supervisor as a supervisor, than as a person. The pattern of strategy selection over the five-week period showed a general increase in usage of the active strategy over the five-week period, while the general pattern of perceived effectiveness of that strategy the five week period fluctuated slightly, but remained relatively low.

In the active strategy, two issues emerged from the data which deserve attention. One pertained to the perceived credibility of the information a new employee gained from coworkers. The other issue relates to the inclusion of the new employee into internal networks. Both are interdependent issues. Berger (1979) elaborated on the first issue of credibility. The new employee gaining the information by asking coworkers must be concerned whether the information is faulty, biased, or incorrect. From the results of the study, it was apparent that this concern was prevalent among new employees throughout the five-week period. The other issue was in regard to the newcomer's inclusion or exclusion into the internal networks of the organization. As Jablin (1985) suggested, coworkers can help cushion the impact of the assimilation process.

However, Feldman (1981) maintained coworkers only fulfill that function after the new employee has become a trusted and an accepted member of the work group. Research suggested this acceptance is reciprocal (Jablin, 1985). As new employees become accepted "members" of the work group, they will get more information from coworkers, thereby denoting trust. Conversely, as trust develops, the new employee places greater confidence that the information being acquired about the supervisor is true. In the present study, however, there appears to be a "delayed-effect" occurring. It was observed that new employees increased their reliance on active strategies in regards to

usage, suggesting coworkers disclose more as the new employee becomes included in the internal communication networks of the organization. However, from the perception of the new employee, the value of that information remains relatively noneffective. When, if ever, the new employee actually begins placing greater confidence in the information gained from coworkers is not clear from the findings of this study.

Interactive. Clearly, the data suggested the interactive strategy was a superior strategy for gaining data. Regarding usage and effectiveness of the interactive strategies, the strategy was used more as a method of gaining information about the supervisor as a person than as a supervisor. Implied is the notion of new employees acquiring information through reinforcements from those with whom they interact (Porter, Lawler & Hackman, 1975). In regards to the strategy selection patterns and perceived effectiveness of interactive techniques, the new employees start initial period of employment at high levels and then declined at week 3, and increased at weeks 4 and 5. The explanation for this pattern may lie in the nature of the interaction during the first two weeks, whereby the supervisor typically spends more time with new employees. Given the high levels of effectiveness of this strategy early in the relationship, it appears that subordinates are gaining a great deal of information about their supervisors due to this increased contact that exists earlier in the relationship. As the new employee began acquiring the needed skills and understanding of the organizational policies and task requirements, the interaction levels declined, thereby creating a void in strategy-use and strategy-effectiveness at week 3. However, as the relationship builds over the five week period, the value of the strategy increases in the perception of the new employee, and its use and effectiveness regained prominence in the relationship. This interpretation would be consistent with the descriptive data that showed increased use of this strategy when compared with the other strategies. It is also consistent with Berger and Calabrese's (1975) original theory on uncertainty and information seeking.

Implications for the Organization

Negative Uncertainty Reduction - As reported, not all uncertainty reduction can be viewed as positive. The results of this study suggest that uncertainty reduction may or may not be such a positive thing. If the what one learns about another individual is negative, the resulting effect on the relationship may also be negative. In the case of the new employee, supervisors should be extra careful regarding the early impressions they make on new employees regarding information about themselves. It is known that these new members aggressively gather information about their bosses during those first few weeks. The nature of that information, whether positive or negative, can have lasting effects on the later development of that relationship.

Two Types of Uncertainty - It was found that new employees seek two types of information from their bosses: 1) information about them as a supervisor; and, 2) information about them as a person. It should be noted that supervisors and managers have varying views regarding the types of information they should disclose to their employees. Indeed, disclosing personal information about oneself carries elements of risk. In this study, it seems that information seeking during the first few days of the new member's employment is dominated by supervisor-type information. In other words, the employee is attempting to reduce their uncertainty about their supervisors as how they will be as a boss. As time passes, the employees begins to increase their efforts to gather information about the supervisor as an individual.

Active Strategies and Credibility of Information - As discovered, information gained from coworkers was viewed cautiously by new employees. According to the results, newcomers sought information from coworkers regarding their boss, but take it "with a grain of salt." However, more importantly, as the new employees moves from week 1 to week 5, the credibility of that information increases as the trust between new

employee and coworkers increases. They also use information gained from coworkers collaboratively with things they have observed.

Interactive Strategy Most Effective - One of the clearer findings in this study was the superiority of the interactive strategies as a means of gaining information and increasing relational satisfaction. Indeed, the face-to-face method of learning about each other is superior to all others. It was also clear that the new employee preferred the strategy over the other two.

Conclusion

The results of the study suggested new employees gained less by passive strategies than interactive strategies. However, passive strategies were more valuable than information obtained from the active strategy. New employees reported moderately using the passive strategy to gain information about their supervisors. The results revealed that the use of the passive strategy by new employees changed very little while perceived effectiveness increased slightly over the five-week period. The active strategy was the lowest throughout the period of analysis. The results regarding the use and effectiveness of the active strategies indicated new employees gained more information from the active strategy in gaining information about a supervisor as a supervisor than as a person. The pattern of strategy selection revealed a general increase in usage while the perceived effectiveness of that strategy fluctuated only slightly and remained relatively low. Finally, the results indicated the interactive strategy as superior in the eyes of the new employees for gaining information about their supervisors. Throughout the five-week period, this strategy was highly used. It was also discovered that as time passed, the relative use of this strategy to the other strategies increased. Regarding usage and effectiveness, the interactive strategy was used more as a method of gaining information about the supervisor as a person than as a supervisor. In regards to the strategy selection patterns and perceived effectiveness of interactive techniques, the new employees started

initial period of employment at high levels and then declined at week 3, and finished weeks 4 and 5 at higher levels than week 1.

This study lends additional support to the extensive literature that already exists regarding the importance of uncertainty reduction to relational development, suggesting that further investigation of uncertainty reduction within the organizational relationship is warranted. The study also implied that uncertainty, as a whole, operated much the same as social relationships. However, future research should examine the nature of person-related uncertainty versus supervisor-related uncertainty and the subsequent reduction strategies used to cope with both.

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Table 1

Content Analysis Interview Results on the New Employee Passive Strategies (N = 26)

Total respondents using passive strategies?	26 respondents
How the passive strategies were used:	
<u>To gain knowledge about the supervisor as a supervisor?</u>	25 respondents
<u>To gain information about the supervisor as a person?</u>	10 respondents

Utilization and Effectiveness of Passive Strategies (1=low, 5=high)

	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5
Utilization of Passive	2.778	2.687	2.41	2.669	2.413
Effectiveness of Passive	2.833	2.933	3.222	3.272	3.6

Table 2

Content Analysis Interview Results on the New Employee Active Strategies

(N = 26)

Total respondents using active strategies? 19 respondents

How the active strategies were used:

To gain knowledge about the supervisor as a supervisor? 16 respondents

To gain information about the supervisor as a person? 13 respondents

Utilization and Effectiveness of Active Strategies (1=low, 5=high)

	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5
Utilization of Active	1.611	2.267	2.456	3.1	2.6
Effectiveness of Active	1.222	1.733	1.49	1.15	1.6

Table 3

Content Analysis Interview Results on the New Employee Interactive Strategies and Relational Satisfaction (N = 26)

Total respondents using interactive strategies? 26 respondents

How the interactive strategies were used:

To gain knowledge about the supervisor as a supervisor? 21 respondents

To gain information about the supervisor as a person? 25 respondents

Utilization and Effectiveness of Interactive Strategies (1=low, 5=high)

	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5
Utilization of Interactive	4.222	3.4	3.108	3.8	4.6
Effectiveness of Interactive	4.056	3.7	2.8	3.533	4.5
Relational Satisfaction	4.556	4.4	4.111	3.967	4.2

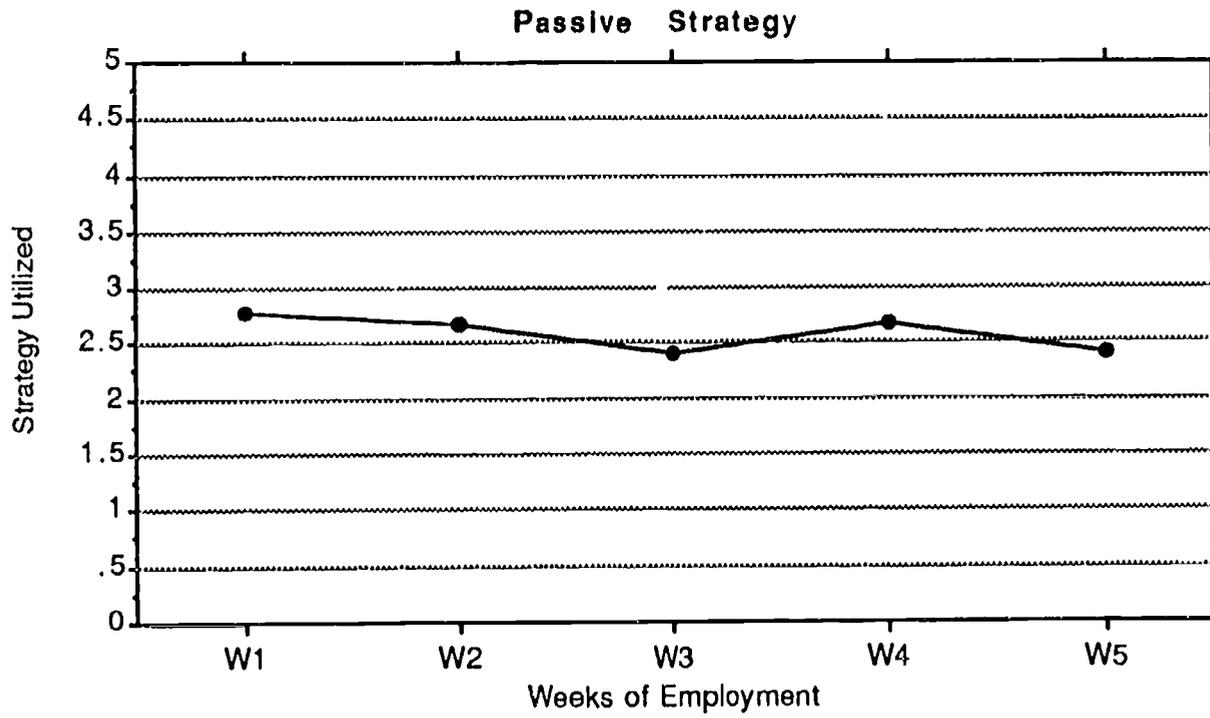


Figure 1. Utilization of Passive Strategies by Week of Employment

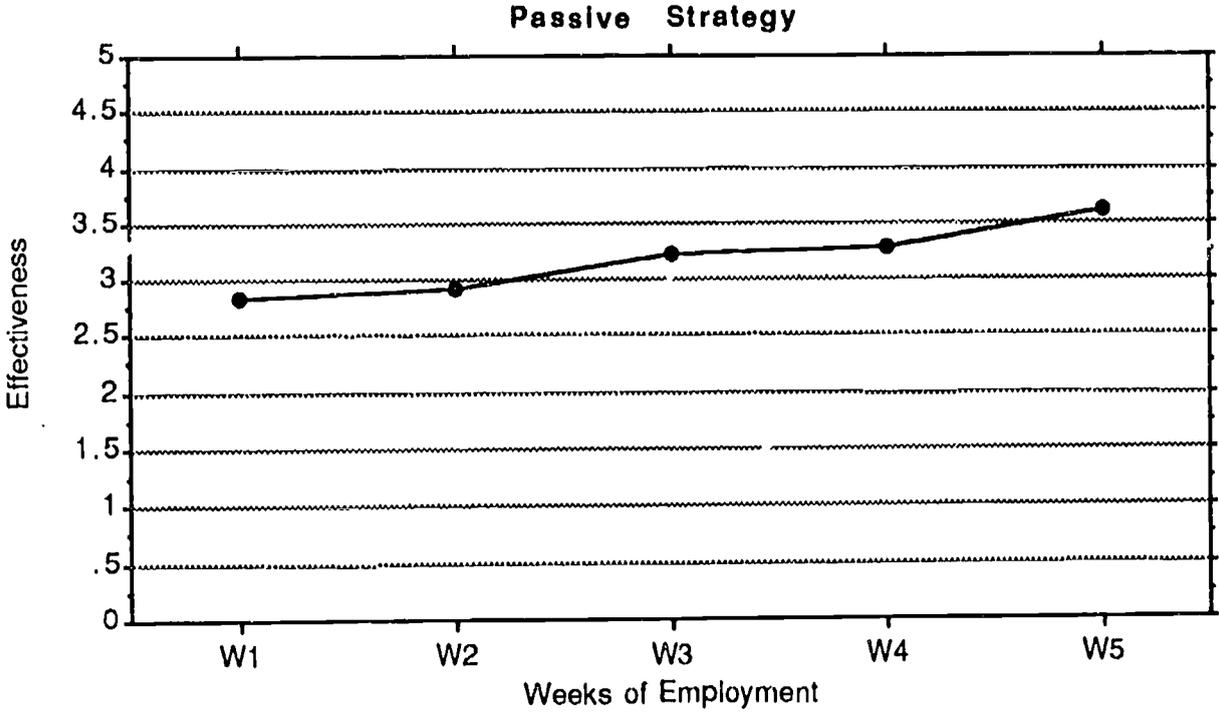


Figure 2. Effectiveness of Passive Strategies by Week of Employment



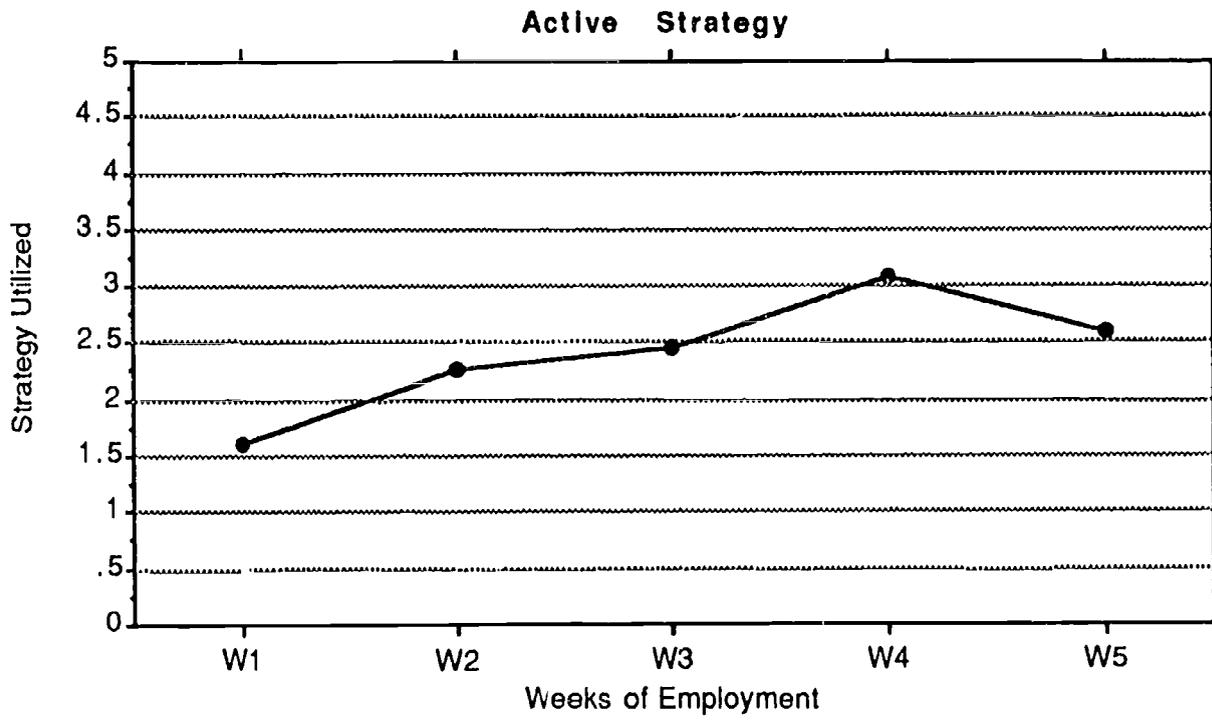


Figure 3. Utilization of Active Strategies by Week of Employment

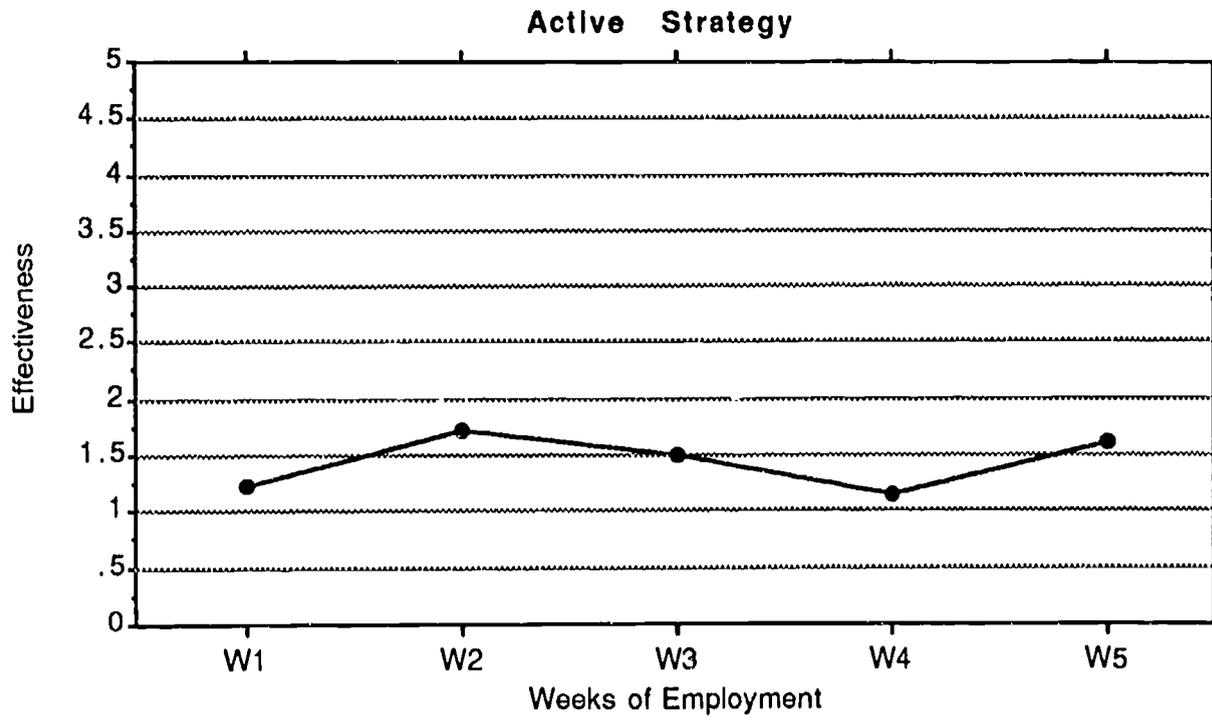


Figure 4. Effectiveness of Active Strategies by Week of Employment

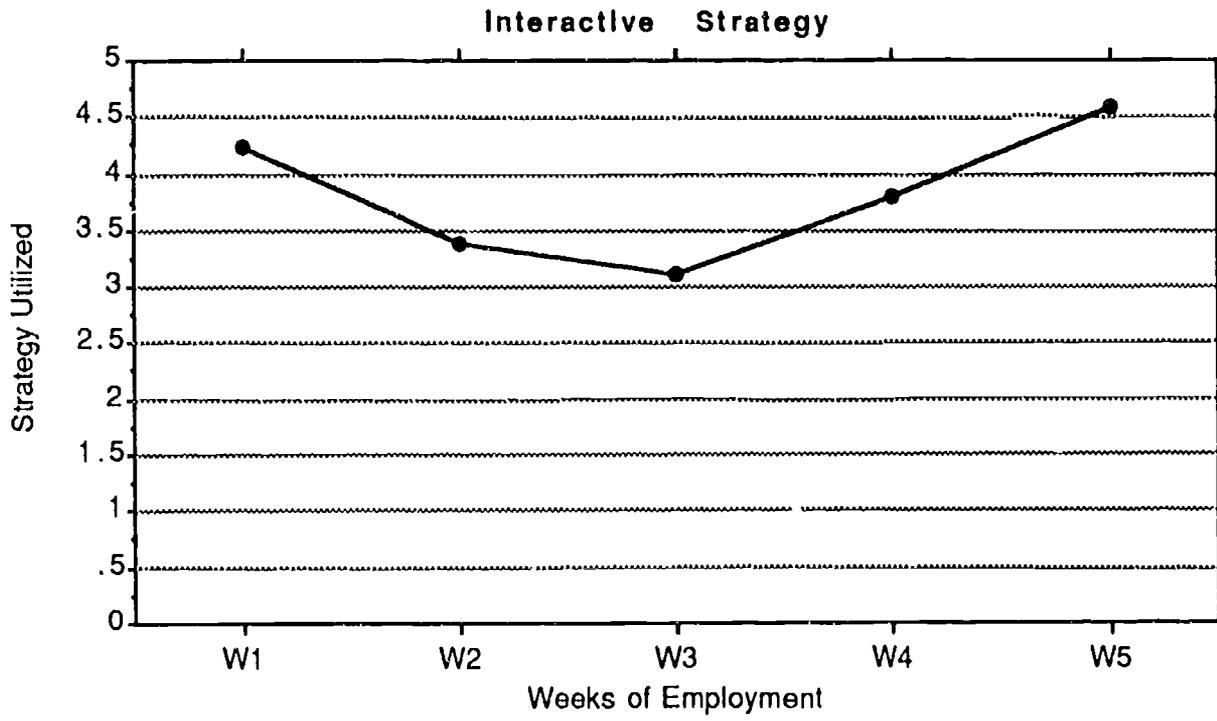


Figure 5. Utilization of Interactive Strategies by Week of Employment

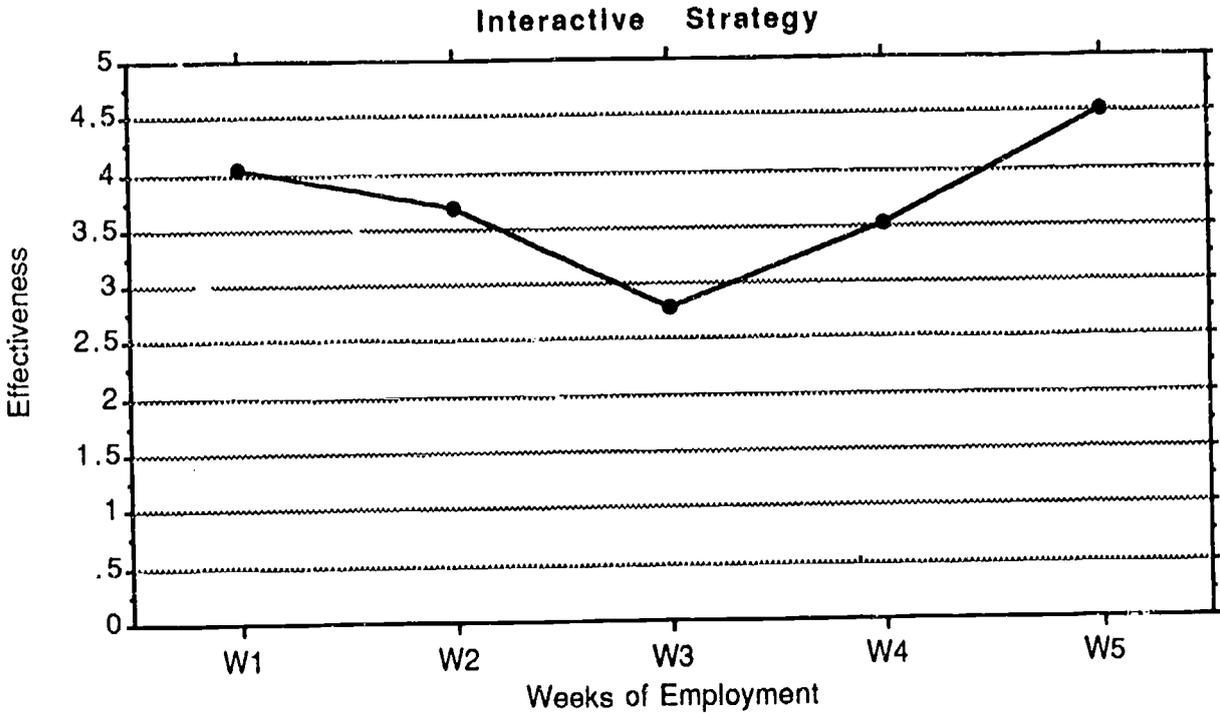


Figure 6. Effectiveness of Interactive Strategies by Week of Employment

Appendix A

The Interview Schedule

Introduction - Your organization, along with numerous other organizations in the area, has agreed to participate in a study I am conducting on new employee communication. This study deals with how new employees use communication to learn about their supervisors in order to get to know them better. I would like to ask you a few questions about that. The interviews will be recorded and transcribed and will not be identified by employee's name. So, all of your responses are confidential. Are there any questions before we start?

Q1 - To begin, tell me a little about yourself and the work you do here.*
(Probing?)*

Q2 - Tell me about the direct face-to-face communication you have with your supervisor on a "typical" day?*

(Probing?)*

Q3 - How do you feel about the relationship you have with your supervisor?*

(Probing?)*

Q4 - This is your _____ week of employment. How well do you feel you know your supervisor?*

(Probing?)*

Q5 - We are interested in knowing the manner in which you have gained knowledge about your supervisor, particularly this past week. Think about the information you have gained this past week about him/her, and describe how you found out about it.*

(Probing?)*

Q6 - Anything else you would like to add?

Conclusion - Thank you very much for your openness. Again, I will tell you that all of your comments will be kept confidential. I will be interviewing more employees over the next few weeks, so I would like to ask you to not tell others the nature of the questions. Thank you.

*Each general question allows the respondent to tell their story. However, each question will be supplemented with probing questions from the interviewer. Tucker, R.K., Weaver, R.L., and Berryman-Fink, C. (1981) provide several useful examples of such probing questions (e.g., Could you elaborate on that? Why is that? Tell me about that? You say you _____ Mirror response .)

Appendix B

Coding Sheet for New Employee Interviews

A. STRATEGIES

Did respondents indicate use of:

1. Passive Strategies? No ___ Yes ___ (circle most appropriate response below)

a. If yes, to what extent did they say it was utilized?

Very Little				Very Much
1	2	3	4	5

b. To what extent did they say it was it effective?

Not effective			Very Effective
1	2	3	4 5

What was this strategy used for?

___ Information about the supervisor as a supervisor?

___ Information about the supervisor as a person?

2. Active Strategies? No ___ Yes ___ (circle most appropriate response below)

a. If yes, to what extent did they say it was utilized?

Very Little			Very Much
1	2	3	4 5

b. To what extent did they say it was it effective?

Not effective			Very Effective
1	2	3	4 5

What was this strategy used for?

___ Information about the supervisor as a supervisor?

___ Information about the supervisor as a person?

3. Interactive Strategies? No ___ Yes ___ (circle most appropriate response below)

a. If yes, to what extent did they say it was utilized?

Very Little			Very Much
1	2	3	4 5

b. To what extent did they say it was it effective?

Not effective			Very Effective
1	2	3	4 5

What was this strategy used for?

___ Information about the supervisor as a supervisor?

___ Information about the supervisor as a person?