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SILENCE OR VOICE? USING FACEWORK AND COMMUNICATION APPREHENSION TO EXPLAIN EMPLOYEE RESPONSES TO AUTONOMY AND COMPETENCE FACE THREATS POSED BY NEGATIVE FEEDBACK

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By

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ABSTRACT

SILENCE OR VOICE: USING FACEWORK AND COMMUNICATION APPREHENSION TO EXPLAIN EMPLOYEE RESPONSES TO AUTONOMY AND COMPETENCE FACE THREATS POSED BY NEGATIVE FEEDBACK

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This study examined the type of communication responses employees choose after receiving potentially face-threatening negative feedback from their supervisors. The facework framework suggests that the addition of preventative facework to negative feedback messages may reduce threats to autonomy and competence face. Different levels of face threat may lead respondents to choose voice or silence response modes and to be defensively or prosocially motivated following reception of negative feedback. Communication apprehension (CA) is also examined as a factor in employees' choice of voice or silence.

This study provided a test of eight negative feedback messages that differed in level and type of face threat, their predicted effects on perceptions of face threat, and selection of voice or silence responses as a function of both face threat and CA. Voice responses may be more functional than silence responses because they allow employees to share ideas and clarify any misunderstandings about feedback they receive. Hagedoorn, Van Yperen, Van De Vliert, and Buunk (1999) suggested reporting of problems as opposed to silence responses can have two positive outcomes: it may result in an early alert for the organization that procedures or practices may not be working and it may also reduce distress for employees experiencing the problem. A new individual

difference variable known as facework strategy preference was also tested for its effect on perceptions of face threat and selection of voice or silence responses.

This study (N = 443) employed a 2 (type of face threat: autonomy, competence) x 4 (level of threat: threat only, threat with tact, threat with approbation, threat with tact and approbation) design with CA as a co-variate to test these ideas. Results indicated that approbation reduced perceptions of both autonomy and competence threat, whereas tact was not effective in reducing the perception of either type of threat. Thus, approbation was the most effective facework message type. As employees felt more threatened (either autonomy or competence) they were less likely to use prosocial voice and more likely to use defensive silence as a response. As a general rule, higher perceived threat was negatively associated with the functional response of prosocial voice; as threat decreased, prosocial voice responses increased. Prosocial voice was also negatively associated with the dysfunctional responses of defensive silence and defensive voice.

The association between defensive voice and autonomy threat was negative and significant for high CAs but nonsignificant for low CAs, as was the correlation between prosocial voice and competence threat. The correlation between defensive silence and competence threat was positive and significant for high CAs and nonsignificant for low CAs. The preference for direct facework was negatively associated with both defensive voice and silence and positively associated with prosocial voice. The preference for indirect facework was positively associated with both defensive voice and silence but not correlated with prosocial voice. Implications of these findings, limitations, and future directions are discussed.

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Literature Review

Researchers and practitioners alike agree that performance feedback is important to organizations as it helps to improve performance and keep employees satisfied in their jobs. However, a meta-analysis by Kluger and DeNisi (1996) suggested all feedback may not have the desired effect of improving performance. They found that one third of the time, performance decreased after feedback delivery. This finding highlights the need for further research into receiver responses and the elements of performance feedback that render it ineffective one-third of the time. This study will investigate some factors which may influence employees' propensity to communicate further with their supervisors about negative feedback they receive, including face threat, communication apprehension (CA), direct facework preference, indirect facework preference, supervisor supportiveness, and perceptions of feedback severity.

Although the feedback a supervisor may give to an employee is important, it is also important for the employee to be able to communicate with the supervisor about the feedback. In order to improve their performance, employees should be able to share ideas and questions with their supervisors after receiving feedback. Informal feedback in particular may serve the function of opening a dialogue between supervisors and employees because it can occur more frequently and with less formality than performance appraisals. Informal feedback is defined here as unscheduled, interactive, involving a supervisor-employee pairing, informal language and speech register, and having an unarranged agenda (based on informal communication definition; Kraut, Fish, Root, & Chalfonte, 1993). Here, the focus is on informal feedback rather than performance appraisals for two reasons: 1) a paucity of research exists on day-to-day communication

interactions in organizations (Bartoo & Sias, 2004) and 2) informal feedback can provide information soon after problematic behavior, as recommended by previous researchers (Anderson, 1987; Ilgen, Fisher, & Taylor, 1979; Lindsley, Brass, & Thomas, 1995). Despite the potential for informal feedback to be a constructive tool, employees may not feel comfortable communicating with their supervisors because performance feedback can threaten the autonomy and competence face of the receiver (i.e., employee).

Face is "the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself" (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 61). Autonomy face is threatened by messages that impose on the employee, such as criticism or orders, whereas competence face is threatened by messages that imply the employee is not a capable individual, such as ridiculing messages. If either type of face is threatened, employees may not feel comfortable voicing ideas or questions about the feedback they received. The ability to use voice after receiving feedback is important because voice is one way employees can assert their freedom to participate by contributing to their organization (Ellis & Van Dyne, in press).

Additionally, when employees perceive a threat, they may be motivated to behave in specific ways. If the face threat presented by feedback is perceived as severe, employees may be motivated to protect themselves, or to behave defensively. For example, they may attempt to place blame on others or to divert attention from problems brought up in the feedback. Using voice behaviors such as criticisms and complaints is one way employees seek to self-protect when they are mistreated (Ellis & Van Dyne, in press). These types of behaviors may be employees' responses to face-threatening feedback and can prove damaging for both the employee and the organization. However, if the threat is perceived as minimal, employees may be motivated to help the

organization, or to behave prosocially. For example, they may offer solutions to the problems brought up in the feedback. In other words, more constructive behavior may result from diminished face threats in negative feedback messages.

Preventative facework provides a way to mitigate threat thus allowing employees to communicate with their supervisors in desirable ways (Lim & Bowers, 1991). The use of tact or approbation messages in concert with feedback known to be threatening can help to diminish employees' perceptions of face threat while still getting the information across. With the reduction of face threat, employees should feel more comfortable voicing ideas, concerns, or questions about the feedback to their supervisors, thus facilitating the process of improving performance cooperatively.

In addition to face threat, a second concern is that some employees may be apprehensive about communicating in general, whereas others may prefer communicating regardless of the threat. Communication apprehension (CA) is "an individual's level of fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons" (McCroskey, 1977a, p. 78). Because CA is an individual characteristic, it is expected to affect employees' communication with everyone they encounter, including their supervisors. Pinder and Harlos (2001) suggested that receiver CA may affect tendencies toward voice and silence. Those with high CA may find it preferable to remain silent, whereas those with low CA may be more willing to speak up in these situations. Learning more about the effects of CA on employees' attempts to communicate with their supervisors can be useful in helping organizations deal more effectively with the varying needs and abilities of their employees.

The combination of the level of face threat and employees' level of trait CA will determine whether they feel comfortable voicing their ideas and questions about feedback they receive and their motives for choosing to use voice or to remain silent. This study will examine how the type and level of face threat in feedback messages, along with employee CA, affects employees' motives and communication responses (i.e., silence or voice). A review of the face and feedback literatures will be provided, along with treatments of autonomy, competence, silence, voice, and CA. Hypotheses and research questions are posed, and the method, results, and discussion of the findings are presented.

Face

Face is defined as the public display of one's self (Holtgraves, Eck, & Lasky, 1997) or "the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself" (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 61). Each person has an image he/she wants to present in a given setting and these images may differ across settings. For example, a CEO may have a more relaxed "face" to be displayed at social events with clients and a more formal "face" to be displayed when working with employees. In order to maintain these different faces people must choose to enact behaviors that are consistent with the image they want to project. Not only do people behave in a way consistent with their desired image, they also help others in a situation to maintain *their* desired images. This is because each individual's face depends not only on their own behavior but also on others' ability to maintain *their* face in the interaction. Cooperative face maintenance in an interaction helps maintain social order. (Cupach & Metts, 1994; Goffman, 1955).

Face is threatened when an individual's face wants or needs are violated. These face wants include the want to be included, the want to have one's abilities respected, and

the want to be free of others' impositions (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Lim & Bowers, 1991) and are commonly referred to as positive face (i.e., inclusion and respect) and negative face (i.e., freedom from imposition). Ting-Toomey (1988) suggested that face may be based on concern for one's own face (self-face concern), for the other's face (other-face concern), or for both one's own and the other's face (mutual-face concern). This study examines self-face concern in feedback receivers.

Negative feedback in the workplace is likely to threaten two specific face needs: autonomy and competence needs. When a supervisor gives an employee advice, this may threaten the employee's need to be free from imposition (i.e., autonomy), because the supervisor is imposing his/her view on the employee. In the same way, other kinds of messages such as reminding or threatening employees may also threaten their sense of autonomy in the workplace because the supervisor is imposing his/her will on the employee. In the case of criticism, the supervisor presents a face threat to the employee's need to have his/her abilities respected (i.e., competence). It is also likely that receiving negative feedback in general presents a threat to competence, as the simple delivery of negative feedback can suggest that the employee is not seen as performing competently. Further details on autonomy and competence concerns in the workplace are presented next.

Autonomy. Lim and Bowers (1991) defined the autonomy need as "the want not to be imposed upon" (p. 420). The need for autonomy is a fundamental psychological need (Deci & Ryan, 2000) and is also known as negative face (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Lim & Bowers, 1991). Employees' need for autonomy can be threatened by negative feedback because negative feedback imposes supervisors' requirements thus constraining

employees' choice in how to behave. Feedback generally includes information meant to inform an individual about his/her performance on the job (Geddes, 1993). Thus, imposition presented by performance feedback involves a supervisor commenting on how, when, where, or how fast employees should perform the required tasks for their jobs which limits their sense of free choice. Lim and Bowers (1991) suggested that the messages most threatening to autonomy are those giving orders or invoking obligation to a group or organization. Because part of a supervisor's job is to tell employees what to do and how to do it, employees frequently deal with this kind of imposition. This loss of autonomy can be hard on employees, supervisors, and the organization as a whole. For example, Ellis and Van Dyne (in press) suggested that negative feelings may result from job creep, which is the gradual inclusion of extra-role behaviors into job expectations, and other types of workplace mistreatment because these impositions affect employees' sense of freedom and control (i.e., their autonomy).

Previous studies of feedback have looked at autonomy in terms of participation in performance appraisals. Participation in performance appraisals indicates that employees are allowed some independence in how they are evaluated. In general, this type of participation has been associated with positive outcomes. As Fedor, Eder, and Buckley (1989) stated, "Inviting the subordinate to participate and share control over the conversation [i.e., performance appraisal] has positive effects on subordinate feedback reactions" (p. 400). For example, Giles and Mossholder (1990) factor analyzed employees' responses to items regarding their supervisors' behavior during performance appraisals. One of the major factors extracted was participation of the employee. The participation factor was positively correlated with job satisfaction, satisfaction with the

supervisor, satisfaction with the performance appraisal session, and satisfaction with the system. Thus, having the freedom to participate in the performance appraisal session led to many positive outcomes both for the employee and the organization. With a sample of nurses, Burke, Weitzel, and Weir (1978) found that the opportunity to present ideas and feelings (i.e., participation) during an appraisal interview was positively associated with perceptions of the supervisor as helpful and constructive, the perception that job problems were cleared up, and the perception that goal-setting was completed. Burke and Wilcox (1969) also found that for phone operators (information, toll, and assistance operators), the opportunity to present ideas and feelings was positively associated with perceptions of the supervisor as helpful and constructive, the perception that job problems were cleared up and the perception that goal-setting was completed. In sum, the ability to participate in the performance appraisal process has generally produced positive outcomes.

Previous feedback studies, such as those discussed above, focused generally on what would happen if participation was allowed or encouraged in the actual process of performance appraisals. The same benefits and positive effects should accrue in the informal feedback situation as well. Benefits should result if employees are allowed participation in feedback interactions just as they do when employees participate in performance appraisals. If, conversely, the freedom to participate is threatened, employees might be expected to have negative responses. This question has not yet been investigated. Specifically, employee responses to threats to their autonomy face have not been examined. This unknown factor presents an important avenue for study because of the potential for negative effects of autonomy-threatening feedback messages and

positive effects of autonomy-preserving messages for both the employee and the organization. Some of the possible effects are discussed next.

The general importance of autonomy to employees is likely to affect how they might respond to threats to their autonomy. Hodson (1991) found that employees most frequently cited infringements on autonomy as the reason they were not enthusiastic about their work. The "infringements" mentioned included things such as overly strict supervising. Hodson also observed that workers found ways to create autonomy if they did not feel the organization granted it to them. For example, in order to regain some autonomy employees may do things that are detrimental to the organization, such as avoid work or take long breaks. Hodson's discussion of autonomy was based largely on observation. Other studies present further evidence on the positive value of feelings of autonomy in the workplace.

In one study (Lewis & Hayward, 2003), both autonomy and motivation to learn were increased by affording students the opportunity to choose the type of assignment they would complete for a class requirement. Parker, Axtell, and Turner (2001) found positive correlations between job autonomy and both organizational commitment and supportive supervision. In addition, supportive supervision was also positively correlated with communication quality. In essence, Parker et al. found a link between supportive supervisors, high communication quality, and high job autonomy. This suggests the potential for a well-phrased feedback message to have a positive effect on autonomy needs. In sum, threats to autonomy can be damaging not only to the individual, but also to the organization because of their potential to elicit negative behaviors, whereas allowing individuals to perceive that they have autonomy can have positive results,

particularly in terms of the employee-supervisor relationship. Another important concern for employees is the need to be seen as competent.

Competence. Lim and Bowers (1991) defined the competence need as "the want that one's abilities be respected" (p. 420). Competence itself can be defined as "a condition or quality of effectiveness, ability, sufficiency, or success" (Elliot & Dweck, 2005, p. 5). Like autonomy, competence is also viewed as a fundamental psychological need (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Meyer (1975) noted the importance of feeling competent at a job: "If a person identifies at all with his work and takes pride in what he is doing, he should think he is good at it—'well above average,' if you will" (p. 45).

Few studies have examined competence or similar constructs in conjunction with feedback. Some have postulated potential relationships, but not tested them empirically. Ashford and Cummings (1983) suggested that the motive to learn about one's own competence is an important motivator behind feedback-seeking behavior. Geddes (1993) suggested that performance feedback valence and sensitivity may affect perceptions of competence, and more specifically that feedback that threatens self perceived competence should lead to unfavorable responses from employees such as lowered performance.

Although few feedback studies have empirically examined the variable of competence, it has been associated with desirable organizational outcomes such as job satisfaction. Sense of competency was a strong positive predictor of job satisfaction in a study by James, Treadway, Conner, and Hochwarter (2005). Gottfredson and Holland (1990) also found that the ability to use skills at which one was competent (i.e., skills that were already learned from a previous job or "things I do best") correlated positively with

expected job satisfaction. Thus, feeling competent in a job is important for job satisfaction.

While previous studies have examined competence and perceptions of competence in various ways, the need or desire to be seen as competent has been overlooked in the feedback literature. The difference between perceptions of one's own competence and the need for competence described by face scholars is that being competent and/or thinking you are competent is different from wanting to be *seen* as competent. Lim and Bowers (1991) defined the need for competence as a need to be respected by others in terms of "intelligence, appearance, and general ability to cope with the world" (p. 420). Keeping up one's competence face depends on assessments of others' impressions of one's own competence, or ability level. To date, no previous studies address this particular need in the context of performance feedback.

Feedback

Feedback can be defined as information received by an individual about his/her past behavior (Ammons, 1956; Annett, 1969). According to Bourne (1966), feedback generally provides information about the correctness, accuracy, or adequacy of the behavior. It can be descriptive, prescriptive, evaluative, or comparative (Haeggberg, 2000). Prescriptive feedback provides information on what should be done next; descriptive feedback, also known as velocity feedback (Kozlowski, Toney, Mullins, Weissbein, Brown, & Bell, 2001), provides information on what the individual has completed; and comparative feedback, also known as normative feedback (Kozlowski et al., 2001), compares performance with that of another individual. Evaluative feedback, also known as labeled feedback (Kozlowski et al., 2001), is feedback that provides

information about whether performance has met an unreferenced standard by putting a positive or negative label on the performance. This type of feedback may include phrases such as "good enough" or "not good enough" while not mentioning the standard of comparison.

The current study focuses on feedback that is evaluative in nature, and that comes from an external party (i.e., a supervisor). Evaluative feedback is critical to study because of its corrective potential, and the supervisor as an external party represents the source most likely to garner cooperation from the employee (Ilgen et al., 1979). In addition, this study is focused on informal feedback, defined here as unscheduled, interactive, involving a supervisor-employee pairing, informal language and speech register, and having an unarranged agenda (based on informal communication definition; Kraut et al., 1993). Informal feedback is important to examine for two reasons. First, there is a lack of research on informal feedback. Bartoo and Sias (2004) pointed out that research on day-to-day communication interactions in organizations has not been conducted and that this type of work could "provide important insights into a variety of workplace issues and help explain variation in employee communication behavior" (p. 16). Second, some scholars (Anderson, 1987; Ilgen et al, 1979; Lindsley et al., 1995) suggest that feedback may be "a dish best served hot;" that feedback should be given soon after any behavior that needs to be corrected. Lindsley et al. noted "When feedback is delayed... actors may continue to employ inappropriate strategies or effort" (p. 653). Most formal organizational feedback typically occurs in performance appraisals, which often occur too late to be maximally corrective. That is, informal feedback can be useful for

correcting behavior immediately, so studying it can help organizations with their feedback processes.

Employees may also benefit from the opportunity to improve their work in a more timely fashion than annually. Informal feedback may open up a dialogue between supervisors and employees about both problems and solutions as they develop. This may provide employees with early warning for behaviors which otherwise might lead to more serious job consequences (i.e., discipline or firing). A "feedback dialogue" may also allow employees the opportunity to participate in deciding how best to accomplish individual and organizational goals on a day-to-day basis.

Feedback in organizations is a widely studied topic, evidenced by several studies aimed at synthesizing the feedback literature (Balcazar, Hopkins, & Suarez, 1986; Clement & Frandsen, 1976; Gardiner, 1971; Kluger & DeNisi, 1996). As noted by both Clement and Frandsen (1976) and Gardiner (1971), early feedback research did not use theory to drive predictions. Despite this, theoretical viewpoints of feedback are evident in some feedback studies (e.g., Kluger & DeNisi, 1996; Rhodes & Frandsen, 1975; Scheidel & Crowell, 1966; Stoltz & Tannenbaum, 1963; Stone & Stone, 1985). The main theoretical viewpoints used to study feedback include control theory (Carver & Scheier, 1981), operant conditioning (Skinner, 1953), and social learning theory (Bandura & Cervone, 1983). Further elaboration on these viewpoints follows.

Control Perspective. Some researchers take a control theory or cybernetic perspective whereby individuals attempt to reconcile discrepancies in "feedback loops." Control theory (Carver & Scheier, 1982) focuses on negative feedback loops, which help a given system reduce discrepancies between the current state and the desired (goal) state.

Similarly, in their synthesis of feedback studies in human communication, Clement and Frandsen (1976) seem to endorse a cybernetic or "system" perspective. They defined feedback as a process of mutual control whereby each communicator influences and is influenced by the other. Defined this way, performance feedback focuses on both sender and receiver and how they influence each other by making a discrepancy evident; this is the central defining feature of feedback using a control theory perspective. In terms of performance feedback, control theory is most useful when studying performance appraisals because prior to appraisals, most supervisors set expectations or goals to be met. The "discrepancy" focus of control theory makes sense in the context of an evaluation of whether or not goals and expectations have been met (i.e., a performance appraisal). However, the current study is focused on informal feedback, and this type of feedback does not involve a supervisor reporting on clear-cut goals and expectations.

Operant Conditioning Perspective. A second perspective on feedback is based in simple operant conditioning (Skinner, 1953). From this viewpoint, feedback is seen as an action-reaction sequence whereby individuals cease or repeat behavior based on rewards and punishments (Clement & Frandsen, 1976). The main principle behind this idea is Thorndike's (1927) law of effect, which suggests people will repeat or increase behaviors associated with positive affect or cognition, and decrease or entirely cease behaviors associated with negative affect or cognition. As Haeggberg (2000) stated, feedback may influence performance through its "behavioral reward properties" (p. 53). This viewpoint suggests that the association of correct behaviors with positive feedback and incorrect behaviors with negative feedback will naturally cause productive behaviors to be repeated or increased, and cause non-productive behaviors to be decreased or stopped

altogether. The law of effect has been criticized for its simplicity (Kluger & DeNisi, 1996), which renders it unable to explain some complex results (e.g., positive feedback can lead to relaxed effort). The findings presented in Kluger and DeNisi's (1996) meta-analysis showed decreases in performance can occur after receiving either positive or negative feedback. In other words, although the "punishment" of negative feedback caused performance to decrease, the "reward" of positive feedback did not cause people to increase their performance. Though the current study focuses only on negative feedback, Kluger and DeNisi's study shows why operant conditioning and the law of effect, while parsimonious, are too simple to explain the aftermath of feedback.

Social Cognitive Perspective. Still other researchers (e.g., Haeggberg, 2000; Podsakoff & Farh, 1989; Wang & Netemeyer, 2002) view feedback with a social learning theory perspective. Social learning theory (SLT; or social cognitive theory, SCT; Bandura, 1991) suggests that feedback provides individuals with information that will boost or lower their self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is a personal judgment of how well one can perform the necessary behaviors for situations that may arise in one's life (Bandura, 2006). Different sources of information can strengthen or weaken self-efficacy. For example, success is expected to strengthen self-efficacy unless too much success occurs too easily, in which case people are easily discouraged when confronted with failure. SLT focuses on feedback obtained through observing others' behavior. This does not fit well with study of performance feedback because performance feedback is intentional communication delivered directly by one party to another. Rather than the employee watching others and learning from their successes and failures, performance feedback focuses on intentional, dyadic communication of areas that one party believes the other

party, the employee, needs to improve. SLT may be applicable in future studies as a companion to direct dyadic communication, but is not ideal for examining and making predictions about communication responses.

These three theories provide useful ways of looking at feedback from different perspectives. However, what they do not provide is a focus on the communication aspects of negative feedback. None of the three theories discussed above, and often invoked in feedback studies, examines message characteristics of feedback as a way of explaining responses. Face (Goffman, 1955) affords a framework for examining feedback messages closely and separating the effects of different message characteristics on employee responses to feedback. Thus, this is a new theoretical lens through which to view the provision of negative feedback and the resulting outcomes.

Face Perspective. This study presents a new perspective on feedback, using face as a framework to guide discussion of message effects on receivers. Receivers' need to maintain face in front of a supervisor has not previously been examined as a determinant of responses to feedback. Based on feedback studies of similar messages, face can provide additional explanation for receiver responses. Past studies have found that using different types of delivery for feedback messages has had positive effects on various responses. For example, Steelman and Rutkowski (2004) found that delivery done in a considerate way resulted in a stronger motivation to act on the feedback content than did delivery done in an inconsiderate way. Baron (1988, 1990) conducted multiple studies showing that the use of constructive rather than destructive (i.e., "negative feedback that is harsh in tone, nonspecific in nature, and focused on internal causes of substandard performance," Baron, 1988, p. 199) criticism resulted in reduced anger and tension for

feedback receivers. The responses in these studies could be attributed to inconsiderate and destructive feedback being face threatening, whereas constructive and considerate feedback was less face threatening. Carson and Cupach (2000) also found that more severe reproaches (e.g., rebukes) were perceived by receivers as more face threatening whereas less severe reproaches (e.g., hinting) were perceived as less face threatening.

When individuals receive feedback messages delivered in a way that mitigates potential face threat, they tend to respond more positively (e.g., less negative emotions, more motivation to perform better) than when the feedback messages are delivered without mitigation. The framework of face threats and facework messages provided by the face literature (see Brown & Levinson, 1987; Lim & Bowers, 1991) can help to organize and direct the study of mitigated delivery of feedback messages and receiver responses to these messages. These studies (Baron, 1988, 1990; Steelman & Rutkowski, 2004; Tata, 2002) provide some empirical evidence that face may be a useful way to predict how people will respond to negative feedback.

The scope of this particular study is limited to learning more about the receiver perspective and how receivers will respond to different ways of delivering feedback. Receivers' perceptions influence whether or not and how they choose to implement feedback; because of this, studying receiver responses is critical (Balcazar, Hopkins, & Suarez, 1985; Prue & Fairbank, 1981). Receiver responses may be determined in part by valence of the feedback message.

Feedback Valence. An important issue in feedback research is the definition of positive and negative feedback. Positive feedback is defined as information about meeting or exceeding expected performance, whereas negative feedback is defined as

information about performing below expectations. Feedback can include things like positive and negative behaviors or emotions. Much performance feedback research follows a similar definition, including an evaluative component and a positive/negative valence component (Geddes, 1993; Geddes & Baron, 1997; Jacobs, Jacobs, Feldman, & Cavior, 1973).

The separation of feedback into "positive" and "negative" is used conventionally by many feedback researchers (Geddes & Baron, 1997; Jacobs et al., 1973; Kluger, Lewinsohn, & Aiello, 1994; Stoltz & Tannenbaum, 1963). However, this is not just a facetious division. Various researchers have completed empirical research showing positive and negative feedback are separate dimensions of feedback and that individuals respond differently to positive and negative feedback. Geddes (1993) factor analyzed feedback and found valence (i.e., positive/negative) to be "an easily identifiable dimension" (p. 204). Geddes and Linnehan (1996) also completed a feedback factor analysis and found separate dimensions for positive and negative feedback. In their review and summary of feedback literature, Ilgen et al. (1979) identified valence, or sign, as one of three dimensions of feedback that affect feedback perceptions. Consistent with Ilgen et al. (1979), Geddes defined valence "as the message sign, or simply, positive versus negative feedback" (p. 204). For ease of understanding and consistency with previous definitions of positive and negative feedback (Geddes & Baron, 1997; Haeggberg, 2000; Jacobs et al., 1973; Kluger et al., 1994; Stoltz & Tannenbaum, 1963), the term "negative feedback" will be used here to refer to instances where the feedback conveys negative information (e.g., about mistakes made, low scores, low production, and other types of low performance) and the term "positive feedback" will be used to

refer to instances where the feedback imparts positive information (e.g., about a job well done, high scores, high production, and other types of high performance).

Previous research indicates that negative feedback generates more difficulties than positive feedback, and this is one reason why it is important to study. People generally prefer positive to negative feedback (Moreland & Sweeney, 1984). Jablin (1978) found that subordinates most preferred to receive a confirming (positive in both content and relational levels) response from their supervisors after (hypothetically) delivering an unfavorable message. In addition, those receiving negative feedback may deny or distort the feedback (Ilgen et al., 1979), but receive and recall positive feedback easily. A study by Lundgren and Rudawsky (1998) found the degree of negativity of feedback to be positively associated with both negative affect and likelihood of rejecting the feedback. Jacobs et al. (1973) found negative feedback was consistently rated as less credible, less desirable, and as having less impact on the receiver than positive feedback. Halperin, Snyder, Shenkel, and Houson (1976) found that negative feedback was only accepted from a high status source, while positive feedback was accepted from any source. Performance outcomes also differed after receiving positive versus negative feedback. Two studies (Shrauger & Rosenberg, 1970; Stoltz & Tannenbaum, 1963) indicated that positive feedback led to improved performance, whereas negative feedback led to decreased performance. Another study showed that negative feedback led to significantly lower perceptions of efficacy than positive feedback (Anderson & Rodin, 1989). In addition, delivering negative feedback to employees is not an enjoyable task for superiors conducting performance appraisals (Antonioni, 1994; London, 2003; Villanova,

Bernardin, Dahmus, and Sims, 1993). Because of these difficulties generally associated with negative feedback, the main focus of this paper will be on negative feedback.

A second reason to study negative feedback is the potential for it to result in positive outcomes. For example, Podsakoff and Farh (1989) found that negative feedback made people increase their goals and perform better. In their study, negative feedback groups outperformed the control group, while positive feedback groups performed similarly to the control group. Jacobs et al. (1973) found that negative feedback that was focused on specific behaviors was viewed as having more impact on the receiver than negative feedback focused on emotions of the observer (e.g., you made me feel angry) or a combination of behavioral and emotional negative feedback. Anderson and Rodin (1989) found that when given self-determination cues, participants receiving mild negative feedback had increased intrinsic motivation. The apt use of negative feedback can have positive results for both individuals and organizations. As previously mentioned, one factor that may affect employees' responses to negative feedback is the need to maintain face.

Face threats and facework. Some situations are inherently face-threatening because they require the exchange of face-threatening information. Negative feedback delivery is one of these situations. Expressions regularly used in feedback (e.g., criticism, advice, reminders, threats, reproaches) may threaten positive and/or negative face. Previous studies of these types of messages have used different labels for face-threatening and face-saving messages, such as reproach (Carson & Cupach, 2000) or destructive/constructive criticism (Baron, 1988, 1990).

When the delivery of potentially face-threatening information is required, people will likely attempt to tone down the face threat while delivering the necessary message (Lim & Bowers, 1991). One potential way to alleviate face threats posed by negative feedback is to use preventative facework (Cupach & Metts, 1994).

Preventative Facework. Preventative facework is defined as using message features in anticipation of presenting a face threat, and consists of *strategies*, which are general categories of facework designated to address specific types of face needs (i.e., autonomy, competence, inclusion), and *messages*, which are the specific messages used to carry out a given strategy.

Some types of messages have been successful (Morand, 2000) in softening the impact of face-threatening acts (FTAs; Brown & Levinson, 1987), including 1) being conventionally indirect, or asking whether the individual is able to comply, 2) minimizing imposition, or using phrases that minimize the request, 3) hedging, or using words such as "perhaps" which soften the request, 4) using formal word choices such as "Sir" to show deference and 5) using past tense, creating distance in time by saying things like "I had been wondering if I could...".

Previous studies have examined the use of facework in teacher-student relationships (Kerssen-Griep, 2001; Kerssen-Griep, Hess, & Trees, 2003), interpersonal relationships (Carson & Cupach, 2002), influence situations (Wilson, Aleman, & Leatham, 1998; Wilson & Kunkel, 2000), and survey items (Holtgraves et al., 1997). Some findings from those studies indicate that preventative facework messages may have positive effects. For example, students who received their teachers' messages with facework perceived them more positively than messages without facework (Kerssen-

Griep, 2001). In a study of surveys, Holtgraves et al. found respondents to be more honest when answering questions containing facework messages than questions without facework messages.

Jablin (1978) conducted a study asking subordinates what type of message was appropriate for a supervisor to use in response to an unfavorable message from a subordinate. For employees in an "open" communication climate, disconfirming (i.e., irrelevant) responses were considered inappropriate, as were repudiating (i.e., negative on relational and content levels) responses. Jablin also found that subordinates preferred to receive confirming (i.e., positive on relational and content levels) and disagreeing (i.e., positive on relational, negative on content level) responses than acceding (i.e., negative on relational, positive on content level), repudiating, and disconfirming responses. In general, there was a preference for messages with positive relational content, or messages that allow receivers to maintain face.

Other findings showed that certain types of messages might be more threatening than others. Wilson and Kunkel (2000) examined the differences between giving advice and asking for a favor. They found that favor-asking was more threatening to negative face (i.e., autonomy) than advice-giving and giving advice was more threatening to positive face (i.e., competence and inclusion combined) than asking for a favor. In addition, dispositional complaints were found to pose more of a face threat than relational or behavioral/physical appearance complaints (Carson & Cupach, 2002).

Facework Strategies. According to Lim and Bowers (1991), choice of a facework strategy is dependent on the type of face that may be threatened. Their framework suggests that there are three strategies, *solidarity*, *approbation*, and *tact,* which address

the three face needs. All strategies and messages are from Lim and Bowers (1991); see Table 1 for examples of each message type within strategy. Solidarity addresses threats to the need for inclusion (i.e., fellowship face). The strategy of solidarity may be carried out using one of a number of solidarity messages, including friendship reaffirmation, cooperation, empathy, social acknowledgement, and agreement. Approbation addresses threats to the need to be seen as competent (i.e., respect for abilities). An approbation strategy may be carried out using one of a number of messages, including admiration, support, contradiction, suggestion, and being diminutive about the problem. The third strategy, tact, addresses the need for autonomy (i.e., freedom from imposition). This strategy may be carried out using one of a number of tact messages, including imposition sharing, experimenting, and unconventional indirectness. All three face needs are fundamental psychological needs (Deci & Ryan, 2000). However, the needs for autonomy and competence are vital for recipients of feedback by supervisors in the organizational context (for autonomy, see Burke et al., 1978; Burke & Wilcox, 1969; Fedor et al., 1989; Hodson, 1991; Parker et al., 2001; for competence, see Geddes, 1993; James et al., 2005; Meyer, 1975), so the current study focuses on those two needs. When autonomy and competence face needs are threatened by negative feedback, employees may respond differently depending on the strength of the threat. Their responses may involve the use of voice or silence as a way of self-protecting or helping others. Discussion of voice and silence is provided next to explain how and with what motives receivers may respond.

Voice and Silence. After receiving negative feedback, employees will respond to their supervisor in some manner. Two ways they may do this are by voicing ideas or

opinions about the feedback (i.e., voice), or by withholding ideas or opinions about the feedback (i.e., silence). Silence and voice were conceptualized by Van Dyne, Ang, and Botero (2003) as two separate constructs rather than as opposite poles of one construct. They define silence as "intentionally withholding ideas," and voice as "expressing ideas."

Van Dyne et al. (2003) argued that voice and silence are not just the presence or absence of speaking, but involve "the actor's motivation to withhold versus express ideas, information, and opinions about work-related improvements" (Van Dyne et al., 2003, p. 1360). Specifically, Van Dyne et al. discussed three motives for employees to be silent or to use voice, the types of which include *prosocial*, *acquiescent*, and *defensive* voice and silence. Each of the three motives can result in either voice or silence.

Prosocial motives are based on wanting to help and making a constructive contribution, acquiescent motives are based on resignation or feeling unable to make a difference, and defensive motives stem from feeling afraid and personally at risk. Acquiescent and defensive motives are based in the work of Morrison and Milliken (2000), who suggested that silence is manifested in organizations because of 1) fear of negative repercussions or 2) feeling that speaking up about an issue would not make a difference.

Related to the concepts of silence and voice is Rusbult, Farrell, Rogers, and Mainous' (1988) typology of responses to dissatisfaction on the job. This typology includes four categories: exit, voice, loyalty, and neglect, and is commonly referred to as "EVLN." Exit responses consist of "leaving an organization by quitting, transferring, searching for a different job, or thinking about quitting" (Rusbult et al., 1988, p. 601), whereas voice "describes actively and constructively trying to improve conditions

through discussing problems with a supervisor or co-workers, taking action to solve problems, suggesting solutions, seeking help from an outside agency like a union, or whistle-blowing" (p. 601). Loyalty is "passively but optimistically waiting for conditions to improve—giving public and private support to the organization, waiting and hoping for improvement, or practicing good citizenship" (Rusbult et al., 1988, p. 601) and neglect is "passively allowing conditions to deteriorate through reduced interest or effort, chronic lateness or absences, using company time for personal business or increased error rate" (Rusbult et al., 1988, p. 601).

The "voice" concept discussed by Van Dyne et al. (2003) builds on the concepts identified in EVLN research (Rusbult et al., 1988) by identifying added motives. Rusbult et al. focus on voice as an active and constructive way of helping solve organizational problems. This viewpoint assumes the employee is always acting constructively and in the organization's best interests when using voice. Van Dyne et al. enrich the concept by suggesting that voice may be motivated in a variety of ways. More specifically, the use of voice may be motivated not only constructively (prosocial motive), but also by giving up (acquiescence motive) or saving oneself (defensive motive). For example, an employee may be motivated to speak up in order to defend his or her performance by pointing out positive actions he or she has taken. An employee may also choose to speak up to express agreement with a decision made in the organization not because he/she thinks it will help or make a difference but because he or she believes giving that particular opinion is expected. By considering these additional motives, Van Dyne et al. added another dimension to the study of voice, and to the study of silence, which will be discussed next.

Pinder and Harlos (2001) differentiated silence into "Acquiescent" and "Quiescent" silence, connoting silence based on passive, accepting resignation (acquiescent) or fear of both speaking up about a problem *and* potential consequences of the change which might result from speaking up (quiescent). In terms of surface outcomes, these ideas are conceptually similar to Rusbult et al.'s (1988) loyalty, wherein a worker waits and trusts that something will change to improve the organization's situation. That is, the worker stays with the organization and does not use voice. Van Dyne et al. (2003) discussed a prosocial motive, which may be the most similar to loyalty because of a more optimistic focus. That is, Van Dyne et al. suggested workers may be motivated to remain silent for prosocial reasons, or because of a desire to help others (e.g., the organization or coworkers). Even this prosocial motive is conceptually more active than the loyalty motive in that prosocial silence involves *actively* choosing to withhold information or opinions whereas loyalty focuses on *passively* waiting and hoping something will change. The concept of loyalty also focuses solely on optimism as a motivator and lacks the consideration of fear and/or resignation evident in Pinder and Harlos' discussion as well as Van Dyne et al.'s conceptualization of silence. Whereas Van Dyne et al. do consider a somewhat optimistic focus in prosocial motives, both conceptualizations focus on fear and self-protection (defensive motive) and resignation (acquiescence motive) as motivations for silence.

Each of the three motives discussed by Van Dyne et al. (2003) can manifest in silence or voice, yielding six communication types including prosocial silence, prosocial voice, acquiescent silence, acquiescent voice, defensive silence, and defensive voice (See Table 2 for a more detailed explanation). Considering the type of feedback studied in the

current research effort (evaluative, informal), defensive and prosocial motives are most relevant. Employees may feel acquiescent after receiving negative feedback, but given the parameters of this study (i.e., delimited to a specific feedback incident), it is unlikely that acquiescence would have time to develop sufficiently to motivate the use of acquiescent voice or silence. Rather, a single informal incident of negative feedback should result in more defensive feelings if it is perceived as face threatening or in more prosocial feelings if it is sufficiently cushioned with preventative facework. Because of this, for the purpose of face predictions, only defensive and prosocial motives will be discussed. First, more explanation of the motives, voice and silence follows.

Prosocial silence involves "intentional and proactive behavior that is primarily focused on others" (Van Dyne et al, 2003, p. 1368). This is characterized by an employee with the knowledge of his/her options who decides not to share information based on the desire to protect others (e.g., fellow coworkers, the organization). *Defensive silence* is "intentional and proactive behavior intended to protect the self from external threats" (Van Dyne et al., p. 1367). This is characterized by an employee who does not share ideas because he/she is afraid of the personal consequences that may result from speaking up.

Prosocial voice involves purposeful communication behavior intended to help others. An employee using prosocial voice would be motivated to help others and would do so by giving solutions to problems that will help the organization or group. *Defensive voice* involves purposeful behavior motivated by self-protection. An employee using defensive voice might not take personal responsibility for things, attribute outcomes to

external factors, shift attention and blame to others, emphasize positive features and divert attention from the problem and engage in other similar behaviors.

In terms of motives, it is probable that employees experiencing a face threat would respond defensively. In his essay on defensive communication, Gibb (1961) elaborated on defensive-supportive communication pairings. A relevant pairing is evaluation (defensive) and description (supportive). Based on this, evaluative feedback alone without facework may tend to make receivers feel defensive, and *negative* evaluation in particular is likely to evoke defensive receiver responses. Kluger et al., (1994) reported on the use of negative feedback as a prompt to elicit negative mood, also indicating defensiveness may be likely. As previously mentioned, other studies (e.g., Baron, 1988, 1990) have shown that people react negatively (e.g., with anger and tension) to more threatening messages and more positively to less threatening messages. If, as expected, the addition of facework indeed renders messages less threatening, then messages without facework would be expected to evoke more negative responses (e.g., defensiveness), whereas messages with facework would be expected to evoke more positive responses (e.g., prosocialness).

Lim and Bowers' (1991) ideas about face threat and proper strategies to address each type of face threat can shed light on this discussion. As previously mentioned, they suggested that a specific strategy addresses each type of face threat most effectively. A tact strategy should address threats to autonomy most effectively, and an approbation strategy should address threats to competence most effectively. Lim and Bowers also examined individuals' natural attempts at facework (without manipulating the type used) and found that use of multiple strategies was common. They commented that "the co-

occurrence of different types of facework is not only possible but sometimes required of a socially competent person" (Lim and Bowers, p. 448). This may indicate that use of multiple strategies may be more effective than one strategy alone, however well-targeted it is. Based on these as-yet untested expectations and the expectation of certain responses to more- or less-threatening messages, different predictions can be made for responses to autonomy and competence threats.

In general, it is expected that the threat-only condition for both autonomy and competence will evoke the most defensiveness. However, the level of defensiveness is expected to decrease differently for each type of threat. It is also expected that the threat plus tact and approbation condition (i.e., the multiple-strategy condition) for both autonomy and competence will evoke the most prosocialness. The level of prosocialness is also expected to vary differently for each type of threat. Thus, the following hypotheses are proposed.

H1: For autonomy threats, the level of threat will descend in the following order (from most to least threatening): threat only, threat with approbation, threat with tact, threat with tact and approbation.

H2: For autonomy threats, defensive voice and silence will be positively associated with the level of threat posed by the message.

H3: For autonomy threats, prosocial voice and silence will be negatively associated with the level of threat posed by the message.

Threats to competence should descend in a slightly different order, according to Lim and Bowers' (1991) suggested threat-strategy matches. Based on this ordering, the relationship between level of threat and both defensiveness and prosocialness should be

different for competence than for autonomy. The following hypotheses are proposed for competence threats.

H4: For competence threats, the level of threat will descend in the following order (from most to least threatening): threat only, threat with tact, threat with approbation, threat with tact and approbation.

H5: For competence threats, defensive voice and silence will be positively associated with the level of threat posed by the message.

H6: For competence threats, prosocial voice and silence will be negatively associated with the level of threat posed by the message.

Communication Apprehension. An additional factor that may affect receiver responses to negative feedback is their level of CA. CA is defined as "an individual's level of fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons" (McCroskey, 1977a, p. 78). McCroskey (1997a) pointed out that CA has generally been studied as a trait-like variable, but also has been examined as a state variable. He suggested that CA should be considered as if it were on a continuum where individuals' level of CA could be affected by both personal and situational characteristics. The current study focuses on CA mainly stemming from personality rather than the situation. It is important to note that studies have shown both personality- and situation-based CA are amenable to training efforts (Ayres, Hopf, & Will, 2000; Dwyer, 2000).

Learning more about how individuals' levels of CA may affect their behavior in an organizational context can be useful because of the associations between CA levels and some important organizational variables. For example, Winiecki and Ayres (1999)

found that CA was negatively correlated with position in the company and individuals' salaries. Those high in CA tended to have lower positions and salaries than those low in CA. In addition, high CAs have been shown to have lower job satisfaction (Harville, 1992), perhaps due to their difficulty developing and maintaining relationships. Harville also found that even people with low CA were not highly satisfied with their jobs when there were low communication requirements, indicating more knowledge of both high and low CAs would be helpful.

The diagnosis of problems associated with high and/or low CA can be useful to organizations because of the treatability of both state and trait CA. In a Solomon four-group study, Ayres et al. (2000) found that both state and trait CA were reduced using a systematic desensitization intervention (i.e., systematic exposure to uncomfortable situations over time to decrease the reaction to those situations). They suggested similar studies be undertaken to determine the effectiveness of other CA treatments. Also, Dwyer (2000) found that trait CA was reduced by both a traditional intervention (i.e., a skills-based public speech class) and a program based on tailoring individual treatments for CA to individual personality dimensions. Helping high CA individuals become more comfortable with communicating through some type of intervention may, in turn, lead to positive individual and organizational outcomes.

Few recent studies have examined CA in the organizational context, although previous findings indicate that CA could affect individuals and organizations alike. The propensity for high CA individuals to avoid communication could be damaging in a feedback situation where clarification and mutual understanding are important. More specifically, it may be problematic if high CA individuals tend to use silence to respond

to feedback when it is important to talk with their supervisors to understand the feedback better and to be able to implement it. If individuals with high CA tend not to use voice, it will be very difficult to have mutual understanding between a supervisor and an employee. The responses of low CA individuals to negative feedback may also provide useful information on how to go about delivering feedback. If individuals with low CA tend to respond to threatening feedback with silence as well, then threat becomes a much more important variable. That is, if face threats are so powerful they elicit silence from people who like communicating in general, then perceived threats are wide-ranging problem for organizations. If low CAs respond with voice even when there is high face threat, then perhaps threat will be less of a concern because it does not seem to alter their natural pattern (i.e., tending to communicate).

One of the basic theoretical assumptions behind CA (McCroskey, 1977a) is that those high in CA will withdraw or avoid communication if possible. In a meta-analysis of CA studies, Allen and Bourhis (1996) found that indeed, "CA is associated with lower levels of communication behavior (as measured in quality or quantity)" (p. 222). In other words, the findings across studies show that individuals with high CA did not communicate as well or as much as those with low CA. Ayres, Keereetaweep, Chen, & Edwards (1998) found that low CA's perform better in interviews than high CA's. High CA's "tried not to think about the impending interview, did not prepare as thoroughly, and believed that they would not perform well compared to low CA's" (Ayres et al., 1998, p. 432). This study also showed that high CA's *talked less and asked fewer questions* than low CA's. In sum, high CA individuals tend to avoid communication and communicate less than low CAs.

Pinder and Harlos (2001) suggested that individuals low in CA will be more likely to choose voice, whereas individuals high in CA will be more likely to choose silence in response to injustice in the workplace, such as negative feedback, which is likely to be perceived as unjust. When high CAs experience a high level of threat, *because* they are experiencing a strong personal threat to either their autonomy or their competence, their response will be motivated by self-protection, and thus will be defensive. Also, higher CA's should be more likely to choose silence over voice because of the anxiety and other negative emotions they associate with communicating.

H7: For participants high in CA, there will be a significant positive relationship between face threat and defensive silence.

Because lower CA individuals do not experience the levels of anxiety and other negative emotions associated with communicating that higher CAs do, they may be more able to strategize regarding the use of voice and silence. Ellis and Van Dyne (in press) suggest that voice could be a way for employees to restore their freedom (i.e., autonomy) by choosing to make a contribution. Following with this suggestion, lower CA employees are expected to use voice when their autonomy is most threatened, as a way of regaining some autonomy. In addition, low CA's were found to prefer (Daly & McCroskey, 1975) and be most satisfied when in jobs requiring high levels of communication (Harville, 1992). In general, they like to communicate. Lower CA's may also find that using voice in the face of a competence threat presents them with an opportunity to show off or highlight their abilities. This may be a way of disproving the negative feedback, and a way of focusing attention away from their seeming incompetence and onto their areas of excellence. Also, similarly to the higher CA's, the lower CA's will react to strong threats

with efforts to self-protect. In other words, they will be defensively motivated. Thus, the following hypotheses are proposed across autonomy and competence threat.

H8: For low CA participants, there should be a significant positive relationship between face threat and defensive voice.

If the negative feedback message is perceived as posing little threat, then the motive may change from defensive to prosocial because there is no reason to defend if little threat exists. Higher CA's should still choose silence because of their aversion to communication in general. However, if the personal threat is greatly reduced, their motive will change from self-protection to other-protection. For example, they may avoid mentioning problems in others' performance to their supervisor rather than avoiding mentioning their own performance problems. They may also focus on choosing voice or silence as a way of protecting the organization (e.g., not bringing up problems, or pointing out problems that could easily be fixed) and thus be prosocially motivated. Thus, the less threatened high CAs feel, the more likely they will be to choose a prosocial response.

H9: For participants high in CA, there will be a significant negative relationship between face threat and prosocial silence.

One study of CA individuals (Harville, 1992) indicated low CA's were less satisfied with jobs requiring little communication and were most satisfied with jobs that required a lot of communication. This may indicate they prefer to verbalize regardless of the situation. However, in the conditions perceived as less threatening, lower CA's may be motivated by prosocial rather than defensive motives. The less threatened they feel,

the more likely low CAs will be to choose a prosocial response, and because they are low CAs, it is likely to be a voice response. The following hypotheses are posed.

H10: For low CA participants, there should be a significant negative relationship between face threat and prosocial voice.

Facework Strategy Preference. Concerns about individual differences in responses to feedback led to the inclusion of a variable of "facework strategy preference." This was defined as individuals' preference for directness/indirectness in delivery of information (which encompassed both information about performance and general impressions). The conceptualization and measurement for this were adapted from Merkin (2006), who measured direct and indirect strategic responses to face threatening situations. Merkin focused on the use of these strategies in face threatening situations. Direct responses were "straightforward and candid" (Merkin, p. 142), whereas indirect responses were "roundabout" (Merkin, p. 142) and divergent. This study frames the concept in a receiver preference mode. That is, the consideration here was to ascertain how direct and/or indirect individuals would prefer those delivering face-threatening messages to be. No other research exists on this concept considered in this way, so research questions pertinent to other variables of interest are posed.

RQ1: How will individual facework strategy preference affect individuals' perceptions of the level of autonomy and competence face threat?

RQ2: How will individual facework strategy preference affect individuals' choice of voice or silence strategy in response to feedback?

Facework strategy preference may have some effect on individuals' choice of voice or silence simply because they may choose strategies to use themselves that are

similar to or different from their own preferences. In addition, some other factors that may affect individuals' choice of voice or silence responses might include how supportive they perceive their supervisor to be (Taylor & Bowers, 1972) and how serious they perceive the problem posed by the feedback they receive to be.

Supervisor support & feedback severity. Supervisor support is defined as "the degree to which supervisors value their [employee] contributions and care about their well-being" (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002, p. 700). This could clearly have an effect on employee voice and silence responses to negative feedback. For example, the perception that one's supervisor is very supportive may increase the likelihood of the choice of a voice response and decrease the tendency for silence responses. Studies of supervisor support have generally found that perceptions of high supervisor support are positively associated with positive organizational variables such as personal accomplishment (Cook, Banks, & Turner, 1993), perceptions of organizational support and subsequently lower turnover (Shanock & Eisenberger, 2006; Eisenberger, Stinglhamber, Vandenbergl, Sucharski, & Rhoades, 2002), and job satisfaction (Steinhardt, Dolbier, Gottlieb, & McCalister, 2003). Jablin (1981) also linked high supervisor supportiveness with more openness of communication with and higher satisfaction with supervisors. Shanock and Eisenberger (2006) found that as perceptions of supervisor support increased, employees' perceptions of support from the organization, and their in-role (i.e., required tasks) and extra-role (i.e., non-required additional tasks) performance all increased. That is, when employees felt supported by their supervisor and their organization, they were more likely to choose to take on extra tasks not required by their job descriptions. Assuming taking on these extra tasks indicates a propensity of employees who feel supported to go

out of their way to help the organization, one active way of "going the extra mile" to help their organizations might be for them to use prosocial voice. So, this could indicate an association between perceived support and an increased tendency to use prosocial voice responses in an effort to help the organization.

Perceptions of supervisor support have also been negatively associated with undesirable constructs such as depression and hostility (Jones-Johnson & Johnson, 2001) and job stress (Steinhardt et al., 2003). The association of supervisor support with depression and hostility (Jones-Johnson & Johnson) could lead employees to withdraw and remain silent when perceived supervisor support is low.

In addition to supervisor support, the receiver's perception of the seriousness of the feedback may have an effect on how he or she responds. There is no previous research on receiver perceptions of severity of a feedback message. However, intuitively, employees might respond differently based on their perception of the severity of the problem. For example, employees may be more likely to use voice defensively if they think the problem is very severe, whereas they may speak up with prosocial motives if they think the problem is less serious for them (i.e., they will not be fired because of it). Similarly, employees who think the feedback they received indicates a very serious problem might tend to keep quiet for defensive reasons. If the problem doesn't seem very severe, employees might keep their comments quiet in an effort not to upset their manager or hurt the organization by bringing up unnecessary (i.e., small or inconsequential) problems. In sum, it is unclear exactly how severity of the feedback will affect responses, so a research question is posed. This research question addresses both supervisor support and severity of the feedback.

RQ3: Will perceived supervisor support or severity of feedback predict employees' tendencies to use voice and silence?

Method

Overview

Working adults (N = 443) were solicited to participate in an experimental survey containing feedback messages delivered with differing levels of face threat. The design incorporated eight conditions, including four message conditions (face threat message, face threat message with tact, face threat message with approbation, and face threat message with approbation and tact). These four message conditions were completely crossed with two types of face threat: autonomy threat and competence threat. First, each participant completed a facework preference scale, perceived supervisor supportiveness scale and the PRCA-Org (Scott, McCroskey, & Sheahan, 1978), and provided detailed information on their job and their demographic information. Following this, they read one of the eight message manipulations. After reading the message, participants were asked to write out how they would respond to the situation, then they completed scales measuring feedback severity, autonomy face threat, competence face threat, defensive voice, prosocial voice, defensive silence, prosocial silence, vignette realism, and past feedback experience.

Participants. A sample of 443 working adults was obtained. The sample consisted of 45.1 % males and 52.4 % females (2.5 % did not give their sex) recruited from a variety of organizations. Participants were solicited through a snowball-type sampling method. Students in communication classes at a Mid-Atlantic university were asked to recruit non-student adults who had worked for a minimum of one year at their current job. Students received class credit for recruiting a maximum of two participants each (most were allowed to recruit only one participant for credit). The students were given a

letter explaining the research and the procedure required to give to participants they recruited. This method of data collection was chosen because the purpose of the current research was to study individual responses to the negative feedback situation rather than to learn about the context of one specific organization. By gathering a broad sample and using random assignment to conditions, the current study focuses on how varying types of individuals respond to this situation rather than how an organizational context affects individuals who reside within a specific organization.

The participants had a mean age of 41.82 years, with the youngest at 19 years old and the oldest at 66 (12 participants did not give their age). The sample consisted of 92.8 % Caucasians, 1.4 % Hispanics, 1.1 % African Americans, 1.1 % Asian Americans, 0.5 % Native Americans, and 0.7 % of other ethnicities (2.5 % did not indicate an ethnicity). Participants were asked to indicate their highest level of education attained. The sample was fairly well-educated, with 0.5 % indicating they had some high school education, 13.5 % indicating they had a high school degree, 17.2 % had some college, 7.7 % were currently attending college, 5.9 % had an associate's degree, 33.2 % had a bachelor's degree, 0.9 % were currently attending a graduate school, 14.4 % indicated they had a graduate degree, and 4.1 % indicated "other" rather than choose one of the categories (2.7 % did not indicate their education level). In sum, over 50% had at least an associate's degree.

One point one percent of the participants worked at a publisher/newspaper, 9 % worked at a manufacturing company, 16.3 % worked at an analytical organization (analyzing/utilizing information; included banking, law, insurance, real estate-associated organizations), 22.6 % worked at a technical organization (performing technical tasks;

included all health-related organizations), 23 % worked at a service organization (hospitality/restaurant), 7.9 % worked in education-related organizations, and 17.34 % chose "other" as the type of organization (2.7 % did not indicate an organization type). Participants were also asked to indicate their specific job type. Of 428 participants who indicated a job type, 0.5 % were nonfarm laborers, 0.5 % were transport workers, 1.2 % were factory workers, 10.3 % were skilled laborers, 12.1 % were clerical/secretarial/support staff, 12.6 % were in sales, 50.9 % were professional/managerial workers, and 11.9 % indicated they were in other job types.

Participants indicated they had worked a mean of 10.1 years with their current employer, and that they worked a mean of 42.9 hours per week. Most of the sample reported receiving feedback with a frequency of at least once a year (91.8 %), whereas 4.3 % reported receiving feedback with some other frequency, and 3.8 % did not indicate their frequency of feedback. More information on the participants' experience with feedback is reported below with the realism check information. Participants reported having 63.2 % male supervisors, 30.5 % female supervisors, and 6.3 % did not report their supervisor's sex. Participants were asked to indicate their organizational status on an organizational triangle (displayed in Appendix C), which had the numbers one through five listed from the top of the triangle to the bottom (similar to measurement in Mahoney, 1979). A few of the participants indicated they were at the highest level of the organization (8.4 %), followed by 16.3 % at the second highest level, 34.1 % at the third highest level, 23.0 % at the second-to-lowest level, and finally 12.9 % reported being at the lowest level of the organization. When asked if they currently supervise others, 54 % indicated that they did supervise others at the time they responded to the survey, whereas

43.3 % indicated they did not supervise others (2.7 % did not respond to the question). Those who indicated they did supervise others were asked how many they supervise. The number supervised ranged from one to 300 employees, with a mean of 20.53 employees supervised. About 8 % supervised 50 or more employees, and about 92 % supervised fewer than 50 employees.

Design. The design was a 2 (threat: autonomy, competence) x 4 (type of facework: none, tact, approbation, tact & approbation) fully crossed design. Threats to autonomy and competence were manipulated and measured. In addition, facework strategy preference, supervisor supportiveness, message realism, past feedback experience, trait CA, feedback severity, defensive voice, prosocial voice, defensive silence, and prosocial silence were measured.

When conducting research which asks participants to imagine some situation and their responses to it, one way to improve responses is by creating research "stories" that include the participant as a main character and portray situations familiar to the participant (Greenberg & Eskew, 1993). Because of this, the vignettes used asked participants to imagine themselves as part of the story. Participants were asked to think of their real job and real supervisor (direct report) before reading the feedback message. They read a brief introduction describing a situation in which they received feedback from their real boss on their real job. The introduction reads as follows, "Imagine your supervisor stops by your work area to talk with you about some recent work you had performed. In his/her estimation there is a problem in that you are not performing as well as you should given your ability. He/she provides you with a brief and general statement and you are left to interpret what was meant." After reading these instructions,

participants read one of eight different feedback messages ostensibly delivered by their boss.

Procedure. Participants completed the survey online but were offered the option of procuring a paper copy if they desired. The online survey was offered for the convenience of the participants and to allow for participation of individuals who otherwise might not be able to participate because of physical distance from where the study was being conducted. The paper survey was also offered to ensure that no one was excluded based on lack of internet access and also for individuals concerned about surveillance at work. No participants requested a paper copy. Participants who completed the web survey were directed to a webpage which displayed the IRB consent form for the study and a link to the survey at the bottom of the page. The survey link contained a randomizer which randomly assigned participants to one of the eight conditions in the study. For logistical reasons, there were eight separate survey versions which were identical except for the message manipulation. When clicked, the randomizer chose one of the eight at random and linked to the front page for that survey, thus providing random assignment to conditions. At the end of the survey, participants were sent to yet another separate webpage to provide their name and daytime phone number so they could be contacted if necessary but still retain anonymity on their survey responses. No names were associated with particular responses.

The survey consisted of initial scales for CA and facework strategy preferences, along with demographics, work information, and a scale for perceived supervisor supportiveness, followed by the message manipulation (see Appendix B for complete messages). After reading the message, participants responded on post-message measures

including scales for feedback severity, autonomy threat, competence threat, defensive voice, prosocial voice, defensive silence, prosocial silence, vignette realism, and past feedback experience. See Appendix C for all scales and items.

Feedback Messages. The feedback messages are included in Appendix A. These messages contain either an autonomy or a competence face threat. Each face threat message consists of a face threat alone or the face threat plus one of three types of preventative facework: tact, approbation, or a combination of tact and approbation. The feedback messages are comprised of combinations of autonomy or competence threat and one of three types of facework.

The feedback messages were created using combinations of different statements that were added to a base message. The individual statements were developed through a brainstorming session with four individuals who were informed of the definitions of the different types of face threat and facework. These individuals worked alone to come up with potential statements, and then shared their statements and generated more ideas based on those statements. Then, the statements generated through brainstorming were combined by the researcher to create the messages used in this study. More description of the messages is provided below.

Threats to autonomy specifically focus on the want not to be imposed upon. The autonomy message threatens this face need in three important ways: by insinuating a loss of independence, invoking obligation to the organization, and by giving an order. Lim and Bowers (1991) suggested these are the three statements most threatening to autonomy needs. Threats to competence focus on the want to be seen as a capable individual; in this case it is the need to be seen as capable of doing an acceptable job. The

competence message threatens this face need in three ways also: through ridicule, focused disapproval, and blunt disapproval of performance.

In order to combat autonomy face threats, previous research claims that tact should be used (Lim & Bowers, 1991). Tact messages are designed to provide the receiver with a boost to autonomy. This is manipulated by the use of statements sharing responsibility for the problem and incurring debt (to the sender), creating shared responsibility for the need to redo the work, and putting the supervisor in a position of owing the employee. To combat competence face threats, previous research claims that approbation should be used (Lim & Bowers, 1991). Approbation messages are designed to show the sender believes in the receiver's capabilities. The message with approbation consists of statements showing support and admiration for the employee, showing that the employee's ability is indeed respected. Finally, the message with both tact and approbation includes all elements from both the tact and approbation messages. The actual messages used in the study included eight different combinations: autonomy threat, autonomy threat with tact, autonomy threat with approbation, autonomy threat with tact/approbation, competence threat, competence threat with tact, competence threat with approbation, and competence threat with tact/approbation. The components of these messages are in Appendix A and the messages as displayed in each of the eight conditions are included in Appendix B.

A pretest was conducted to ensure the competence threat manipulation was effective. The autonomy threat manipulation had already been tested and found effective in a prior study (Westerman & Park, 2007). Results of the pretest are reported at the beginning of the results section.

Measurement

Participants completed scales measuring CA, facework strategy preference, supervisor supportiveness, feedback severity, autonomy face threat, competence face threat, defensive voice, prosocial voice, defensive silence, prosocial silence, vignette realism, and past feedback experience. The CA, facework strategy preference, supervisor supportiveness, message realism, and past feedback experience scales used Likert-type scaling with 5-point scales. This scaling was based on previous successful use of these scales with 5-point scaling (see Westerman, Park, & Lee, 2007; Bartoo & Sias, 2004; Harville, 1992). Feedback severity was measured using semantic differentials. Both face threat scales and all four voice/silence scales used a seven-point Likert-type format. Each scale is described individually in more detail below. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was performed on all scales to test for unidimensionality. This process involved checking for differences between observed inter-item correlations and expected inter-item correlations. First, expected inter-item correlations were calculated as products of factor loadings for individual items. Confidence intervals were also calculated for these expected inter-item correlations. Then, the observed correlations were examined to determine whether they fell outside of the calculated confidence intervals. A small number of these observed correlations can be expected to fall outside of the confidence intervals by chance. If more observed correlations than expected by chance fell outside of the confidence intervals for a given scale, items with multiple problematic correlations were dropped from the analysis until a unidimensional solution was found. Retained items and their factor loadings can be seen in Table 3. Although some items have factor loadings below .30, these items were not removed because they did not present large

errors that needed to be removed from the factor analyses according to the requirements described above. That is, although their factor loadings were low, these items presented fewer errors than would be expected by chance. Reliabilities were then calculated based on the resulting unidimensional scales.

PRCA-Org. The PRCA-Org scale was designed to measure CA in an organizational setting. The measure was originally created by Scott et al. (1978), who used 30 items from three existing scales (PRCA, Verbal Reticence, and Unwillingness to Communicate) and 20 new items designed to tap into CA displayed in organizations. Their results showed the new scale (PRCA-Org) was similar to other measures of trait CA. The correlation between the PRCA and this new scale was .90. Scott et al. concluded that the PRCA-Org would provide increased face validity for measuring CA when dealing with organizational samples. Subsequently, this scale has been used in a variety of organizational studies (e.g., Bartoo & Sias, 2004; Harville, 1992; Winiecki & Ayres, 1999). It consists of twenty Likert-type items asking about communication in organizational settings (i.e., People can usually count on me to keep a conversation going," and "I enjoy talking to my supervisor") Scott et al. (1978) found a reliability (Cronbach's α) of .91. Thirteen of the twenty items were chosen for face validity and to reduce the number of items participants were required to answer. The items were answered on a five-point Likert-type scale, with 1 being strongly agree and 5 being strongly disagree. Thus, higher numbers on this scale would indicate higher trait CA. CFA was performed on the scale, and four items were dropped because too many large errors were found initially between observed and expected correlations and these four items had problematic correlations with multiple other items. Nine items were retained in

a unidimensional scale that had a reliability (Cronbach's α) of .86. Dropped and retained items are indicated in Appendix C.

Facework strategy preference. Facework strategy preference is individuals' preference for directness/indirectness of delivery of information, and encompassed both performance and general thoughts about the person. The items for this were adapted from Merkin (2006), who measured direct and indirect facework strategies in a cross-cultural setting. The adapted items measured the preference for more direct delivery and for more indirect delivery. Sample "direct" items include "If something is wrong with my performance, I would want to be told directly," and "I like my supervisor to express his/her thoughts on my ability forthrightly." Sample "indirect" items include, "I want my supervisor to express any issues with my performance indirectly," and "I want others to deliver their reactions to my performance sensitively." Factor analysis was performed separately on each scale. The direct scale that resulted from CFA was one 5-item unidimensional factor that had a reliability (Cronbach's α) of .87. All items were retained for this scale. The indirect scale was four items that formed a unidimensional factor that had a reliability (Cronbach's α) of .66. One item was dropped from the indirect scale because of problematic correlations with the other items.

Supervisor supportiveness. The supervisor supportiveness scale (Taylor & Bowers, 1972) was designed to measure participants' perceptions of how supportive their supervisor was of them. The scale included three items, such as "My supervisor is willing to listen to my problems." Participants responded to these items on a 5-point Likert-type scale with 1 equal to strongly agree and 5 equal to strongly disagree. CFA was performed

and resulted in all three items being retained in a unidimensional factor with a reliability (Cronbach's α) of .93.

Feedback severity. This scale measured participants' perceptions of how serious a problem was posed by the feedback they received. This scale was created by the researcher and consisted of four semantic differential items, such as "Trivial..Crucial." CFA was performed on the four items and all were retained in a unidimensional factor with a reliability (Cronbach's α) of .80

Realism. Participants' perceptions of the realism of the situation presented in the survey may depend on their beliefs about whether or not they would ever receive the type of feedback presented in the survey and whether or not the situation described seems like something that would really happen in their work life. Both were measured as part of the manipulation check. These scales were measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1-strongly disagree to 5-strongly agree).

Previous feedback experience was measured with four items created by Westerman and Park (2007). They found a reliability (Cronbach's α) of .86. These items include samples such as "I consider this type of feedback normal," and "I would never expect to hear this kind of message." CFA revealed the four items formed a unidimensional factor that had a reliability (Cronbach's α) of .80.

Realism of the situation (i.e., vignette realism) was measured with a five-item measure previously used by Westerman and Park (2007). This scale includes items such as, "I can imagine being in a situation like this one," and "This situation could happen, or has happened." Westerman and Park found this scale had a reliability (Cronbach's α) of

.84. CFA conducted for this study retained all five items as one unidimensional factor with a reliability (Cronbach's α) of .75.

Face threat. The current study focused on autonomy face (synonymous with negative face) and competence face (combined with solidarity, makes up positive face). For autonomy threats, Westerman and Park (2007) added items to Carson and Cupach's (2000) original scale and found their version had a reliability (Cronbach's α) of .90. The seven-item scale from Westerman and Park was used to measure autonomy threat. For this study, CFA was conducted and the seven items were retained in a unidimensional factor that had a reliability (Cronbach's α) of .87.

Threats to competence were measured with two modified items from Carson and Cupach's (2000) face threat scale and six original items from a scale previously used by Westerman and Mieksztyn (2007). The items include, "My boss's statements showed he/she thought I was incompetent at the task," and "My boss's statements pointed out he/she thought I failed miserably." Westerman and Mieksztyn found this scale to be unidimensional with a (Cronbach's α) of .89. CFA was conducted on the current data set and all eight items were retained in a unidimensional factor with a reliability (Cronbach's α) of .89. Both face threat scales are included in Appendix C.[1]

Voice. Scales for voice were created using a combination of items adapted from Van Dyne et al. (2003) and items written specifically for the feedback situation to increase face validity of the scale. The scale for prosocial voice includes 5 items adapted from Van Dyne et al. and 4 items written by the researcher. The scale for defensive voice consists of five items adapted from Van Dyne et al. Responses were given on a 7-point Likert-type scale. These scales were tested for unidimensionality using CFA. For

defensive voice, all five items were retained in a unidimensional factor, and had a reliability (Cronbach's α) of .87. For prosocial voice, all nine items were retained in a unidimensional factor with a reliability (Cronbach's α) of .93. The scales are included in Appendix C.

Silence. Similar to the measurement for voice, the silence scales are a combination of items adapted from Van Dyne et al. (2003) and items written by the researcher to increase face validity for this study. The prosocial silence scale consists of 5 items adapted from Van Dyne et al. and 5 items written by the researcher. The defensive silence scale includes 5 items adapted from Van Dyne et al. and 4 items written by the researcher. Responses were given on a 7-point Likert-type scale. These scales were tested for unidimensionality using CFA. The defensive silence scale retained nine items in a unidimensional factor with a reliability (Cronbach's α) of .89. For the prosocial silence scale, four items were dropped in order to form a unidimensional factor with the remaining six items. This scale had a reliability (Cronbach's α) of .60.[2] Both scales are included in Appendix C.

Feedback sign. The sign of the feedback was also checked with a three-item semantic differential manipulation check adapted from Haeggburg (2001) and one additional item written by the researcher. These items were tested for unidimensionality using CFA. Three of the four items formed a unidimensional factor, including poor-good and low-high. These three items had a reliability (Cronbach's α) of .82. The items are included in Appendix C.

Work information & Demographics. Working adults were asked for more detailed information on their work situation and some of their own demographics. Some of this

information was included as control variables, including organization size, supervisor's sex, hours worked per week, whether or not they supervise others, type of job performed, organizational status, and type of organization. Participants were also asked to provide their tenure at the organization, as it may have affected their perceptions of competence and autonomy threats. In addition, they were asked to share how often they receive feedback, and whether they receive written or verbal feedback, or written *and* verbal feedback. This information helped in establishing the ability of the sample to comment on feedback experiences. Participants were also asked to share their own age, their sex, their level of education, and their ethnicity.

Pre-analysis

Work Information & Demographics. To determine whether any control variables had an effect on the results, tests were conducted on the participant's age, sex, ethnicity, and education level, their job and organization type, their organizational status, whether they were a supervisor or not, their tenure, hours per week, the sex of their supervisor, and the size of the organization. Table 4 shows the results of a one-way ANOVA with condition (eight message conditions) as the independent variable and each of the continuous variables as the dependent variable, and Table 5 shows the results of chi-square tests for the effects of study condition on the categorical control variables. None of the control variables were associated significantly with the eight conditions.

Feedback Experience & Realism Check. Two types of realism were tested to determine participant perceptions of each. These included previous feedback experience and vignette realism. Each provided information about a different aspect of the feedback

experience of the participant and each participant's perceptions of the hypothetical situation.

First, previous feedback experience can give some insight into participants' previous experience with receiving feedback. This was measured on a five-point Likert-type scale with one indicating strong disagreement and five indicating strong agreement. A one-sample t-test (with 3, or the midpoint, as the test value) was performed to determine whether participants had previously received the kind of feedback delivered in the study. Participants ($M = 2.70$, $SD = 0.87$) had not previously experienced this type of feedback, $t\ (422) = -7.04$, $p < .001$, $\eta = .11$. The interpretation of the items for this scale could have led people to indicate they had not experienced this type of feedback even if they had received negative feedback previously. All four items in some way refer to "this type" of feedback, which could indicate negative feedback, or feedback phrased in this certain way, or literally this message itself. There is no way to know exactly how participants interpreted these items. Future studies should use more specific items to determine exactly what type of feedback participants have previously experienced.

In addition, responses to questions about how often and through which channel(s) participants received feedback can give some insight into their previous experience with feedback. Participants reported variously receiving feedback daily (18.3 %), weekly (35 %), monthly (22.1 %), bi-annually (10.3 %), and annually (9.9 %). Four and a half percent reported receiving feedback at other levels of frequency, such as "as needed," or "only when you would do something wrong." In addition, participants reported how the feedback was delivered. Two hundred and thirty two participants (52.4 %) reported receiving feedback verbally, twenty (4.5 %) received written feedback, and one hundred

seventy-two (38.8 %) received both verbal and written feedback, whereas one individual (0.2 %) reported receiving no feedback. Eighteen participants did not respond to the question about feedback delivery.

Realism of the situation was a direct measure of whether or not participants saw the described situation as realistic. This was measured using a Likert-type scale of one to five, with one being strongly disagree and five being strongly agree. A one-sample t-test (with 3 as the test value) indicated that participants found the scenario believable (M = 3.27, SD = 0.71), t (422) = 7.73, $p < .001$, $\eta = .12$.

Manipulation Check. Whether participants indeed saw the feedback message they received as negative was of crucial importance. This was measured with three semantic differential items on a seven-point scale, with lower values indicating more negative evaluations. A one-sample t-test with the midpoint (4) as the test value revealed the feedback was seen as more negative than positive (M = 3.72, SD = 1.54), t (425) = -3.76, $p < .001$, $\eta = .03$. Based on this, it was concluded that manipulation of the negative valence in these messages was effective.

Results

Overview

A pretest was run prior to the main data collection to determine the effectiveness of the competence message manipulation. The autonomy message manipulation was previously tested in Westerman and Park (2007). Following the results of the pretest, the main data was collected and analyzed. These results follow those of the pretest.

Pretest

The autonomy face threat messages were pretested for their manipulation effects in a prior study by Westerman and Park (2007). They were shown to differ sufficiently in their effects on perceptions of autonomy face threat. The competence face threat messages were pretested specifically as a precursor to this study. All four competence face threat messages were presented to participants as repeated measures and counterbalanced. Participants rated the level of face threat after reading each message in turn. A rating of five was most threatening and a rating of one was least threatening. A repeated subjects one-way ANOVA revealed the four types were perceived significantly different in terms of competence threat, $F(1, 31) = 22.03$, $p < .001$. Post-hoc paired t-tests revealed the mean ratings for the threat-only condition ($M = 3.84$, $SD = 0.66$) differed significantly from each of the other three messages: approbation ($M = 2.75$, $SD = 0.85$), $t(31) = -9.53$, $p < .001$, tact ($M = 2.92$, $SD = 0.65$), $t(31) = 8.12$, $t < .001$ and combined tact and approbation ($M = 2.68$, $SD = 0.79$), $t(31) = -10.09$, $p < .001$. As expected (and intended), the threat level of the messages descended in the following order (by mean): threat-only was most threatening, followed by tact, followed by

approbation, and finally the least threatening message was the combined tact and approbation message.

Perceptions of face threat were also tested for order effects. The only difference found was that the threat-only message was perceived as less threatening when presented first as opposed to any other position (2^{nd}, 3^{rd}, 4^{th}). As the messages were not presented in repeated subjects form in the main study, this provides evidence that testing each message alone provides the most stringent conditions for finding significant results, as participants' views of the threat-only message were not potentially inflated by reading any of the other messages first.

Main Data Analysis

Hypothesis one, which predicted threats would descend in a certain order for autonomy, was tested with a one-way ANOVA. Hypothesis one was not supported. This ANOVA revealed that there were not significant differences in the ratings of autonomy threat due to experimental condition, $F(7,421) = .68$, $p > .05$, $\eta^2 = .01$. Means and standard deviations for this analysis are provided in Table 6. A Tukey post hoc analysis revealed no significant differences between any pairing of two conditions out of the eight. Subsequently, a planned contrast was run to compare the ratings of autonomy face threat in the autonomy face threat conditions (all four) to the ratings of autonomy face threat in the competence face threat conditions (all four). This contrast revealed that the two groups (autonomy versus competence conditions) were not significantly different from each other, $t(421) = -.09$, $p = .93$, $\eta^2 = .0001$. Finally, because the approbation conditions (across autonomy & competence conditions) appeared to elicit the lowest perception of autonomy threat, a planned contrast was run to compare the two approbation conditions

(i.e., autonomy threat with approbation & competence threat with approbation) against the other six conditions (i.e., autonomy threat only, with tact, with tact & approbation, competence threat only, with tact, with tact & approbation). This contrast was significant, $t\,(421) = 1.94, p < .05, \eta^2 = .01$, indicating the two approbation conditions were perceived as significantly less threatening to participants' autonomy than the other six conditions combined.

Hypothesis four, which suggested threats would descend in a certain order for competence, was tested with a one-way ANOVA. Hypothesis four was not supported. This analysis showed significant differences in ratings of competence threat due to experimental condition, $F\,(7, 420) = 4.31, p < .001, \eta^2 = .07$. Means and standard deviations are provided in Table 6. A Tukey post hoc analysis revealed significant differences between the competence threat condition and each of the following conditions: autonomy with tact, autonomy with approbation, autonomy with tact and approbation, and competence with approbation. These differences are represented in Table 6 with subscripts. A planned contrast of the autonomy threat conditions and the competence threat conditions was run to determine whether the two groups were different. The competence threat ratings were significantly different from the autonomy threat conditions (all four) versus the competence threat conditions (all four), $t\,(420) = -3.27, p < .001, \eta^2 = .02$. A planned contrast was run to compare among the four competence threat conditions. This contrast revealed that the two conditions containing approbation (i.e., approbation and tact & approbation conditions) were significantly different from the other two conditions, $t\,(206) = -2.73, p < .001, \eta^2 = .03$. That is, the

approbation conditions were significantly less threatening to participants' competence than those without approbation.

Autonomy threat ratings were affected by both types of threat (i.e., autonomy and competence), but competence threat ratings were only affected by competence threat. Overall, approbation messages resulted in the least perceived autonomy or competence threat, whereas tact messages did not reduce either type of threat. Because of this assessment of the differences across conditions, additional analyses were undertaken to determine if these two groups (i.e., approbation-only message conditions vs. all other message conditions) differed significantly in terms of the major variables in the study. T-tests were run to compare the two approbation-only conditions with the other six message conditions on CA, defensive voice, prosocial voice, defensive silence, direct facework preference, indirect facework preference, supervisor supportiveness, and feedback severity. Of these variables, only one variable measured before the message induction, indirect facework preference, differed significantly between the approbation ($M = 2.91$, $SD = .63$) and the non-approbation ($M = 2.71$, $SD = .67$) condition groups, $t\ (434) = -2.80$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .02$. All pre-analysis variables, including participants' age, sex, ethnicity, and education level, their job and organization type, their organizational status, whether they were a supervisor or not, their tenure, hours per week, the sex of their supervisor, and the size of the organization, were also submitted to t-tests using the same groupings and none were significantly different across the two groups. This lack of differences led to the use of perceived threat rather than comparison of participants based on condition for the remaining analyses.

Hypotheses two and five, which predicted a positive correlation between defensive responses, both in terms of voice and silence, and the level of autonomy threat and competence threat, respectively, were tested by correlating each autonomy threat and competence threat with defensive voice and silence. Correlations are reported in Table 7. Autonomy face threat was significantly and positively correlated with defensive silence, r (420) = .10, $p < .05$, $r^2 = .01$, and negatively, but not significantly correlated with defensive voice, r (419) = -.05, $p > .05$, $r^2 = .003$. Hypothesis two is thus partially supported. Competence face threat was positively and significantly correlated with defensive silence, r (419) = .19, $p < .01$, $r^2 = .04$, but not significantly correlated with defensive voice, r (418) = .07, $p > .05$, $r^2 = .005$. Hypothesis five is also partially supported. Overall, these findings indicate that as face threats of either type increase, the propensity to use defensive silence, but not defensive voice, increases.

Hypotheses three and six, which predicted a negative correlation between prosocial voice and silence and the level of autonomy and competence threat, respectively, were tested with correlations. The correlations are reported in Table 7. Autonomy face threat was significantly and negatively correlated with prosocial voice, r (419) = -.19, $p < .01$, $r^2 = .04$. Thus, hypothesis three is partially supported. Competence face threat was significantly and negatively correlated with prosocial voice, r (418) = -.23, $p < .01$, $r^2 = .05$, providing partial support for hypothesis six. As noted above, prosocial silence was not tested due to measurement concerns. These findings indicate a greater propensity to choose prosocial voice when threat is perceived to be low.

Hypotheses seven and eight, which stated that high CAs would have a positive relationship between face threat and defensive silence, and that low CAs would have a

positive relationship between face threat and defensive voice, were tested with correlations using sub-samples of the highest and lowest CA individuals for both autonomy and competence face threat. The upper (n = 103, M = 3.21, SD = 0.39) and lower (n = 119, M = 1.56, SD = 0.27) quartiles of CA were used for this analysis. Complete correlation tables for the high and low quartiles of CA are provided in Tables 6 and 7.

Hypothesis seven predicted a positive relationship between face threat and defensive silence for those high in CA. The upper quartile of CA was analyzed, and a nonsignificant relationship was found between autonomy threat and defensive silence, r (99) = .11, n.s., r^2 = .01 Also for those high in CA, a positive relationship was found between competence threat and defensive silence, r (99) = .27, $p < .01$, r^2 = .07. Hypothesis seven was partially supported because of the predicted positive relationship between autonomy threat and defensive silence.

Hypothesis eight predicted a positive relationship between face threat and defensive voice for those low in CA. The lower quartile of CA was analyzed, and a nonsignificant relationship was found between autonomy threat and defensive voice, r (113) = -.10, n.s., r^2 = .01, and between competence threat and defensive voice, r (112) = -.09, r^2 = .01. Hypothesis eight was not supported, as no significant findings were evident.

Hypotheses nine and ten, which stated that for those high in CA, there would be a negative relationship between face threat and prosocial silence, and that for those with low CA, there would be a negative relationship between face threat and prosocial voice, were also tested using the upper and lower quartiles of CA.

Hypothesis nine predicted a negative relationship between face threat and prosocial silence for those high in CA. This hypothesis could not be tested because of the measurement problems with prosocial silence. Hypothesis ten predicted a significant negative relationship between face threat and prosocial voice for those low in CA. The lower quartile of CA was analyzed, and a significant negative relationship was found between autonomy threat and prosocial voice, r (113) = -.19, $p < .05$, $r^2 = .04$. A nonsignificant relationship was found between competence threat and prosocial voice, r (112) = -.10, n.s., $r^2 = .01$. Thus, hypothesis ten was partially supported because of the negative correlation between autonomy threat and prosocial voice.

In sum, for low CAs, the association between autonomy threat and prosocial voice was significant and negative, but the association between competence threat and prosocial voice was nonsignificant. For high CAs, the correlation between defensive silence and competence threat was positive and significant, but autonomy threat and defensive silence were not significantly related.

Research questions one and two, which asked how facework strategy preferences would affect perceptions of autonomy and competence face threats and the choice of voice or silence, were answered using correlations between preference for indirect and preference for direct strategies with each type of facework (RQ1) and direct and indirect individual facework strategy with each type of voice/silence response (RQ2). Prosocial silence was excluded from the analyses because of the measurement issues discussed earlier. To answer RQ1, the preference for direct facework strategy was not significantly correlated with either autonomy, r (429) = -.02, $p > .05$, $r^2 = .001$, or competence face threat, r (428) = -.07, $p > .05$, $r^2 = .005$. This indicates that there was no relationship

between the preference for direct delivery of feedback and perceptions of either type of face threat. The preference for indirect facework strategy was significantly and positively correlated with both autonomy, r (429) = .10, $p < .05$, $r^2 = .01$, and competence face threat , r (428) = .12, $p < .05$, $r^2 = .01$, indicating that the more strongly people preferred indirect delivery of feedback, the more they felt both their autonomy and competence were threatened by the feedback message.

To answer RQ2, the preference for direct facework strategies was negatively and significantly correlated with defensive voice, r (419) = .35, $p < .01$, $r^2 = .12$, and defensive silence, r (420) = -.36, $p < .01$, $r^2 = .13$. Those who preferred direct facework strategies were less likely to use either defensive response (i.e., voice or silence). The preference for direct facework strategies was positively correlated with prosocial voice, r (419) = .32, $p < .01$, $r^2 = .10$. That is, individuals who preferred direct strategies for feedback delivery were also more likely to use prosocial voice as a response to the feedback in an effort to help others or their organization. The preference for indirect facework strategies was positively correlated with both defensive voice, r (419) = .20, $p < .01$, $r^2 = .04$, and defensive silence, r (420) = .21, $p < .01$, $r^2 = .04$. Those who preferred an indirect strategy for feedback delivery were more likely to choose a defensive strategy, including both voice and silence. The preference for indirect facework strategies was not significantly correlated with prosocial voice, r (419) = -.06, $p > .05$, $r^2 = .004$. In other words, there was no relationship between the preference for indirect strategies and the tendency to choose to respond prosocially with voice. Those who preferred more direct delivery were less likely to use defensive response strategies (voice or silence), and did not seems to feel threat more or less strongly because of the preference. Those who

preferred more indirect delivery were more likely to respond defensively (voice or silence) and felt threat more strongly the more they preferred indirect delivery.

To test research question three, three regressions were run with the criterion variables of defensive voice, prosocial voice, and defensive silence, respectively, and predictor variables including perceived supervisor support and severity of the feedback. Supervisor support and feedback severity were centered before entering them into the equation (cf., Cohen, Cohen, West, & Aiken, 2003), and a product term for the two variables was included to test for interaction effects.

The regression for defensive voice showed that perceived feedback severity (b = -0.109, $p < .05$) had a significant negative effect on the tendency to use defensive voice, but supervisor supportiveness (b = -0.072, $p = .144$) did not, and the interaction between the two (b = -0.034, $p = .488$) was also not significant. The more severe the feedback was perceived to be, the less likely participants were to use defensive voice. For prosocial voice, supervisor supportiveness (b = 5.362, $p < .001$) was the only significant predictor, indicating that as supervisor supportiveness increased, so did prosocial voice. Finally, for defensive silence, there were no significant predictors. All regression results are reported in Table 10.

Post hoc analyses

Facework Strategy Preference. An unexpected finding emerged from the exploratory variables of preference for indirect facework strategies and preference for direct facework strategies. There was a significant, negative correlation between the two, $r\,(435) = -.36, p < .01, r^2 = .13$, indicating that they were measuring separate preferences. These individual differences have not previously been tapped; this provides an indicator

that they are separate preferences rather than two ends of a continuum of preference. In addition, the direct strategy preference was negatively correlated with CA, r (435) = -.36, $p < .01$, $r^2 = .13$, indicating that those with lower CA, or those more comfortable communicating in general, had a preference for more direct strategies. Preference for indirect strategies was correlated positively with CA, r (435) = .27, $p < .01$, $r^2 = .07$, indicating that those with higher CA, or those generally uncomfortable communicating, preferred more indirect strategies.

Voice/Silence Regressions. Although the hypotheses were answered using correlations, in order to determine the variables which had the most effect on voice and silence, an additional set of regressions were run. Each regression had predictors of CA, autonomy face threat, competence face threat, direct facework preference, and indirect facework preference. The criterion variables were defensive voice, prosocial voice, and defensive silence, respectively. The predictors were centered, then entered into the equation (cf., Cohen, Cohen, West, & Aiken, 2003), and product terms were included to test for second-order effects. Results for these regressions are reported in Table 11.

For *defensive voice*, autonomy face threat (b = -0.19) and direct facework preference (b = -0.27) were significant negative predictors and competence face threat (b = 0.16), and CA (b = 0.15) were significant positive predictors. Thus, the more autonomy threat and the more an individual preferred direct facework, the less likely they were to use defensive voice. The more competence face threat and the higher their CA level, the more likely they were to use defensive voice.

This regression had one significant second-order effect; CA interacted with competence threat to affect defensive voice. This interaction showed the positive

relationship between perceived competence threat and defensive voice was strengthened by the individuals' CA level, B = 0.163, $p < .05$. The significant interaction indicates that all three slopes are significantly different from each other. However, for individuals with CA scores at 1 standard deviation below the mean (i.e., low CA), the simple slope was positive but not significantly different from zero (b = 0.048, $p > .25$). The higher individuals' level of CA, the more the simple slope increased (b = 0.188, $p > .05$ for moderate CA; b = .328, $p < .005$ for high CA), but only the high CA slope was significantly different from zero. This means that when CA is one standard deviation above the mean and competence threat is high, the use of defensive voice increased significantly. The simple slopes are shown in Figure 1.

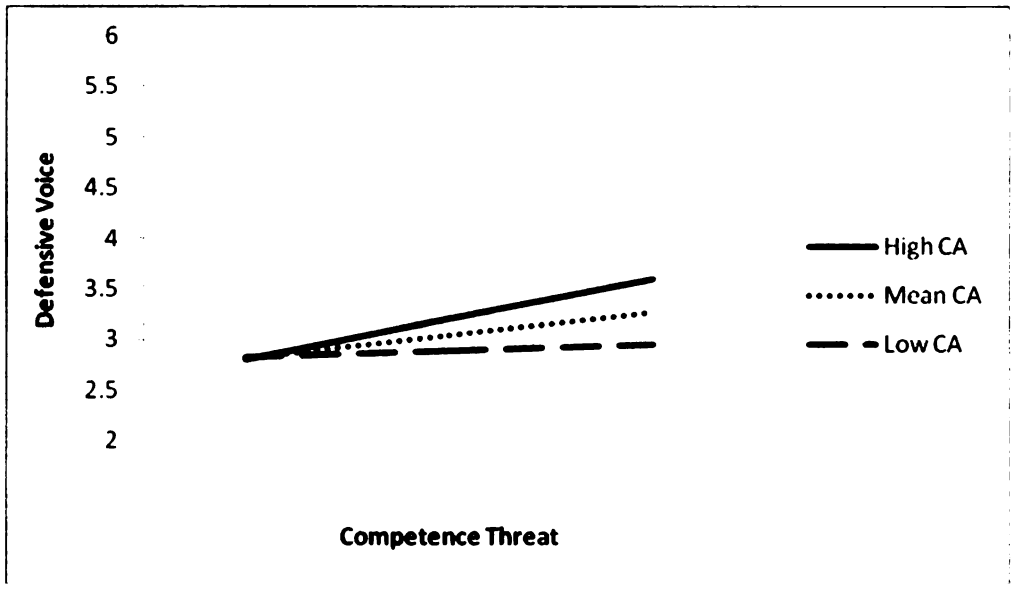


Figure 1. Simple slopes for the interaction of CA and competence threat on defensive voice.

For *prosocial voice*, CA (b = -0.19) and competence face threat (b = -0.14) were significant negative predictors and direct facework preference (b = .30) and indirect facework preference (b = .13) were significant positive predictors. This indicates that

when CA and competence face threat were higher, prosocial voice decreased. Prosocial voice increased with more preference for direct and indirect facework. There were two significant second order effects. CA interacted with competence threat, and autonomy and competence threat interacted with each other to affect prosocial voice.

First, CA and competence threat interacted to affect prosocial voice. This showed the negative relationship between perceived competence threat and prosocial voice was strengthened by the individuals' CA level, B = -0.17, $p < .05$. The significant interaction indicates that all three slopes are significantly different from each other. The higher CA was, the stronger the negative relationship between prosocial voice and competence threat. For individuals with CA scores at 1 standard deviation below the mean (i.e., low CA), the simple slope was negative but not significantly different from zero (b = -.019, $p > .40$). The higher individuals' level of CA, the stronger the negative simple slope became (b = -.143, $p > .05$ for moderate CA; b = -.266, $p < .01$ for high CA), but only the high CA slope was significantly different from zero. That is, when CA is one standard deviation above the mean and competence threat is high, the use of prosocial voice decreased significantly. The simple slopes are shown in Figure 2.

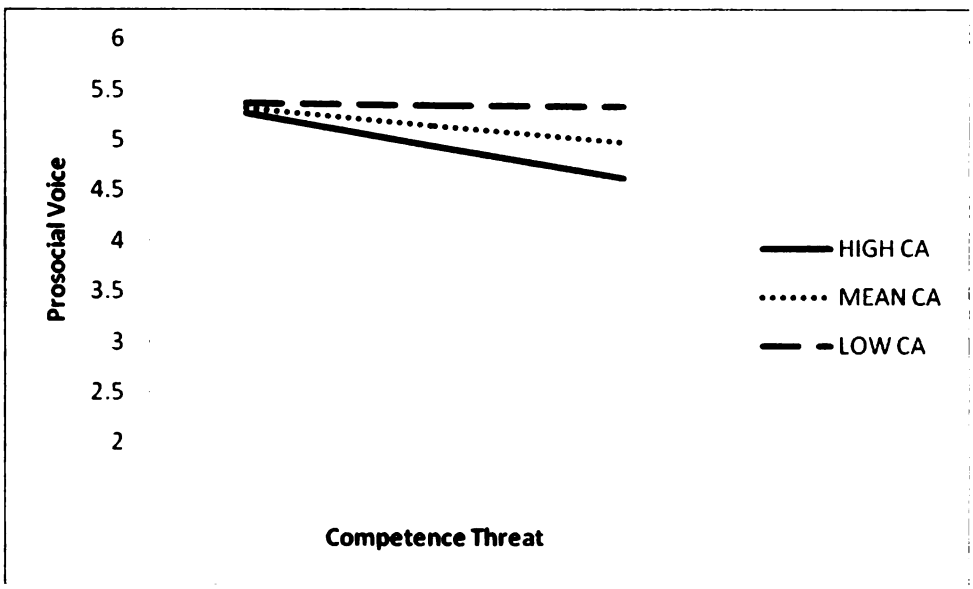


Figure 2. Simple slopes for the interaction of CA and competence threat on prosocial voice.

A second significant interaction was revealed between the two types of threat (autonomy & competence) on prosocial voice. The negative relationship between perceived competence threat and the use of prosocial voice becomes more pronounced as perceived autonomy threat decreases, b = 0.102, $p < .05$. The significant interaction indicates that all three slopes are different from each other. In addition, the simple slope for individuals with scores of perceived autonomy threat at 1 standard deviation below the mean was significantly different from zero, b = -.217, $p < .01$. As autonomy threat increased, the relationship between prosocial voice and competence threat weakened (b = -.143, $p < .05$ for the mean of autonomy threat, and b = -.069, $p > .10$ for 1SD above the mean). When autonomy face threat is one standard deviation below the mean *or* when autonomy face threat is at the mean, and competence threat is high, there is a significant decrease in prosocial voice. A graph of the slopes is provided in Figure 3.

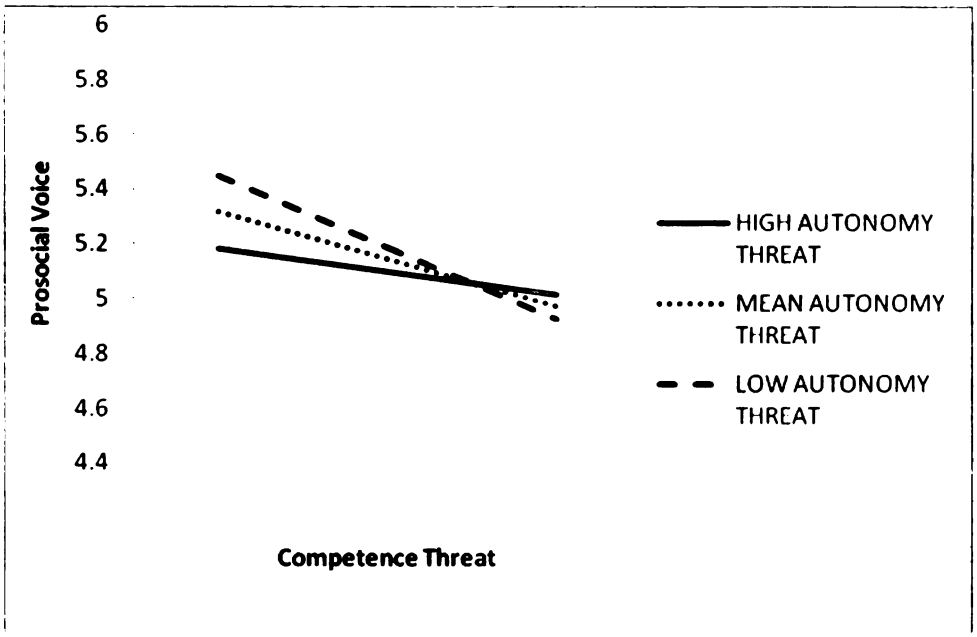


Figure 3. Simple slopes for the interaction of autonomy and competence threat on prosocial voice.

For *defensive silence*, direct facework preference (b = -0.28) was a significant negative predictor, and CA (b = 0.16) and competence face threat (b = 0.16) were significant positive predictors. The more individuals preferred direct facework, the less they used defensive silence, and the higher their CA and the competence threat, the more they used defensive silence. There were two significant second-order effects, with CA and competence threat interacting and the approbation-no approbation variable interacting with direct facework preference to affect defensive silence.

First, the CA-competence threat interaction showed the positive relationship between perceived competence threat and defensive voice was strengthened by the individuals' CA level, B = 0.167, $p < .05$. The significant interaction indicated that all three slopes are significantly different from each other. However, for individuals with CA scores at 1 standard deviation below the mean (i.e., low CA), the simple slope was

positive but not significantly different from zero (b = 0.017, $p > .40$). The higher individuals' level of CA, the more the simple slope increased (b = 0.139, $p > .05$ for moderate CA; b = .261, $p < .01$ for high CA), and both the moderate and the high CA slopes were significantly different from zero. This means that when CA is one standard deviation above the mean and competence threat is high, there is a significant increase in defensive silence. The simple slopes for this interaction are shown in Figure 4.

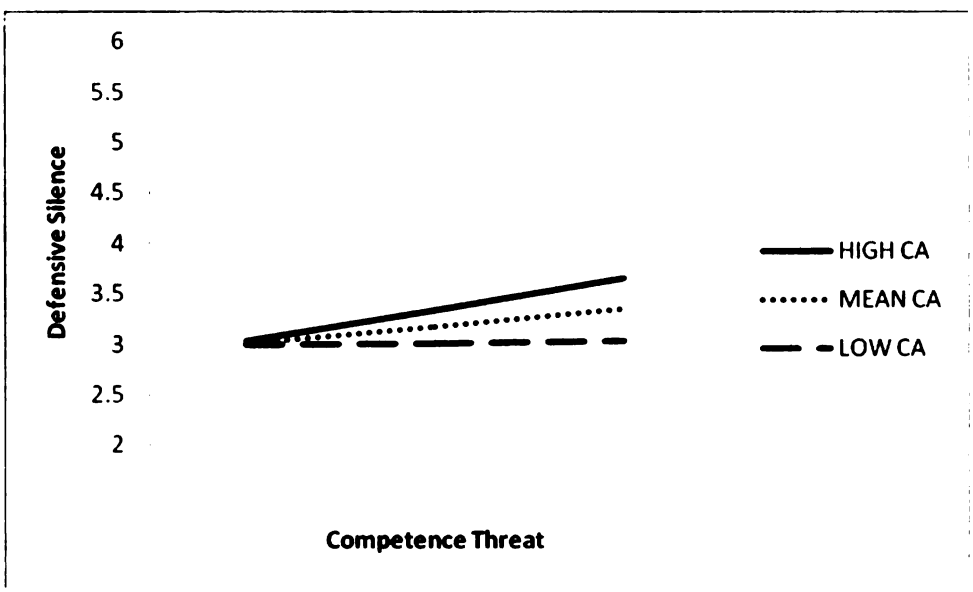


Figure 4. Simple slopes for the interaction between CA and competence threat on defensive silence.

Second, the approbation-no approbation interaction showed that for those in the no-approbation conditions, the higher their preference for direct facework, the less likely they would be to choose to use defensive silence. Those in the approbation message conditions did not display a difference in their choice of using defensive silence depending on their preference for direct facework. Thus direct facework preference was more influential in the choice to use defensive silence when the feedback message contained no approbation.

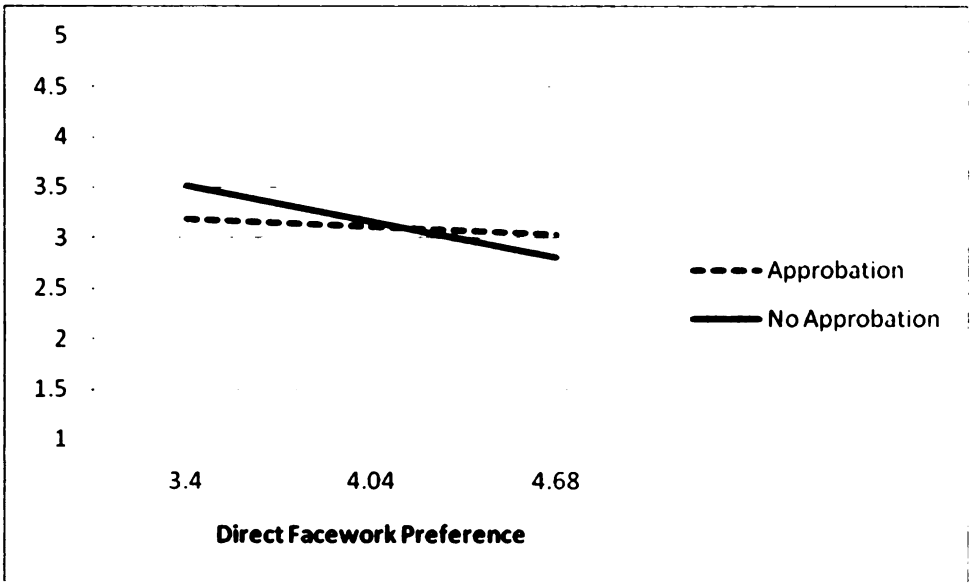


Figure 5. Simple slopes for the interaction between approbation-no approbation and direct facework preference on defensive silence.

Summary of findings

For autonomy threat ratings, there were no significant differences among individual conditions. Further investigation showed the two approbation-only conditions were significantly lower than the other six conditions in terms of ratings of autonomy threat. For competence threat ratings, the four competence conditions were significantly different from the four autonomy conditions. Among the four competence conditions, the two conditions containing an approbation message (i.e., approbation & combined tact & approbation) were perceived as significantly less threatening than the competence threat-only and competence with tact conditions.

Defensive voice was not significantly correlated with autonomy and competence face threat ratings. Prosocial voice was significantly and negatively correlated with both autonomy and competence face threat ratings. Defensive silence was significantly and positively correlated with autonomy and competence face threat ratings. Prosocial silence

was not significantly correlated with either type of threat, but the measurement of this construct needs to be improved before definitive statements are made.

For high CA participants, defensive silence was positively correlated with competence threat, but not significantly correlated with autonomy threat. For low CA participants, defensive voice was not significantly correlated with either autonomy or competence threat, and autonomy threat was negatively and significantly correlated with prosocial voice.

Perceived supervisor supportiveness was a significant positive predictor of tendency to use prosocial voice, and feedback severity was a negative predictor of using defensive voice. In other words, when supervisor supportiveness was high, prosocial voice was likely to be used. When feedback severity was low, defensive voice was more likely to be used.

The preference for direct facework strategies was not correlated with ratings of autonomy or competence face threat. However, the preference for indirect facework strategies was significantly and positively correlated with ratings of both types of face threat. The more participants preferred indirect delivery, the stronger they perceived both types of threats to be.

Preferences for direct facework strategies negatively and significantly correlated with both defensive silence and defensive voice and positively and significantly correlated with prosocial voice. Those who had a high preference for direct strategies were less likely to respond defensively and more likely to respond with prosocial voice. There was not a significant correlation between direct facework strategy preference and prosocial silence. The preference for indirect facework strategies was positively and

significantly correlated with defensive silence and defensive voice but not significantly correlated with either prosocial voice or prosocial silence. Participants who preferred indirect strategies more were more likely to use defensive strategies in response to threats.

The preference for indirect and direct facework strategies were negatively and significantly correlated with each other, indicating two separate variables rather than two ends of a continuum. In addition, the direct strategy preference correlated negatively with trait CA and preference for indirect strategies correlated positively with trait CA.

Autonomy face threat and direct facework preference were significant negative predictors of defensive voice, whereas CA, competence face threat, and indirect facework preference were significant positive predictors of defensive voice. In addition, the positive relationship between competence threat and defensive voice was strengthened by higher levels of CA, such that there was a more pronounced difference in people with different levels of CA in their choice to use defensive voice when competence threat was high than when it was low.

Competence face threat and CA were significant negative predictors of prosocial voice, whereas direct and indirect facework preference were significant positive predictors of prosocial voice. In addition, the negative relationship between prosocial voice and competence threat was strengthened by higher levels of CA so that there was a more pronounced difference in people with different levels of CA in their choice to use prosocial voice when competence threat was high than when it was low. A second interaction revealed that the negative relationship between prosocial voice and competence threat was weakened by higher autonomy threat, such that when competence

threat was low, autonomy threat had a stronger effect on the choice of prosocial voice than when competent threat was high.

Direct facework preference was a significant negative predictor of defensive silence, whereas CA and competence face threat were significant positive predictors of defensive silence. Also, the positive relationship between defensive silence and competence threat was strengthened by higher CA such that the difference among different people with different levels of CA in their choice to use defensive silence was greater when competence threat was high than when it was low.

Discussion

Summary

This study examined employee responses to different types of negative feedback messages. Both autonomy and competence threats and their corresponding facework messages (i.e., tact & approbation) were examined for their effects on employees' tendencies to respond with defensive voice, prosocial voice, defensive silence, or prosocial silence. CA was examined for its potential to affect people's responses; those with low CA were expected to communicate more freely whereas those with high CA were expected to be more inhibited in their communication. Two new individual difference variables were studied for their relationship with the voice and silence responses: the preference for direct facework strategies and the preference for indirect facework strategies. Supervisor supportiveness was also investigated as a potential contributor to employees' choice of response to negative feedback. It should be noted that whereas numerous statistically significant findings were presented in the results section of this study, some of the findings are not large in terms of effect sizes. In light of this and because this is an initial study, the conclusions drawn below should be considered tentative.

Explanation/Implications of findings

Face Threat. The message manipulations were not completely effective in manipulating the two types of threats separately. Two potential explanations for this will be discussed. One explanation is that the messages worked, but the two types of threat were somehow entangled in a way unforeseen previously. A second explanation is that

there was a problem with the specific phrasing of the messages (i.e., an artifact) which caused systematic variance in participant responses.

First, if it is assumed that the messages were effective, but that threats to autonomy and competence are not necessarily completely separate, then the first problem is that autonomy threat ratings did not differ for either autonomy versus competence-threatening conditions. This means the perception of an autonomy threat was evoked by an actual autonomy threat and by a competence threat. Why might this be? Consider that people who are not competent are also not given freedom or responsibility (i.e., autonomy). This is particularly true in the workplace, where an incompetent performance by any individual can cause problems for all. Thus, in organizations, those considered incompetent are watched closely and "kept on a short leash." Translated in terms of feedback for an average employee, if a negative feedback message, such as the one in this study, indicates that an individual is not seen as competent, could it not be assumed by the receiver that he/she was also experiencing a threat to his/her autonomy? That is, perhaps implying that one is not competent also implies a reduction in freedom. LMX theory (Scandura & Graen, 1984) suggests that individuals in high-LMX relationships with their supervisor are seen as trustworthy, competent, and are given extra responsibility and freedom because of the relationship. The implication of a lack of competence may also imply that the employee is entering a lower status relationship where he/she will not be trusted with freedom or responsibility. This could result in the lack of difference in autonomy face threat ratings across the two types of conditions (autonomy & competence). That is, autonomy threat messages threaten autonomy

because they were designed to do so, and competence threat messages threaten autonomy because it is assumed that a loss of competence also means a loss of autonomy.

Despite the lack of difference in autonomy ratings, the competence ratings *did* differ depending on the type of threat. This could be because although a competence threat may imply a loss of autonomy, an autonomy threat may not imply that one is seen as incompetent. Employees could easily come up with explanations for why, despite their competence at their job, their supervisor might threaten to take away their freedom. It could be that one's supervisor is power-hungry, bossy, a micromanager, or a control freak. Looking at the actual autonomy threat message, an employee retort along these lines is quite clear (Supervisor: "This is not how I would have done it." Employee: "It may not be how *you* would have done it, but that doesn't mean it isn't right."). Also, a threat to autonomy could be seen as rote, or part of the supervisor's legitimate power (French & Raven, 1959); thus it would not be threatening to one's sense of competence because it is simply part of the supervisor's job. When a supervisor threatens autonomy, it does not inherently imply the employee is incompetent, or implicate that a loss of competence is imminent as a result of the loss of autonomy. These explanations leave room for rating competence threat differently when an autonomy versus a competence threat message is posed.

A second explanation for the failure of the message manipulations to elicit the expected threat is that there was something in the specific messages that caused participants to respond contrarily to how they were expected to respond. A close examination of the messages reveals that the competence threat messages started with "You screwed this up" and the autonomy threat messages did not start with the same

personal and accusatory tone. In fact, the autonomy threat was centered on the sender by saying "This is not the way that I would have done it." The difference in the tone of the messages could have caused a difference in how individuals responded to them. More specifically, because the autonomy threat message started out by focusing on the supervisor's preference, the employee may have been more inclined or more able to blame the problem on the supervisor. However, because the competence threat message focuses on "You," it very clearly indicates that the problem is indeed the employee's fault, so avoiding that threat by blaming the supervisor may not have been possible or may have been more difficult than for the autonomy threat message.

As for threat levels of the different messages, approbation was clearly the strategy that reduced face threat the most, across all conditions and for both types of threat. The autonomy threat ratings were the lowest for the approbation-only condition across conditions for both types of threat. The competence threat ratings were the lowest for the approbation-only condition and approbation plus tact conditions across conditions for both types of threat. In other words, no matter what type of threat was provoked, the message most effective in reducing that threat was the one that made clear that even though there was a problem with the receiver's performance, the supervisor still believed the person had the ability to do the job as desired. This indicates Lim and Bowers (1991) may be correct about approbation addressing competence threats, but it may reach further than competence threats alone.

Tact, on the other hand, was not a highly effective facework tactic in terms of threat reduction. Ratings of autonomy and competence for the tact message conditions did not differ from the threat-only messages for autonomy or competence. One element

of the tact message was to share some of the responsibility for the problem. It could be that sharing responsibility would hold more sway if done in front of a third party, such as the supervisor's boss, or if the supervisor indicates he/she would let his/her supervisor know the responsibility for the error was shared. However, these findings indicate Lim and Bowers' (1991) assumption that tact addresses autonomy threats may not hold for this sample and perhaps for other organizational workers.

In sum, Lim and Bowers' (1991) approbation appears to be the more effective feedback strategy of the two tested here. This study provides some evidence supporting the idea that approbation addresses a competence threat. However, the tact strategy does not appear to have an effect on autonomy threats or competence threats, and even appears to hinder the effectiveness of approbation messages, as autonomy threat ratings were higher for the combined conditions than for the approbation conditions alone.

These findings indicate the need for further research into the effectiveness of the different types of facework that address different types of face threat. Research should address the separation of autonomy and competence face threats; specifically of interest is whether they can be separated in an organizational context. Practitioners can take a clear and safe message from the findings: use approbation in negative feedback messages! Whereas this is only one study, so the findings should be interpreted with caution, it seems unlikely that the use of approbation messages could be harmful to employees as they provide generally confirming and supportive messages. Thus, practitioners can feel relatively secure in implementing the use of this type of message.

Defensive Voice. The tendency to use defensive voice did not appear to be related to ratings of either autonomy or competence threat. That is, these results indicate that if

people are going to use defensive voice, they will choose that response regardless of how threatening or nonthreatening a feedback message may be. It could be that some people tend to respond defensively in general.

However, defensive voice was positively related to CA. This indicates that those who are highly apprehensive about communicating in general have a greater tendency to use defensive voice, regardless of the situation. Because of their anxiety about communicating itself, high CAs may have felt defensive simply because they were asked to communicate in response to a negative feedback message. This could create higher tendencies to use defensive voice in response to negative feedback. It could also be that because high CAs generally avoid communicating, they lack skill in communicating and may not realize that using defensive voice might have negative outcomes for them.

Taken together, these findings have implications for both researchers and practitioners. First, the findings provide an additional confirmation for CA researchers by indicating yet another negative association in organizations for those with high CA. Previous research indicated those high in CA are at a disadvantage in various areas. For example, high CAs have been demonstrated to have lower job satisfaction (Harville, 1992) and to perform more poorly in interviews than low CAs (Ayres et al., 1998). A tendency to use defensive voice could be one reason why it is difficult for those high in trait CA to obtain jobs through interviewing and to attain job satisfaction.

Practitioners may want to consider the level of CA of current employees to determine the best course of action when dealing with different individuals. Previous CA research (Ayres et al., 2000; Dwyer, 2000) indicates that training can reduce the level of both state and trait CA for some individuals, so organizations may want to consider

implementing some CA training to help employees who are high in CA deal with receiving and responding to negative feedback. Ayres et al.'s study would suggest systematic desensitization would be effective in reducing trait CA. Dwyer would suggest a traditional skills-based training program would work, or training based on personality dimensions could be effective. Alternatively, organizations might provide training for managers in dealing with defensive voice responses when they arise.

In addition to the correlational findings for CA and defensive voice, another effect emerged which indicated that when competence threat was low, the choice of defensive voice was similar for individuals low, moderate, and high in CA, but when competence threat was high, high CAs were most likely to use defensive voice, followed by moderate CAs and low CAs. In other words, the positive relationship between perceived competence threat and defensive voice became more pronounced for individuals with high CA. Previous studies (MacIntyre, 1994; McCroskey, 1977b) suggest that CA is negatively correlated with self-esteem; that is, high CA individuals tend to have lower self-esteem. This may be one reason why high CAs seem to be more strongly affected by competence threat than do low CAs. The high CAs reacted very strongly by choosing defensiveness more when threat was high, even choosing to use a response that would be considered out of character for them normally—voice. Perhaps the low self-esteem of high CA individuals caused them to feel even more defensive when their competence was threatened, and to take the extreme measure of using voice, albeit defensive voice.

Defensive voice was negatively related to prosocial voice, indicating those who choose to use defensive voice will be less likely to use prosocial voice. This may be an important finding for organizations to consider, as prosocial voice is probably the most

functional response to negative feedback of the four responses examined here. Hagedoorn et al. (1999) suggest voice is a more functional response than silence, as it can provide an early alert for the organization of problems that may exist and may also relieve employees' distress over the problem. Hirschman (1970) would probably consider exit to be an alternate and somewhat functional type of voice, because by exiting, people are making a statement and attempting to have an effect on the organization. However, exit was not examined here. Of the two voice responses used in this study, prosocial voice is preferable to defensive voice because it is constructive, making an effort to help either the organization or a fellow coworker, whereas defensive voice is more selfishly motivated and may prove damaging to the organization and the individual.

Defensive voice was also negatively related to direct facework preference and positively related to indirect facework preference. A higher preference for direct facework indicated less use of defensive voice, and a higher preference for indirect delivery indicated more use of defensive voice. This may suggest that people who want information delivered in a clear, uncensored way are less likely to respond in a defensive manner, whereas those who prefer information delivered in a more sensitive manner are more likely to respond defensively. Organizations may want to consider determining their employees' preferences and training managers in delivery styles that accommodate those preferences.

Feedback severity was found to be a negative predictor of defensive voice. The more serious the feedback was perceived to be, the less likely individuals were to use defensive voice. This can be explained by simple fear of repercussions. Perhaps using defensive voice is perceived as implicating oneself in the problem at hand. When the

problem is not very serious, the feedback may seem unjust, spurring more use of defensive voice to protest the unfairness of the negative feedback and explain away the problem behavior(s). Baron (1990) found that destructive criticism was viewed as less fair than constructive criticism, indicating a view of negative feedback as unjust is likely. Baron (1988) also suggested that destructive criticism, which is "negative feedback that is harsh in tone, nonspecific in nature, and focused on internal causes of substandard performance" (p. 199), can lead to emotional responses such as anger or resentment, and render the receiver more contentious. In particular, "nonspecific" feedback may be likely to be viewed as unjustified and may spur a defensive response.

Prosocial Voice. The tendency to use prosocial voice was negatively correlated with ratings of both autonomy and competence face threat. This indicates those who perceived a greater threat were less likely to attempt to help the organization or their coworkers by using prosocial voice. This further indicates that the use of facework messages to soften negative feedback may help in leading to the positive and functional response of prosocial voice. The importance of delivering negative feedback (i.e., to improve performance and help employees avoid consequences) combined with the knowledge that reduced threat leads to a more functional response, should lead organizations to believe that reducing threat in feedback messages is a valuable pursuit. Managers should be taught how to deliver negative feedback in less threatening ways in order to elicit more desirable responses (i.e., prosocial voice). For researchers, this indicates future study of facework strategies and their use in organizations is worthwhile.

Tendency to use prosocial voice was also negatively correlated with CA, indicating that lower apprehension to communicating meant participants were more likely

to try to use voice to assist either their organization or a coworker. That is, those who are generally more comfortable communicating are more likely to use prosocial voice. For practitioners, these results strengthen the need for treatments to reduce CA for employees high in CA and for training for managers in dealing with different levels of CA in their employees. For researchers, this provides more evidence that low CA can be an advantageous characteristic in employees.

An effect emerged for prosocial voice similar to that for defensive voice. The level of CA strengthened the negative relationship between perceived competence threat and prosocial voice so that those higher in CA were the least likely to choose prosocial voice when competence threat was high, followed by those with a moderate level of CA and finally those with a low level of CA. The low CAs were just as likely to choose prosocial voice whether they perceived a competence threat or not. This finding points to high CA individuals being more sensitive about competence than low CA individuals. As noted above, this could be a result of the negative correlation found to exist between CA and self-esteem in other studies (MacIntyre, 1994; McCroskey, 1977b). That is, higher CAs reacted more strongly to higher competence threat by purposely *not* using prosocial voice, whereas low CAs did not evidence much of a difference in their use of prosocial voice based on the level of perceived competence threat.

The level of perceived autonomy threat also had an effect on the relationship between perceived competence threat and the use of prosocial voice. The presence of autonomy threat weakened the relationship of competence threat with prosocial voice. When autonomy threat was low, there was a strong negative relationship between competence threat and the use of prosocial voice, but when autonomy threat was high, the

negative relationship between competence threat and prosocial voice was not as strong. This indicates the perception of each type of threat did not operate independently, although only one type of threat was presented at a time in the messages. This could mean that competence threat has a stronger effect if autonomy threat is low—that is, an autonomy threat is more important than a competence threat. Because this interaction is relatively isolated in that it did not reach significance in defensive voice or defensive silence, further investigation should be conducted to determine if this relationship will hold in different studies.

Prosocial voice was also positively associated with direct facework preference but not associated with indirect facework preference. Those individuals who prefer information to be delivered directly tend to be more likely to use prosocial voice. The preference for receiving information directly may be indicative of individuals' preferred style of delivery for when they themselves send messages. That is, perhaps participants' stated preferences for receiving information are the same as their preferred methods of sending information. If this is the case, then those who prefer direct delivery may naturally feel comfortable delivering "advice" to a supervisor who has just delivered negative feedback. Perhaps they expect the supervisor to be prepared for the same delivery style in return—if the negative feedback is delivered bluntly and directly by the supervisor, then the employee can also deliver helpful (but also potentially negative) feedback to the supervisor in a blunt manner. Jablin (1978) found that employees predicted that subordinates would respond to supervisors with the same message they originally sent. That is, subordinates expected they would respond to supervisors' repudiation message most often with repudiation, and they would respond to supervisors'

confirmation message with confirmation messages of their own. That these employees would choose the same message type as their supervisors may also indicate they would choose a similar delivery style to respond to their supervisors.

Supervisor supportiveness was found to be a positive predictor of prosocial voice. Feeling that their supervisor was supportive led employees to want to help the organization and/or their coworkers in an active way. This seems a natural finding for supervisor supportiveness, given the association between perceived supervisor support and perceived organizational support found by Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002). If an employee feels supported by his/her supervisor and organization, he/she will want to help them.

Defensive Silence. The tendency to use defensive silence was positively correlated with ratings of both autonomy and competence face threat. This makes sense intuitively, as those who felt more threatened tended to be more defensively silent. One way of dealing with negative feedback might be to avoid giving more evidence of one's own problematic performance and to avoid appearing to agree with the negative feedback by remaining silent. Defensive silence could also be a coping mechanism participants wished to employ while absorbing the negative feedback they had just received. Defensive silence may be seen as functional for the organization in as much as it is similar to Rusbult et al.'s (1988) loyalty, which is defined as passively and optimistically staying with the organization while waiting for the situation to improve. For example, defensive silence may be functional if it keeps a valuable employee from leaving the organization and the problem can be fixed through another route. However, the types of silence (defensive and prosocial) used in this study are not really the same as loyalty,

especially with the motivations attached to them. Further discussion of loyalty related to prosocial silence is provided in the limitations section.

Defensive silence was also positively related to CA. This finding parallels the finding for defensive voice. Perhaps high CA individuals are also generally more nervous and thus tend to be more defensive on the whole because of their anxiety about communicating. To these individuals, defensive motives would be natural because they are receivers in a communication transaction, and silence would be natural because of their apprehension about communicating further.

The relationship between defensive silence and competence threat was different for individuals with different levels of CA. Those with high CA responded to higher competence threat with more defensive silence, whereas those with low CA did not change their defensive silence responses based on competence threat. This finding parallels the finding for defensive voice. Assuming that high CA individuals generally have low self-esteem (see MacIntyre, 1994; McCroskey, 1977b), it may also be true that high CA individuals responded with more defensive silence to competence threats because of their low self-esteem, whereas low CAs, who presumably did not have self-esteem problems, were not affected by competence threat in terms of their choice to use defensive silence.

Defensive silence, like defensive voice, was negatively correlated with direct facework preference and positively correlated with indirect facework preference. The tendency to be defensive seems to hold across voice and silence in terms of these relationships. In general, then, those who prefer direct delivery tend to be less defensive overall, and those who prefer indirect delivery tend to be more defensive overall. This

could be because people who like to hear information directly are more prepared for unsettling feedback and are thus less likely to react defensively than those who prefer more sensitivity in message delivery.

Prosocial Silence. Unfortunately, the measurement for prosocial silence in the present study was not sufficiently reliable to draw conclusions about this particular variable. Prosocial silence presents a tricky measurement situation, as the researcher must attempt to measure what is essentially a non-response—being silent. Being silent to help others may be particularly difficult for participants to understand unless they possess some information which needs to be kept secret. Employees without "secret" information may remain silent simply because they are hoping things will get better, as Rusbult et al. (1988) suggested with their loyalty construct, or because they think speaking up will not make a difference (i.e., acquiescence). It may be worth measuring a silence construct motivated by optimism in addition to prosocial, defensive, or acquiescent motives (the latter of which was not measured in this study). Creative thinking may be needed to discover a way of measuring this tendency accurately and getting at the reasons why individuals remain silent in organizations.

Implications for Practitioners

Practitioners can reap useful information from the current study. First, because CA appears to be important for certain outcomes in organizations, such as communication responses, practitioners may want to consider providing training for their managerial staff in how to deal with employees with different levels of CA. It may also be worthwhile to consider providing training to employees with high CA in an effort to help them be more comfortable communicating. This training could take the form of

systematic desensitization (per Ayres et al., 2000) or skills-based training (per Dwyer, 2000.

Second, organizations may want to consider determining their employees' preferences for direct and indirect facework and helping managers to develop delivery styles that meet those needs for their employees. Finally, the use of approbation message to reduce threat seems to be a good idea for organizations to implement. Face threat seems to lead to undesirable outcomes, so reducing threat using approbation messages is a good option for practitioners in organizations to consider.

Implications for Researchers

In general, researchers can take a few key points away from the current study. First, CA seems an important variable to consider in organizations. Employees' CA seems to make a difference in how they respond to negative feedback. Also, the findings here corroborate other findings that high CA can be problematic in organizations. Thus, further investigation of CA is important and worthwhile.

Second, face threat was shown to have an effect on employee responses, and at least one type of facework was shown to be effective in reducing the perception of face threat. As Lim and Bowers' (1991) ideas have not been investigated in other studies, these findings provide a first step toward determining whether their thinking was accurate and/or how it should be adjusted in the future. The current findings indicate there are nuances to investigate in the study of face threat and preventative facework.

Finally, the voice and silence results also provide evidence that the area of voice and silence is worth investigating further. The problematic measurement of prosocial voice indicates there is room for improvement, and the interesting findings for defensive

voice, prosocial voice, and defensive silence suggest future studies will be enlightening and useful in developing theory about communication responses in organizational settings.

Limitations

A few limitations are evident after completion of the study, including problems with the induction of threat, the measurement of prosocial silence, the sampling method, the use of self-report and the use of responses based on intentions. First, the threat manipulations did not work exactly as planned. Although the threat messages had been used in previous studies and pretested, they were not perceived as expected. Fortunately, measures of perceived threat were able to stand in for the manipulated conditions in the analyses. Before another study is done, these messages will need to be adjusted and pretested together to ensure they are sufficiently different from each other. Alternatively, methodology could be changed to ask for reports of feedback messages rather than manipulating the type of message participants receive.

A second issue is that of the measurement of prosocial silence. This issue can be considered on a conceptual or a measurement level. For this study, measurement was the problem. Asking people whether they would keep quiet about some unknown company or coworker secret may not be effective unless individuals actually have secrets to keep. In future studies it may be useful to ask participants whether they possess information that could be damaging to the company or to a coworker as a way of differentiating meaningful from meaningless answers. Alternatively, adjusting the writing of the items to focus less on keeping information quiet may also improve the measurement of prosocial silence.

Future researchers in the area may want to consider a more macro issue: whether prosocial silence is problematic at a conceptual level. Is there a better way of conceiving of prosocial silence? The examples and items from Van Dyne et al. (2003) focus on keeping private information quiet. Perhaps there is a conceptualization that would apply across all organizational citizens rather than only to those with privileged information. It may be that the conceptualization of prosocial silence should be more similar to Rusbult et al's (1988) loyalty, comprising more focus on optimism and hope for the future of the organization as reasons for keeping quiet. This conceptualization could get at the motive of wanting to help, but have a wider focus than just keeping secrets.

The sampling method used here may have been problematic. Although the data were tested for systematic differences across conditions due to a variety of demographic and work variables (e.g., supervisor gender, tenure at the organization), and no differences were found, it is possible there were other unknown variables creating unmeasured systematic variance. This problem should be remedied in the future by collecting a sample from one organization for comparison with the current sample.

Using self-report scales can be considered a limitation. Self-report based on a manipulated message can only approximate how people would respond if put in a similar situation in real life. This problem was combated by using a sample of working adults who would be likely to have had feedback experiences similar to the one described in the survey. Observing individuals' responses to real feedback messages in their real workplaces from their real supervisors may yield richer, and potentially different findings. However, using working participants should yield a fairly accurate picture of how people might respond in a feedback situation.

Related to the issue of self-report is the issue of intentions. This study did not measure behavior, but measured intentions to behave in certain ways. The Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA, Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980) suggests that behavioral intentions lead to behavior consistent with the intentions. Kim and Hunter (1993) conducted a meta-analysis showing a correlation of .82 between behavioral intentions and behavior, indicating that intentions are indeed likely to lead to the corresponding behavior. Thus, intentions are not a perfect way, but a reasonably accurate way of studying constructs of interest.

Future Directions

The current study provides rich potential for future studies in the area of feedback in organizations. Feedback is crucial to the success of both organizations and their employees because it allows both parties the benefits of improved performance and helps both to avoid negative consequences of low performance. This future research can be grouped into four areas: message issues, individual difference variables, supervisor-subordinate interaction, and communication responses.

Message issues. The order of delivery might make a difference (Asch, 1946; Rosnow, 1966). It could be that the messages were viewed similarly because the threat came before facework in each message. This would explain the lack of significant differences among autonomy conditions for ratings of autonomy face threat. That is, people may have been so offended by the first statement that the facework statements, which came afterward, did not have a chance to "soften the blow." Delivering the face-threatening statement first, followed by a face-saving message may have a different effect than delivering the face-saving message first, followed by a face-threatening message.

Conventional wisdom advocates the "sandwich" method (i.e., positive-negative-positive; Dohrenwend, 2002); perhaps putting the face threat between two face-saving statements may be the most effective. This should be empirically investigated in future studies.

Second, future research should also investigate the effectiveness of various face-saving tactics on the delivery of negative information. Delivery of negative information can extend beyond negative feedback to other contexts, such as the delivery of terminal disease diagnoses in hospitals. This research should investigate Lim and Bowers' (1991) claims regarding which types of facework address which types of face threats to determine whether the claims are valid. The current study provides some evidence to answer this question, but more should be gathered in future studies. In addition, future investigations of the types of messages which are most successful (approbation in particular) may be informed by the social support literature.

Future research may also attempt to address the issues of message "range." That is, the current study only investigated one specific message, whereas there is a range of messages that might be considered threatening to either autonomy or competence threat, and a range of messages that might provide relief from each type of threat. A different methodology may be required; asking people in organizations what type of messages they receive could help to create a sense of what the range of potential feedback messages in real organizations may be. Future studies could then test this "bank" of messages, enabling researchers to provide practitioners with a broader range to use in feedback delivery.

Individual difference variables. Future studies should investigate individual difference variables as a way of explaining differences in employee responses to

messages they receive at work. This study found participants had different levels of preference for direct and indirect facework, and these corresponded differently with their responses to negative feedback. CA also related differently to the types of voice and silence. These are just a few of a variety of individual difference variables that could affect responses to negative feedback in organizations. For example, leader-member exchange (LMX), need for feedback (Miller, Johnson, Hart, & Peterson, 1999), self-esteem and the big five personality traits could all have effects on employee voice/silence responses. These individual difference variables should be tested in future studies.

Supervisor-subordinate interaction. Future studies might also investigate other aspects of the interaction between supervisors and subordinates. The current study focuses on the subordinate as a receiver and what the receiver does after receiving a feedback message. A second question to consider in terms of supervisor-subordinate interactions is whether the findings of this study would hold if feedback was being delivered *upward*—if the negative feedback message was going from an employee to a supervisor. More specifically, what types of voice/silence responses would supervisors choose to use in response to negative feedback? The combination of the reactions from both the subordinates and the supervisors could identify destructive communication patterns in feedback interactions and eventually help to defuse those situations by learning what types of messages lead to what types of responses. Supervisor supportiveness may become an even more important variable in future studies of this interaction.

Communication responses. Finally, future investigation into voice and silence responses is important. The current results are just a first look into these responses.

Future studies should investigate what types of messages elicit which types of voice and silence and should also investigate consequents of the use of different types of voice and silence. Acquiescent silence should also be included in future studies when relevant. Voice and silence responses could also be investigated in organizational relationships other than the supervisor-subordinate relationship. For example, some doctor-patient relationships may require the sharing of negative information both ways: the doctor may have to deliver a serious diagnosis, or the patient may have to explain his or her dissatisfaction with the doctor's behavior. Patient responses in particular could be affected by their ability to change health care providers (HCPs) and the type of relationship they have with their HCP. More specifically, patients may choose not to speak up because they do not have other options for HCPs or because they do not have a close relationship with their HCP. Learning more about the propensity to use voice and/or silence responses in the doctor-patient relationship could help doctors and hospitals improve their procedures and may help patients be able to express their concerns more freely and clearly.

In addition to communication responses, it may also be informative to consider emotional responses as they are related to communication responses. Considering that some responses to negative feedback may be irrational, it may be useful to consider action-emotion patterns which may be activated in response to negative feedback. These could provide richer explanation for the communication responses to negative feedback.

Conclusion

This study investigated the effects of different facework messages on employee responses to negative feedback that could induce autonomy or competence threat. In

addition, employees' level of CA was studied as a potential factor in the choice of voice and silence responses to feedback. Direct and indirect facework preference were created as new variables which affected how people respond to negative feedback delivered with different levels of face threat.

This study provided a test of eight different feedback messages, some more and some less threatening to autonomy and competence face. An approbation strategy was found to be the most effective preventative facework strategy for reducing perceptions of both autonomy and competence threat. A tact strategy was not effective in reducing either type of face threat, contrary to previous thinking in the area of face. The most functional employee response, prosocial voice, was found to be negatively related to perceptions of autonomy and competence threat, indicating that more threat would lead to fewer prosocial voice responses. Both types of threat were also positively correlated with defensive silence, indicating employees who perceived they were threatened were likely to choose to use defensive silence as a response. Finally, CA moderated the effect of competence threat on prosocial voice, defensive voice, and defensive silence. The higher an individual's CA levels, the more they responded to threat by using less prosocial voice and by using more defensive silence and defensive voice.

Using approbation messages is recommended as an immediate solution to the threats posed by negative feedback, until further research can be conducted. Practitioners are advised to be aware of the effects of threat and CA on how employees respond to negative feedback, and to consider implementing training to help deal with high CA levels and defensive voice responses from employees. Finally, future research should be

conducted into facework strategies and their effectiveness, and employee voice and silence responses, as these are two areas currently under-researched by researchers.

Endnotes

[1] Because the autonomy and competence face threat scales were highly correlated with each other ($r = .72, p < .01$), CFA was run with the scales combined as one scale and as one scale with two factors (to check for second-order unidimensionality). The one-scale CFA revealed that 30% of the observed correlations were outside of 95 % confidence intervals for the predicted correlations. The second-order unidimensional CFA revealed that 50% of the observed correlations were outside of 95 % confidence intervals for the predicted correlations. Thus, the scales were kept separate for later analyses.

[2] Measurement difficulties with prosocial silence precluded running analyses using this variable. The analyses would have little meaning unless validity and reliability of the measure are acceptable, and they are not in this case. This issue is discussed further in the limitations section.

Table 1. Definitions and Examples of face-saving messages for solidarity, approbation, and tact (Lim & Bowers, 1991).

	Definition	Sample Item
Solidarity		
Friendship reaffirmation	To express intimate emotions toward the other	"I know I can trust you."
Cooperation	To emphasize the necessity to cooperate with each other	"We have to work on the problem together."
Empathy	To show understanding of the other's emotional state	"I understand what you are trying to say."
Social acknowledgement	To appreciate work-related aspects of the other	"You are a good colleague."
Agreement	To agree or seek agreement	"I had a similar thought."
Approbation		
Admiration	To approve of the other without any reservation	"You did a very good job."
Support	To approve of some other aspects with minimization of the problem	"You have some good ideas, but you need to support them with evidence."

Table 1, cont.

Approbation (cont.)		
Contradiction	To approve of some other aspects without understating the problem	"I know you put a lot of time and effort into it, but it just doesn't have the focus you need."
Suggestion	To suggest ways to make the performance even better	"You need to add more evidence to strengthen your arguments."
Being diminutive	To trivialize the problematic area	"I know that I'm asking a lot, but it needs a little more research."
Tact		
Imposition Sharing	To share the responsibility	"Could we sit together and work on the ways to improve it?"
Experimenting	To explore the possibility for the other to volunteer	"Would you be willing to work on the paper again?"
Unconventional Indirectness	Not to state the imposition explicitly	"I think you are the best candidate to write the group paper."

Table 2. Voice/Silence Table (Adapted from Van Dyne, Ang, & Botero, 2003)

	Employee Silence. Intentionally withholding ideas, information, and opinions related to negative feedback	Employee Voice. Intentionally expressing ideas, information, and opinions related to negative feedback
Disengaged behavior Based on resignation, feeling unable to make a difference	Acquiescent silence. Examples: Withholding ideas based on resignation Keeping opinions to self due to low self-efficacy to make a difference	Acquiescent voice. Examples: Expressing supportive ideas based on resignation Agreeing with the group due to low self-efficacy to make a difference
Self-protective behavior Based on fear, feeling afraid and personally at risk	Defensive silence. Examples: Withholding information on problems based on fear Omitting facts to protect the self	Defensive voice. Examples: Expressing ideas that shift attention elsewhere based on fear Proposing ideas that focus on other to protect the self
Other-oriented behavior Based on cooperation, feeling cooperative and altruistic	Prosocial silence. Examples: Withholding confidential information based on cooperation Protecting proprietary knowledge to benefit the organization	Prosocial voice. Examples: Expressing solutions to problems based on cooperation Suggesting constructive ideas for change to benefit the organization

Table 3. Scale Items & Factor Loadings

PRCA-Org 20 (5-pt. Likert-type scale)	*Factor Loadings*
I feel self-conscious when I am called upon to answer a question or give an opinion. (recode)	.55
I am basically an outgoing person.	.57
When I'm with other people, I often have difficulty thinking of the right things to talk about. (recode)	.66
I'm afraid to speak up in conversations. (recode)	.65
I look forward to an opportunity to speak in public.	.50
In most situations, I generally know what to say to people.	.56
I talk less because I'm shy. (recode)	.81
Conversing with people who hold positions of authority causes me to be fearful and tense. (recode)	.67
I consider myself to be the silent type. (recode)	.78
Previous Feedback Experience (5 pt. Likert-type scale)	
I consider this type of feedback normal.	.77
I would be shocked to receive this feedback.(recode)	.54
I would never expect to hear this kind of message.(recode)	.88
I don't know what it would be like to hear this kind of message. (recode)	.65

Table 3, cont.

Scenario Realism (5 pt. Likert-type scale)	
I didn't have any problem with the realism of this situation.	.48
It was difficult to make myself feel that this situation was real. (recode)	.57
This situation could happen, or has happened.	.76
A situation like this could develop in real life.	.50
I can imagine being in a situation like this one.	.75
Autonomy Face Threat (preceded by "My boss's statements"; 7 pt. Likert-type scale)	
Made me uncomfortable.	.60
Required me to do things exactly his/her way.	.61
Did not allow me to choose how I do my job.	.74
Made me feel I owed something back.	.64
Constrained my choices.	.84
Took away some of my independence.	.83
Could make me look bad in the eyes of others.	.66
Competence Face Threat (preceded by "My boss's statements"; 7 pt. Likert-type scale)	
Showed he/she thought I was incompetent at the task	.86
Indicated he/she thought I did not know what I was doing	.88

Table 3, cont.

Pointed out he/she thought I failed miserably	.79
Showed he/she expected a lot better work to complete the task well.	.55
Insulted my abilities	.83
Questioned my competence✦	.89
Allowed me to determine appropriate solutions.✦ (recode)	-.14
Indicated doubt in my competence*	.79

✦Item from Carson & Cupach (2002)

Defensive Voice (7 pt. Likert-type scale)	
I would not express anything except agreement with my supervisor, based on fear.	.79
I would express ideas that shift attention to others, because I would be afraid.	.82
I would provide explanations that focus the discussion on others in order to protect myself.	.72
I would go along and communicate support for my supervisor, based on self-protection	.67
I would express agreement with my supervisor, because I would be motivated by fear.	.81

Prosocial Voice (7 pt. Likert-type scale)	
I would try to offer suggestions that would help other people at my company.	.70
I would try to offer suggestions that would help my company.	.83

Table 3, cont.

I would share my opinions in an effort to help the company change for the better.	.81
I would want to help my organization, so I would make an effort to contribute solutions to problems in my company.	.80
I would give solutions to problems with the cooperative motive of benefiting my organization.	.84
I would develop and make recommendations concerning the feedback.	.71
I would communicate my opinions about the feedback even if my supervisor disagrees.	.57
I would speak up with ideas for new projects that might benefit the organization.	.84
I would suggest ideas for change, based on constructive concern for my organization.	.80
Defensive Silence (7 pt. Likert-type scale)	
I would withhold ideas of mine because I'd be afraid something bad would happen if I was to share them.	.63
I would leave out information that would make me look bad.	.61
If, based on this feedback, I thought my job or reputation was in danger, I wouldn't mention negative information about myself.	.37
I would withhold ideas of mine because I wouldn't want others to take advantage of me.	.64

Table 3, cont.

I would not speak up and suggest ideas for changing my performance, based on fear.	.80
I would withhold relevant information due to fear.	.79
I would omit pertinent facts in order to protect myself.	.67
I would avoid expressing ideas for improvements, based on wanting to protect myself.	.83
I would withhold my solutions to problems because I would be afraid.	.84
Prosocial Silence (7 pt. Likert-type scale)	
If I knew someone else wasn't doing so well, I wouldn't bring it up to my supervisor.	.47
I would keep quiet rather than "rock the boat" by bringing up ideas that will cause problems for my supervisor.	.62
I wouldn't mention negative information about others at work to avoid looking like a tattletale. (RC)	.49
I would withhold thoughts about my performance, based on cooperation.	.53
I would withstand pressure from others to discuss the feedback I received.	.26
I would refuse to divulge information that might harm the organization.	.35

Table 3, cont.

Feedback sign manipulation check (adapted from Haeggburg, 2001; semantic differential scaling from 1-7)	
Good-Poor	.65
Low-High	.83
Below average-Above average*	.88
* Additional item written by researcher	
Severity (Semantic differential scale from 1-7)	
Trivial-Crucial	.66
Significant-Insignificant (recode)	.79
Weak-Strong	.63
Major-Minor (recode)	.78
Supervisor Supportiveness (Taylor & Bowers, 1972)	
My supervisor is friendly and easy to approach.	.85
When I talk with my supervisor, he or she pays attention to what I'm saying.	.93
My supervisor is willing to listen to my problems.	.92
Facework Strategy Preferences (adapted from Merkin, 2006)	
Direct	
If something is wrong with my performance, I would want to be told directly.	.75
I like my supervisor to express his/her thoughts on my ability forthrightly.	.82

Table 3, cont.

I want others to share their real thoughts about my performance frankly.	.82
I want others to say what they think with no reservations.	.71
I want others to acknowledge what they see as the truth straight to my face.	.74
Indirect	
I want others to express themselves in question form (e.g., asking if I need some help doing my tasks).	.53
I want others to express their thoughts on my ability indirectly.	.50
I want others to deliver their reactions to my performance sensitively.	.56
I want others to respond to my mistakes or successes in a subtle way.	.70

Table 4. One-Way ANOVA results for condition on continuous control variables.

	df	F
Participant's Age	7, 423	1.04
Organizational Status	7, 411	0.73
Supervisor Status	7, 423	0.86
Tenure	7, 419	1.98
Hours per week	7, 420	0.53

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Table 5. Chi-square results for condition on nominal control variables

	df	χ^2
Participant's Sex	7	8.41
Ethnicity	35	39.97
Education Level	56	61.01
Job Type	49	45.82
Organization Type	42	39.92
Supervisor Sex	7	4.27
Organization Size	35	21.06

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Table 6. Perception of autonomy and competence face threat by condition.

	Condition	N	M	SD
Autonomy face threat	Autonomy Threat	54	4.38	1.32
	Autonomy with Tact	53	4.30	1.18
	Autonomy with Approbation	56	4.08	1.26
	Autonomy with Tact & Approbation	55	4.24	1.12
	Competence Threat	49	4.42	1.09
	Competence with Tact	53	4.32	1.12
	Competence with Approbation	53	4.05	1.09
	Competence with Tact & Approbation	56	4.25	1.11
Competence face threat	Competence Threat	49	4.47_{abcd}	1.22
	Competence with Tact	53	4.12	1.28
	Competence with Approbation	53	3.71_{d}	1.20
	Competence with Tact & Approbation	55	3.95	1.18
	Autonomy Threat	54	4.07	1.40
	Autonomy with Tact	53	3.70_{a}	1.09
	Autonomy with Approbation	56	3.51_{b}	1.06
	Autonomy with Tact & Approbation	55	3.47_{c}	1.02

Note. Significantly different means, according to Tukey tests, are marked with pairs of matching letters in subscript.

Table 7. Zero-order correlations among trait CA, face threat, voice/silence, and direct & indirect facework strategy preference.

	PRCA-Org	Autonomy face threat	Competence face threat	Defensive voice	Prosocial voice
PRCA-Org					
Autonomy face threat	.17**				
Competence face threat	.21**	.72**			
Defensive voice	.27**	-.05	.07		
Prosocial voice	-.30**	-.19**	-.23**	-.46**	
Defensive silence	.30**	.10*	.19**	.74**	-.52**
Prosocial silence	.13**	.05	.02	.24**	-.10*
Direct facework preference	-.36**	-.02	-.07	-.35**	.32**
Indirect facework preference	.27**	.10*	.12*	.20**	-.06
M	2.29	4.25	3.87	3.06	5.20
SD	0.64	1.16	1.21	1.23	1.04

Note: N's range from 418-435. ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 7, cont.

	Defensive silence	Prosocial silence	Direct facework preference	Indirect facework preference
PRCA-Org				
Autonomy face threat				
Competence face threat				
Defensive voice				
Prosocial voice				
Defensive silence				
Prosocial silence	.47**			
Direct facework preference	-.36**	-.09		
Indirect facework preference	.21**	.05	-.36**	
M	3.22	4.10	4.04	2.76
SD	1.06	0.86	0.63	0.66

Note: N's range from 418-435. ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 8. Correlations among variables for low CA quartile split (n = 119, M = 1.56, SD = .27).

	Autonomy face threat	Competence face threat	Defensive voice	Prosocial voice	Defensive silence	Prosocial silence
Autonomy face threat						
Competence face threat	.608**					
Defensive voice	-.096	-.089				
Prosocial voice	-.187*	-.103	-.468**			
Defensive silence	.081	.020	.690**	-.408**		
Prosocial silence	-.084	-.111	.225*	-.056	.473**	

Note. ** $p < 0.01$ (2-tailed), * $p < 0.05$ (2-tailed).

Table 9. Correlations among variables for high CA quartile split (n = 103, M = 3.21, SD = .39).

	Autonomy face threat	Competence face threat	Defensive voice	Prosocial voice	Defensive silence	Prosocial silence
Autonomy face threat						
Competence face threat	.810**					
Defensive voice	-.205*	.006				
Prosocial voice	-.210*	-.328**	-.390**			
Defensive silence	.108	.268**	.649**	-.512**		
Prosocial silence	.126	.119	.311**	-.105	.528**	

Note. ** $p < 0.01$ (2-tailed), * $p < 0.05$ (2-tailed).

Table 10. Hierarchical Regression Analyses Results.

Defensive Voice	b	s.e.	t
Feedback Severity	-0.109	0.048	-2.222*
Supervisor Supportiveness	-0.072	0.070	-1.464
FB Severity x Supv. Support	-0.034	0.055	-0.694

F (2, 410) = 3.927, $p < .05$, adjusted $R^2 = .014$
F_{change} (1, 409) = 0.481, $p = .49$, $R^2_{change} = .001$

Prosocial Voice	b	s.e.	t
Feedback Severity	0.002	0.039	-0.033
Supervisor Supportiveness	0.257	0.057	5.362***
FB Severity x Supv. Support	0.054	0.046	1.131

F (2, 410) = 14.559, $p < .001$, adjusted $R^2 = .062$
F_{change} (1, 409) = 1.278, $p = .259$, $R^2_{change} = .003$

Defensive Silence	b	s.e.	t
Feedback Severity	-0.034	0.041	-0.682
Supervisor Supportiveness	-0.075	0.060	-1.519
FB Severity x Supv. Support	-0.015	0.048	-0.312

F (2, 411) = 1.514, $p = .221$, adjusted $R^2 = .002$
F_{change} (1, 410) = 0.097, $p = .755$, $R^2_{change} = .000$

Note. *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$

Table 11. Hierarchical Regression Analyses Results.

Defensive Voice	B	s.e.	t
Approbation vs. No Approbation	0.055	0.131	1.188
CA	0.156	0.094	3.131**
Autonomy Face Threat	-0.194	0.068	-3.028**
Competence Face Threat	0.148	0.066	2.288*
Direct Facework Pref.	-0.261	0.101	-5.098***
Indirect Facework Pref.	0.070	0.093	1.397
AppxPRCA	-0.348	0.225	-1.635
AppxAuto	-0.050	0.158	-0.398
AppxComp	0.022	0.158	0.162
AppxDirect	-0.138	0.243	-1.265
AppxIndirect	-0.068	0.235	-.0623
PRCAxAuto	-0.160	0.129	-1.924
PRCAxComp	0.180	0.110	2.163*
PRCAxDirect	0.049	0.163	0.911
PRCAxIndirect	0.101	0.147	1.756
AutoxComp	0.011	0.037	0.224
AutoxDirect	0.031	0.127	0.407
AutoxIndirect	0.050	0.114	0.661
CompxDirect	0.030	0.133	0.394
CompxIndirect	-0.030	0.113	-0.396
DirectxIndirect	-0.034	0.152	-0.641

$F(6, 411) = 14.121, p < .01$, adjusted $R^2 = .159$
$F_{change}(15, 396) = 1.138, p = .320, R^2_{change} = .034$

Table 11, cont.

Prosocial Voice	B	s.e.	T
Approbation vs. No Approbation	-0.028	0.109	-0.607
CA	-0.195	0.078	-3.990***
Autonomy Face Threat	-0.078	0.057	-1.236
Competence Face Threat	-0.136	0.055	-2.131*
Direct Facework Pref.	0.292	0.084	5.791***
Indirect Facework Pref.	0.122	0.078	2.464*
AppxPRCA	0.070	0.186	0.702
AppxAuto	0.061	0.130	0.497
AppxComp	-0.072	0.131	-0.544
AppxDirect	0.069	0.200	0.650
AppxIndirect	0.210	0.194	1.954
PRCAxAuto	0.079	0.106	0.965
PRCAxComp	-0.167	0.091	-2.049*
PRCAxDirect	0.018	0.134	0.354
PRCAxIndirect	0.052	0.121	0.930
AutoxComp	0.098	0.030	2.022*
AutoxDirect	0.102	0.105	1.343
AutoxIndirect	0.018	0.094	0.244
CompxDirect	0.006	0.109	0.083
CompxIndirect	0.066	0.093	0.894
DirectxIndirect	0.019	0.125	0.369

$F(6, 411) = 16.621, p < .001$, adjusted $R^2 = .195$
$F_{change}(15, 396) = 1.503, p = .101, R^2_{change} = .043$

Table 11, cont.

Defensive Silence	B	s.e.	T
Approbation vs. No Approbation	0.013	0.111	0.278
CA	0.165	0.080	3.353**
Autonomy Face Threat	-0.044	0.058	-0.700
Competence Face Threat	0.161	0.056	2.516*
Direct Facework Pref.	-0.278	0.083	-5.546***
Indirect Facework Pref.	0.050	0.078	1.019
AppxPRCA	-0.168	0.191	-1.654
AppxAuto	-0.064	0.134	-0.509
AppxComp	0.087	0.134	0.647
AppxDirect	-0.236	0.205	-2.137*
AppxIndirect	-0.078	0.199	-0.721
PRCAxAuto	-0.158	0.109	-1.911
PRCAxComp	0.183	0.094	2.222*
PRCAxDirect	-0.071	0.133	-1.364
PRCAxIndirect	-0.062	0.125	-1.078
AutoxComp	0.058	0.031	1.179
AutoxDirect	-0.031	0.103	-0.395
AutoxIndirect	0.080	0.095	1.081
CompxDirect	0.085	0.113	1.073
CompxIndirect	-0.024	0.096	-0.321
DirectxIndirect	-0.039	0.120	-0.745

$F(6, 412) = 15.847, p < .001$, adjusted $R^2 = .188$
$F_{change}(15, 397) = 1.056, p = .396, R^2_{change} = .031$

Note. *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$

APPENDICES

Appendix A. Message Components

Autonomy threat
Loss of independence / obligation / order

This is not how I would have done it. / You have an obligation to the organization to produce quality work. / Keep working until your work is up to my standards.

Tact Message
Imposition sharing/debt incurrence

What was expected of you may not have been clear, though. / I'd greatly appreciate it if you would keep putting in good effort.

Competence threat
Ridicule/Comparative disapproval/Blunt disapproval

You screwed this job up. / Your performance is not up to standard, and / this job needs to be redone.

Approbation Message
Support/admiration

But, I want you to know you're on the right track and your work has potential.

Combined Tact & Approbation message

What was expected of you may not have been clear, though. You're on the right track and your work has potential. I'd greatly appreciate it if you would keep putting in good effort.

Appendix B. Message Conditions

Imagine your supervisor stops by your work area to talk with you about some recent work you had performed. In his/her estimation there is a problem because you did not perform a certain task required of you as well as you should. He/she provides you with a brief and general statement about that task and you are left to decide what to do next.

Autonomy threat

This is not how I would have done it. You have an obligation to the organization to produce quality work. Keep working until your work is up to my standards.

Autonomy threat with tact

This is not how I would have done it. You have an obligation to the organization to produce quality work. What was expected of you may not have been clear, though. I'd greatly appreciate it if you would keep putting in good effort. Keep working until your work is up to my standards.

Autonomy threat with approbation

This is not how I would have done it. You have an obligation to the organization to produce quality work. But, I want you to know you're on the right track and your work has potential. Keep working until your work is up to my standards.

Autonomy threat with tact and approbation

This is not how I would have done it. You have an obligation to the organization to produce quality work. What was expected of you may not have been clear, though. You're on the right track and your work has potential. I'd greatly appreciate it if you would keep putting in good effort. Keep working until your work is up to my standards.

Competence threat

You screwed this job up. Your performance is not up to par, and the job needs to be redone.

Competence threat with tact

You screwed this job up. Your performance is not up to par, and the job needs to be redone. What was expected of you may not have been clear though. I'd greatly appreciate it if you would keep putting in good effort.

Competence threat with approbation

You screwed this job up. Your performance is not up to par, and the job needs to be redone. But, I want you to know you're on the right track and your work has potential.

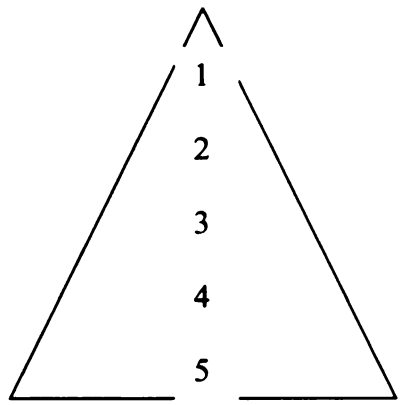
Competence threat with tact and approbation

You screwed this job up. Your performance is not up to par, and the job needs to be redone. What was expected of you may not have been clear, though. You're on the right track and your work has potential. I'd greatly appreciate it if you would keep putting in good effort.

Appendix C. Measurement

Organizational status measurement

Your status in the organization: (please circle the appropriate number)



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