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# Effects of Supervisors' Communication Styles on Interns' Satisfaction and Learning

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Effects of Supervisors' Communication Styles on Interns' Satisfaction and Learning

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Spring 2013

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgments ..... 4

Abstract ..... 5

Chapter 1: Introduction..... 6

Chapter 2: Literature Review and Research Question ..... 12

    Interns and Internship Programs ..... 12

    Authoritarian and Collaborative Managerial Communication Styles ..... 21

    Mentoring and Mentor–Protégé Relationships ..... 28

    Research Question ..... 34

    Table 1: Spectrum of Managerial/Supervisor Communication Styles ..... 36

Chapter 3: Methods ..... 37

    Research Participants..... 37

    Procedures ..... 37

Chapter 4: Results ..... 41

    Factor Analyses of Independent and Dependent Variables ..... 41

    Table 2: Factor Loadings for Independent Variable ..... 42

    Results for Entire Sample ..... 44

    Table 3: Factor Loadings for Dependent Variables ..... 45

    Results for Authoritarian and Collaborative Supervisors ..... 46

Chapter 5: Discussion ..... 48

    Findings and Implications ..... 48

    Limitations ..... 55

    Future Research ..... 58

INTERNS' SATISFACTION AND LEARNING	3
Conclusion .....	59
References .....	60
Appendices	
Appendix A: Questionnaire .....	80
Appendix B: Human Research Committee Approval.....	86

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### Abstract

As a relatively new addition to the modern workforce, interns are a unique and important but understudied population. In particular, scholars know little about the how interactions between interns and those who supervise them contribute to interns' satisfaction with and learning from the internship experience. This study explores the effects of two supervisors' communication styles—authoritarian and collaborative—on interns' satisfaction and learning. Sixty-three university respondents who had completed an internship program completed an online questionnaire that assessed their supervisors' communication style and their learning and satisfaction with the internship. Results showed that supervisors employed the collaborative communication style significantly more often than the authoritarian communication style, and that it was strongly associated with outcomes for interns, although the authoritarian style also was associated with those outcomes. The results suggest the need for a new way of conceiving of leadership/managerial communication that integrates aspects from both the authoritarian and collaborative communication styles, as well as the need to better integrate the three primary stakeholders of internship programs (interns, universities, and companies).

## CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

As a significant feature of the contemporary organizational context, *internships*, which involve “term-length placement of an enrolled student in an organization—sometimes with pay, sometimes without pay—with a faculty supervisor, a company supervisor, and some academic credit earned toward the degree” (Narayanan, Olk, & Fukami, 2010, p. 61), represent a mutually beneficial relationship between organizations and university students, in which interns apply conceptual and theoretical classroom knowledge to the organizational world to gain valuable skills and experiences that are useful to their future professional endeavors (see, e.g., Gupta, Burns, & Schiferl, 2010; Narayanan et al., 2010), while organizations acquire valuable temporary assistance via interns’ low-cost labor (Dailey, 2008) and can use internships as a “screening device” (Narayanan, et al., 2010, p. 62) for potential future hires. Given the potential benefits, more than ever before, college students are participating in internship programs at a wide variety of organizations.

Because of the increased college student demand for and participation in internships, internship programs and experiences are beginning to attract scholarly attention. Because internship programs and experiences usually are evaluated and awarded academic credit based on the degree to which they provide valuable learning experiences (McDonough, Rodriguez, & Prior-Miller, 2009), learning is a primary purpose of internship programs, and, consequently, much of the research has focused on the extent to which internship programs and experiences result in student learning (see, e.g., C. M. Brown & Murphy, 2005; Eyler, 1993; Matthew, Taylor, & Ellis, 2012; Varghese et al., 2012). In addition to learning, interns’ satisfaction has been of primary importance to researchers (see Beebe, Blaylock, & Sweetser, 2009; D’abate,

Youndt, & Wenzel, 2009; Gupta et al., 2010; Knouse & Fontenot, 2008; Lord, Sumrall, & Sambandam, 2011; Smayling & Miller, 2012). Although internship program effectiveness and interns' satisfaction undoubtedly result from interactions and relationships that occur within the internship site, research about the role of communication in creating these outcomes is lacking.

Given that interns, like most employees, are supervised, interns' interactions with supervisors at the internship site potentially are related to interns' satisfaction, and communicative behaviors that occur between interns and supervisors could be sources of interns' satisfaction as well. The literature on managerial/supervisor communication shows correlations between supervisor–employee communication characteristics and employees' satisfaction, and, as such, that literature may reveal important information about effects of supervisors' communication on the satisfaction of interns as a unique, but related population in the workforce. Thus, it is important to consider effects that communication styles and behaviors of supervisors/managers have on interns' satisfaction.

de Vries, Bakker-Pieper, and Oostenveld (2010) defined *leaders' communication style* “as a distinctive set of interpersonal communicative behaviors geared toward the optimization of hierarchical relationships in order to reach certain group or individual goals” (p. 368). The style approach to the study of leadership/managerial communication was among the first to take a communication-oriented view of leadership to explain its influence on organizational outcomes (see Barge, 1997).

The managerial/leadership communication styles identified in the literature, essentially, range from authoritarian to collaborative, with a spectrum of styles in between. The *authoritarian style*, which views leaders as embodying qualities of powerfulness as they manage and influence subordinates to meet organizational goals (Yukl, 1994), is characterized by task-

centered, prescriptive, autocratic communication. In contrast, the *collaborative style* is characterized by person-centered, participatory, democratic communication (see, e.g., Claes, 1999; Wheelless & Reichel, 1990). Generally, contemporary research suggests that collaborative/democratic/participative/person-centered styles correlate with positive outcomes, including employees' (and leaders') task attraction (Wheelless & Reichel, 1990), motivation (Campbell, Brommer, & Yeo, 1993; Hollembeak & Amorose, 2005), organizational commitment (de Vries et al., 2010; Huang, Shi, Zhang, & Cheung, 2006), innovation (Somech, 2005, 2006a) performance (e.g., Clark, Hartline, & Jones, 2009; de Vries et al., 2010; Kahai, Sosik, & Avolio, 2004, 2006; Ryska, 2009; Somech, 2006b; Yousef, 2000), and, prominently, job satisfaction (e.g., Bhatti, Murta Maitlo, Shaikh, Hashmi, & Shaikh, 2012; Clark et al., 2009; Foels, Driskell, Mullen, & Salas, 2000; Ismail, Zainuddin, & Ibrahim, 2010; Kim, 2002; Madlock, 2008; Richmond, McCroskey, & Davis, 1982). Job satisfaction has been a particularly important focus of this body of research, given that research (including meta-analyses) across a wide range of organizational types (e.g., profit versus nonprofit), professions, and countries shows that job satisfaction results in favorable outcomes for organizations, such as decreased employee absenteeism, burnout, and turnover (e.g., Carsten & Spector, 1987; Côte & Morgan, 2002; George & Gareth, 1986; Griffin, Hogan, Lambert, Tucker-Gail, & Baker, 2010; Kalliath & Morris, 2002; Long & Thean, 2011; Randsley de Moura, Abrahms, Retter, Gunnarsdottir, & Ando, 2009; Sagie, 1998; Tett & Meyer, 1993; Van Dick et al., 2004); increased employee organizational commitment (e.g., Curry, Wakefield, Price, & Mueller, 1986; Knoop, 1995; Markovits, Davis, Fay, & van Dick, 2010; Yousef, 2002); and increased employee and organizational performance/productivity/effectiveness (e.g., Harter, Schmidt, & Hayes, 2002; Hoffman, & Ingram, 1992; Iaffaldano & Muchinsky, 1985; Judge, Thoresen, Bono, & Patton,

2001; Koys, 2001; Madlock, 2008; Ostroff, 1992; Petty, McGee, & Cavender, 1984; Pincus, 1986; Zigler, Hagen, & Diehl, 2012). Moreover, according to some scholars (e.g., D'abate et al., 2009), effects of leaders' use of a collaborative style on job satisfaction are transferrable to other groups in the workforce, which might include interns, despite some unique characteristics of that organizational group (discussed later). Thus, findings about the effects of managerial communication styles on employees' job satisfaction warrant their application to interns to determine whether and how those styles are correlated with interns' satisfaction.

Learning, as mentioned previously, also is a primary purpose of internship programs, given that they take place within an educational context (Fonner, 2009). As such, the relationship between supervisors and interns also is somewhat analogous to mentor–protégé relationships and, consequently, research about mentoring may be helpful for understanding whether and how supervisors' communication affects the learning achieved by interns.

Mentoring in the organizational context has become more prevalent during the past few decades because of its correlation with job satisfaction, job success, organizational commitment, and other positive outcomes (see, e.g., Allen, Smith, Mael, O'Shea, & Eby, 2009; Bozeman & Feeney, 2007; B. P. Brown, Zablah, & Bellenger, 2008; Bullis & Bach, 1989; Donaldson, Ensher, & Grant-Vallone, 2000; Egan, 1996; Kalbfleisch & Davies, 1993; Kalbfleisch & Keyton, 1995; Lee & Del Carmen Montiel, 2011; Payne & Huffman, 2005; Selzer, 2008; Spitzmüller et al., 2008; Srivastava, 2011; Weng, Huang, Tsai, Chang, & Lin, 2010). Bozeman and Feeney (2007) defined *mentoring* as

a process for the informal transmission of knowledge, social capital, and psycho-social support perceived by the recipient as relevant to work, career or professional development; mentoring entails informal communication, usually face-to-face and over a

sustained period of time, between a person who is perceived to have greater relevant knowledge, wisdom or experience (the mentor), to a person who is perceived to have less (the protégé). (p. 17)

Hence, mentoring relationships are characterized by an “expert” providing support and guidance to a “novice” (Holmes, 2005), and several models have been advanced to conceptualize that relationship and styles of mentoring, models that, potentially, can be applied to the supervisor–intern relationship.

In both the study of managerial/supervisor communication styles and mentoring styles, there has been a historical shift from an authoritarian style toward the use of a more relational, person-centered, collaborative communication style by managers/supervisors/mentors to obtain the promised benefits (see, e.g., Plas, 2001; Plas & Lewis, 2001). Modern conceptions of managerial communication styles, as explained previously, position collaborative and authoritarian styles at opposite ends of a continuum, with a range of styles in between; modern theories of mentoring also discuss a spectrum of styles with similar aspects (discussed in Chapter 2). Importantly, the managerial communication styles that employees most prefer align with the mentoring styles and behaviors that mentees most prefer, both of which stress collaboration. It is unclear, however, whether the relationships that have been found between the use of a collaborative managerial/mentor communication style and positive employee/mentee outcomes (as well as the inverse relationship between the use of an authoritarian managerial/mentor communication style and negative employee/mentee outcomes) applies to interns as well.

Thus, the present study seeks to understand more fully the effects of supervisors' communication on interns as a relatively new population in the workforce. With positive outcomes, such as learning and satisfaction, at stake, it is important to study how communication

between interns and their supervisors might play a role in promoting such outcomes. Hence, this study investigates whether the use of authoritarian and collaborative managerial communication styles, and the mentoring styles that coincide with those managerial styles, are related to interns' satisfaction and learning.

To accomplish that goal, Chapter 2 reviews literature on interns and internship programs, and the nature and effects of managerial communication and mentoring on employees and mentees, respectively, followed by the research question that was posed in this investigation. Chapter 3 explains the methods used to conduct the study to answer the research question, and Chapter 4 presents the results from the study. Finally, Chapter 5 discusses the results in terms of their implications for communication theory and research, as well as their applied value to students involved in internship programs and to employees in organizations who supervise interns; identifies limitations that characterized the study, and offers suggestions for future research.

## CHAPTER 2

## REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The following review of literature on the topic being investigated includes research on interns and internship programs, authoritarian and collaborative managerial communication styles, and mentors and mentoring relationships. This review offers valuable information regarding the purposes of internships and internship program effectiveness, as well as about the effects of various managerial communication styles and mentoring styles on employees and mentees, respectively. Generally, internship program effectiveness correlates with interns' satisfaction and/or is associated with qualities that result from the work environment, such as the degree to which internships help interns to learn about work or to gain work experience (e.g., D'abate et al., 2010). Some studies suggest that positive intern-supervisor relationships can result in these outcomes (e.g., Dailey, 2008; Smayling & Miller, 2010), but there has not been a focus on specific communicative behaviors or styles used by supervisors with interns that are most conducive to increasing interns' satisfaction and learning, giving rise to the research questions that was posed in the present study.

**Interns and Internship Programs**

Thus far, researchers have focused primarily on internship program effectiveness (see, e.g., Fonner, 2009; Knouse & Fontenot, 2008; Moghaddam, 2011; Wan, Yang, Cheng, & Su, 2013), finding that effectiveness is a function of a variety of contributing factors. In a review of the literature, Knouse and Fontenot (2008) discussed five factors that influence internship program effectiveness: (a) enhanced employment opportunities, (b) realistic expectations about the job or work, (c) prerequisites for participating, (d) mentoring, and (e) satisfaction with the internship experience. The first three factors pertain to characteristics and perceptions of the

work environment, whereas the last two factors tend to be derived from interactions and relationships at the internship site. Generally, the research shows that internships tend to lead to better employment opportunities for students because recruiters prefer to hire those students rather than students who have not completed an internship. Internships also are thought to instill in interns realistic expectations of organizational life by providing them with real-world work experience. Knouse and Fontenot's review also found that performance-related prerequisites for participation in internship programs (e.g., a minimum grade point average or particular required coursework) also contributed to program effectiveness, although students' attitudes and beliefs about their performance were more likely to be a determining factor than were the prerequisites themselves.

The importance of the first three factors, those that pertain to characteristics and perceptions of the work environment (enhanced employment opportunities, realistic expectations about work, and prerequisites) identified by Knouse and Fontenot (2008) is echoed in similar studies, such as that conducted by Fonner (2009), which examined the extent to which internships increase (a) students' perceived work experience, (b) understanding of the workplace, and (c) knowledge of desired future jobs, as related to perceptions of the work and work environment. In a study conducted over a 4-month period, Fonner compared students who had completed an internship program to those who had not with regard to those three outcomes, which are similar to some of the outcomes that were identified by Knouse and Fontenot. Twice during the internship (a few weeks into the program and, again, at the end), interns completed a questionnaire that measured their perceptions of the amount of work experience that they had gained, the extent to which the internship was a preview of the workplace, and the extent to which it was a preview of future jobs. The results showed that internships significantly increased

students' perceived work experience and their knowledge of desired future jobs over time, but there was no significant change over time in terms of students' workplace understanding. These findings imply that students in internship programs learn through experience what career path they might like to take in the future. Thus, learning (about desired future jobs or real-world experience) was an important factor affecting internship program effectiveness.

Taken together, some of the findings from Knouse and Fontenot's (2008) review and from Fonner's (2009) study comprise an early conceptualization of internship program effectiveness that pertains to learning, in terms of students building their skills and gaining knowledge of, and experience with, the organizational world. However, the other two factors that Knouse and Fontenot identified as contributing to internship effectiveness, mentoring and interns' satisfaction, are decidedly more relational, especially when paired together. Although Knouse and Fontenot discussed those factors only minimally, and descriptions of those factors are ambiguous in the research that has been conducted thus far, each is thought to be influential with regard to internship program effectiveness. Knouse and Fontenot noted that researchers have found that mentoring in internship programs correlates with students' higher perceived value of the experience, because mentors, in comparison to not having mentors, have the ability to "produce better socialization into the organization, higher levels of learning, and larger numbers of job offers" (p. 63), although they did not delve into the mentoring styles or behaviors that supervisors use most and that interns prefer. Additionally, although Knouse and Fontenot deemed interns' satisfaction to be a contributing factor to internship program effectiveness, the findings were inconclusive with regard to what contributes to interns' satisfaction. They proposed that treatment by and regular feedback from others in the organization where the internship takes place, as well as task-related factors (e.g., whether assignments were clear and

challenging), increase interns' satisfaction. Whether feedback was positive or negative was not specified, but according to Rothman's (2007), interns value being told "how to do things better," and, toward that end, they prefer highly detailed and thoroughly explained instructions on assignments. Although Knouse and Fontenot underscored the importance of relational aspect of the internship experience through their discussion of the relationship between mentoring of interns and interns' satisfaction, further investigation is necessary to understand more fully the nature and effects of supervisors' communicative behaviors on interns.

The study conducted by D'abate et al. (2009) extended the research on interns' satisfaction by identifying characteristics of internship programs that contribute to that outcome. A nonrandom sample of 261 undergraduate business school students who were interns completed a questionnaire that assessed the influence of job characteristics (e.g., the variety of skills and activities that pertain to the job, task identity and significance, autonomy, and feedback), work environment characteristics (e.g., opportunities to learn and for career development, and supervisor and coworker support), and contextual variables (e.g., flexible schedule, commute, compensation, satisfaction with compensation, and location) on interns' satisfaction. The results showed that characteristics of the job and work environment were the primary contributors to interns' satisfaction, with students' overall satisfaction being high, but not being significantly related to contextual variables, such as gender, grade point average, or class year. Job characteristics were highly influential on students' satisfaction with the internship program, with task significance being most influential. Work environment characteristics also were influential, with learning opportunities, supervisor support, and satisfaction with the organization being associated with students' satisfaction. Hence, regardless of demographic and contextual differences, student interns, generally, were satisfied with their internship experiences, especially

when they were given the supervision and support necessary for successfully taking on reasonably challenging tasks. Given that characteristics of the work environment, especially learning opportunities and supervisor support, were influential factors on interns' satisfaction, it is important to further explore how communication between supervisors and interns might incorporate these relational qualities and, thereby, affect interns' satisfaction.

A study by Gupta et al. (2010) elicited similar results regarding factors that contribute to students' satisfaction in business internship programs. The benefits of internship programs for students that were identified by Gupta et al. align with those described in research about internship program effectiveness, including learning-related factors, such as application of theoretical knowledge (using learned skills), increased knowledge of industries and career paths, better understanding of career interests, more realistic workplace expectations, and faster advancement within the workplace. Gupta et al. also proposed that students are more satisfied in internships in which they perceive greater personal benefits and are provided with positive experiences, and that internships are more satisfying if they are perceived by students to improve their job prospects.

To learn about contributing factors to internship program effectiveness, Gupta et al. (2010) gathered data from 88 business students who completed a 39-item scale that asked about features of their internship experience (especially with regard to whether the experience and work environment were positive, whether it improved job prospects and helped them to learn new work-related and communication skills, and whether they became more comfortable over time with the work environment). Important findings included a significant correlation between students' satisfaction and their confidence in their ability to later obtain full-time employment and their perception of the importance of the internship to their future professional success; a less

significant relationship was found between students' satisfaction and perceived likelihood of working in the future for the company at which they completed the internship. Gupta et al. also found no significant relationship between students' satisfaction and contextual factors, such as duration of internship, hours spent in the internship, compensation received, and grade point average. Their results support interns' satisfaction being derived from their perception that the internship will better their future, which cannot be achieved through task aspects alone; relational features of the internship program, such as mentoring, relationships within the organization, and even just observing others in the workplace, also are important.

The research on internship programs discussed thus far primarily reveals internship program effectiveness to be a function of several task-related and relational components, which is echoed in a study conducted by Smayling and Miller (2012) that focused on relational components. They predicted that interns' gender match with their supervisor, degree to which the internship related to interns' desired professional field, and degree to which the program provided opportunities for interns to use their new professional skills would influence interns' satisfaction, and, in turn, interns' performance and the perceived effectiveness of the program. Three hundred fifty-nine students who had participated in business internships completed a questionnaire that asked about their satisfaction with the internship program, perceptions of task-related elements (e.g., task appropriateness, degree to which they were able to use their professional skills, and degree to which the internship related to a desired career field), and perceptions of social aspects (e.g., degree to which they thought they were supervised, whether they experienced a sense of responsibility, and degree to which they thought that the internship transitioned them into the working world). In turn, supervisors rated their interns' learning ability, judgment, dependability, and quality of work.

The findings from Smayling and Miller's (2012) study showed that interns were more satisfied, regardless of gender, when they perceived that they had been adequately and appropriately supervised (operationalized with respect to whether it was constant; whether it promoted high-quality work, the ability to learn, relations with others, and the exercise of judgment; whether it was dependable; and whether supervisors' attitude was perceived positively). However, male interns' satisfaction was strongly associated with the degree to which the internship related to a desired career field, whereas female interns' satisfaction was strongly correlated with the degree to which they experienced responsibility at the internship site.

Together, Smayling and Miller's (2012) study and the studies conducted by D'abate et al. (2009) and by Gupta et al. (2010) explained interns' satisfaction as resulting from job-related and relational factors. The job-related factors include task significance and appropriateness, learning opportunities, and gaining experience; relational aspects include feedback, supervisor support, career development, and mentoring, which likely are products of the relationship between interns and supervisors, as they cannot be derived from the work alone; however, relational aspects are discussed less frequently and with less depth than are job-related factors in the literature on internships. Given associations found between these relational factors and interns' satisfaction and learning, it is important to study how the intern-supervisor relationship, given the centrality of that relationship to the overall internship experience, could affect interns' satisfaction and learning.

Dailey (2008) conducted a study to examine the communicative aspects of supervisor-intern relationships, focusing on effects of leader-member exchanges (LMX) in those relationships on interns' *psychological climate* (defined as interns' cognitive perceptions of the organizational environment) and organizational commitment. LMX refers to the nature of the

communicative relationship established between superiors and subordinates, with high-LMX relationships characterized by open, frequent, social, and inclusive communication, each of which are lacking in low-LMX relationships, which are created when superiors restrict communication to work-related topics and small talk. Dailey reviewed literature on LMX in other relationships within organizations that are similar to the supervisor–intern relationship, including regular full-time employees (in which high LMX was correlated with organizational commitment); mentor–protégé relationships (especially those in which LMX is high and “communication is abundant, helpful and social”; Dailey, p. 6); and nonstandard employees, such as contract or temporary workers (in which, generally, there was low LMX). On the basis of that review, Dailey hypothesized that high LMX would be positively correlated with interns’ increased organizational commitment, as well as with positive perceptions of the organizational climate, as rated along four dimensions (trust, support, recognition, and fairness).

One hundred four voluntary participants (undergraduate communication students who currently were completing an internship or had completed one) completed a questionnaire that asked about their levels of LMX, organizational commitment, and psychological climate (measured via Likert scales). As hypothesized, high LMX in the supervisor–intern relationship was correlated more significantly with the positive outcomes of interns’ organizational commitment and improved perceptions of three of the four dimensions of psychological climate (trust, support, and recognition) compared to low or medium LMX. Given that high LMX is characterized by person-centered, relational communication, a description that also applies to the collaborative managerial communication style (explored later in this review), this general style might be the most beneficial for and preferred by interns, although the outcomes of learning and satisfaction were not explicitly discussed in Dailey’s (2008) study.

Although the studies reviewed above (D'abate et al., 2009; Knouse & Fontenot, 2008; Smayling & Miller, 2012) have established that relational aspects of internship programs contribute to their perceived effectiveness, further investigation is needed regarding the nature of and effects on interns of specific types of relationships with supervisors that characterize the internship experience. Although Dailey's (2008) study highlighted the importance of supervisor–intern relationship dynamics with respect to important organizational outcomes, it did not address outcomes that were demonstrated in other studies conducted about internships—specifically, interns' satisfaction and learning. Because many, if not most, internships last the length of an academic term (e.g., 15-week semester), organizational commitment may not be the most relevant outcome to examine; in the limited time that interns spend with an organization, learning and satisfaction, perhaps, are more important outcomes, especially in determining the effectiveness of an internship program. Although characteristics and descriptions of effective internship programs and experiences are prevalent in the literature, processes by which these outcomes are derived are underdeveloped. The present study seeks to fill that gap by focusing on the supervisor–intern relationship to examine how two managerial communication styles—authoritarian and collaborative—influence interns' satisfaction and learning. As explicated below, an established body of research has been conducted on these two managerial communication styles that provides valuable information that can be applied to the communication between supervisors and interns.

### **Authoritarian and Collaborative Managerial Communication Styles**

Managerial communication styles have been studied over the past several decades, beginning with a famous study conducted by Lewin, Lippitt, and White (1939; see also Lewin, 1950; Lippitt, 1938, 1939, 1940; Lippitt & White, 1943; White & Lippitt, 1960) that contrasted the effects of three leadership styles: (a) *authoritarian leader*, who makes all group decisions and assigns “autocratically the activities of each member—the task and with whom to work” to meet the leader’s goals; (b) *democratic leader*, who treats all decisions as “a matter of group determination, encouraged and drawn out by the leader” (Lippitt, 1940, p. 63); and (c) *laissez-faire leader*, who is uninvolved, leaving the group to make all decisions itself. Lewin et al.’s study observed children working on a group activity (making clay masks) as influenced by exposure to each of the three leadership styles. The findings showed that children working under an authoritarian leader exhibited more dissonance within the group, despite the way that the leader “pushed the group toward a unified pattern” (Lippitt, 1939, p. 33) than did the children working for a democratic leader, who exhibited more group cohesion and stability, and used collective in-group communication, such as using the word “we” instead of “I.” The results supported the notion that particular managerial communication styles result in particular outcomes; in this case, the democratic leadership style was more efficient and preferred by those exposed to it.

Lewin et al.’s (1939) study, then groundbreaking, had a profound effect on the study of leadership styles, resulting in much research about differences between authoritarian and democratic (and related) styles (see, e.g., Anderson, 1959; Bass & Bass, 2008; Fodor, 1978; Gastil, 1994; Gilstein, Wright, & Stone, 1977; Halpin, 1957; Haythorne, Crouch, Haefner, Langham, & Carter, 1956; Jurma, 1978; Kipnis, Schmidt, Price, & Stitt, 1981; Meade, 1985;

Preston & Heintz, 1949; Rokeach, 1952; Rosenbaum, & Rosenbaum, 1971; Shaw, 1955; Sudolsky & Nathan, 1971), and it continues to influence modern conceptions of managerial communication styles. As an alternative to authoritarian leadership, democratic leadership involves subordinates in organizational processes, and, eventually, that view of leadership led in the 1970s and 1980s to the emergence, and study of, collaborative leadership, seemingly in response to traditional views about leadership styles positing that top-down, autocratic leadership and associated “masculine” traits (e.g., individualism, control, assertiveness, competition, defensiveness and confrontation) are the most effective and most desirable in leaders (Claes, 1999). Today, the collaborative style, marked by subordinates’ participation, such as sharing of decision-making processes and mutuality (Houghton, Neck, & Manz, 2003; Pearce & Conger, 2003; Seifert, 2001), is a prominent feature of organizational communication research.

Communication scholars also have investigated differences between authoritarian and democratic/collaborative managerial, focusing on the communicative behaviors employed by those types of leader. Richmond et al. (1982), for instance, investigated the effects of supervisors’ communicative behaviors on the relationship between supervisors and subordinates for five diverse samples of workers. Specifically, Richmond et al. employed the Management Communication Style (MCS) instrument, which views such communication as existing on a continuum from an extreme “boss centered” or “tells” approach to an extreme “subordinate centered” or “joins” approach . . . [with] four major points identified on the continuum, representing increasing levels of subordinate interaction with superior: *tell*, *sell*, *consult*, and *join*. (p. 173)

Expanding on those styles, Wheelless and Reichel (1990) noted that

from the first extreme to the latter, the use of authority by the manager decreases and the freedom for subordinates increases . . . a manager exhibiting the *tells* style makes decisions, then announces them to employees. A manager exhibiting the *sells* style also makes the decisions but tries to persuade the subordinates of the desirability of the decision. The *consults* style manager presents the problem to subordinates for their advice before he/she makes a final decision. Finally, a manager employing the *joins* style delegates decision-making to subordinates. (p. 375)

Richmond et al. (1982) had participants from each of the sample groups complete the MCS instrument, as well as scales that measured variables that included communicative use of power (coercive, legitimate, reward, referent, and expert) and conflict management style (avoidant or direct). The results indicated that the MCS of immediate superiors—with whom subordinates have a closer communication relationship than anyone else in the organizational context—was significantly related to employees' satisfaction, whereas the MCS of upper management was less significant. Specifically, “a more employee-oriented MCS [like the *consults* or *joins* approach] of an immediate superior is associated with greater satisfaction with supervision and work” (Richmond et al., p. 183). The results, thus, suggest that superiors should use an employee-oriented, collaborative style rather than a task-oriented, authoritarian style when interacting with subordinates to increase employees' job satisfaction.

Other studies have used the MCS instrument in conjunction with other instruments to study the effects of managerial communication styles on important outcomes for employees. For instance, Wheelless and Reichel (1990) assessed the effects of MCS, along with social style and conflict management style (i.e., nonconfrontation, solution-orientation, and control in conflict situations), on employees' social attraction and task attraction (feelings about working with a

person) to their managers, which are associated with positive organizational outcomes, such as job satisfaction, positive work environment, and productivity. They predicted that social and task attraction would be positively correlated with aspects of supervisors' communication styles that are perceived by subordinates to be rewarding, and negatively related with aspects that are perceived to be punishing. These instruments were used in combination because managers who employ a particular MCS or social style demonstrate similar communicative behavior in a conflict situation; for instance, managers who, generally, employ a versatile, responsive style would likely adopt a solution-oriented style during conflict situations because of inherent similarities that exist between these styles. Hence, a combination of the three measures provided a complex view of the effects of managerial communication styles.

Wheless and Reichel (1990) distributed questionnaires to workers in management positions in a variety of organizations, and the managers distributed the same questionnaire to employees who they directly supervised. The questionnaire measured demographic information and each of the communication styles of interest. The results validated people's MCS, social style, and conflict management style being relatively consistent. The results also indicated that a combination of versatility, responsiveness (both being social styles), solution-orientation, and nonconfrontation (both being conflict management styles) were most strongly correlated with task attraction, which means that those styles were more preferred by subordinates, whereas assertiveness (social style) and control (conflict management style) were negatively associated with task attraction, meaning that they were less preferred by subordinates. Hence, employees preferred managers who took initiative rather than those who avoided doing so, and they preferred managers who communicated openly with them and used active conflict management

skills in conflict situations; if managers exhibited these traits, employees were more willing and eager to work for them.

Studies such as those conducted by Richmond et al. (1982) and by Wheelless and Reichel (1990) featured the ends of the spectrum of managerial communication styles that occur in the workplace; that is, "boss centered" and "subordinate centered." Yrle, Hartman, and Galle (2009) extended that research by using knowledge about managerial communication styles and types of LMX relationships that those styles create to predict the impact of LMX on organizational and individual outcomes. Specifically, they hypothesized that high-LMX relationships would be significantly associated with better quality communication between supervisors and their subordinates.

Eighty-eight participating managers at a large urban U.S. medical center completed a questionnaire that asked about important demographics, their job and work characteristics, and their relationships with their employees. Managers then selected two employees to complete the questionnaire, which was modified to ask about their relationship with the supervisor who provided them with the questionnaire. The results showed that high LMX correlated with collaborative managerial communication style aspects; within that category, coordination and participation were the most strongly associated with high LMX. Yrle et al. (2009) suggested that to cultivate a high-LMX relationship, supervisors should "provide high quality of information and permit participation by the subordinate" (p. 266). This suggestion was based on the finding that when the element of participation is lacking, LMX is lower; thus, person-centered and task-centered leadership styles are enacted through divergent communicative behaviors. Task-centered styles were characterized by more verbal aggressiveness because the talk between supervisors and subordinates revolves, mostly, around aspects of the work, such as planning and

setting goals, whereas person-centered styles were characterized by “an assured, supportive, argumentative, precise, and verbally non-aggressive communication style” (Yrle et al., p. 376). The person-centered style was preferred by employees and, thus, resulted in higher employee task and social attraction, and, subsequently, higher employee job satisfaction.

McColl-Kennedy and Anderson (2002) investigated the effects of leadership communication styles on employees' emotions, self-esteem, and organizational commitment as they intersect with gender combinations of managers and subordinates. The goal was to create a causal model to explain how gender combinations of supervisors and employees, supervisors' leadership styles, and employees' emotions, self-esteem, and organizational commitment are correlated. Questionnaires were completed by 127 sales representatives who were asked about their supervisors' communication style, how often they experience particular emotions at work (namely, frustration and optimism), how committed they were to the organization, and the degree to which they had self-esteem at work. Analysis of the data suggested that a *transformational leadership style*, characterized by “guidance through individualized consideration, intellectual stimulations, inspirational motivation and idealized influence” (McColl-Kennedy & Anderson, p. 116), was positively correlated with optimism for both males and females, and that this was truer for subordinates of female supervisors than for those of male supervisors, because females embody that style more frequently than do men. Notably, male subordinates of male supervisors reported higher frustration than did other gender combinations, regardless of leadership style, although self-esteem was least affected by the transformational leadership style. This is likely because the “typically male” management styles (e.g., strategic planning, business-oriented leadership skills, and a tendency toward recognition and challenge) are not conducive to nurturing and to developing relational connections in the same way as are “typically female”

styles, according to Claes (1999). Furthermore, Claes asserted that “women are said to possess ‘feminine’ qualities such as relationship building and teamwork that are valued in a more collaborative and creative management environment” (p. 431). Hence, although the results of McColl-Kennedy and Anderson’s study were not conclusive regarding the effects of supervisor–subordinate gender combinations and leadership style, overall, those results suggest that positive outcomes—namely, higher employee optimism and self-esteem, and lower frustration—can be encouraged if supervisors employ a transformational leadership style.

The transformational leadership style and related person-centered managerial styles, have been studied by many researchers given contemporary changes in organizational climate. Typically, transformational leadership is studied in contrast to *transactional leadership*, which is task oriented and often is characterized by exchanges that involve use of rewards and punishments (for overviews, see Bass, 1998, 1999; Bass & Riggio, 2006; Bono & Judge, 2004; Clarke, 2013; Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, & van Engen, 2003; Harms & Credé, 2010; Hunt & Conger, 1999; Judge & Piccolo, 2004; Leithwood & Sun, 2012; Lowe, Kroeck, & Sivasubramaniam, 1996; McCarthy, 1997; Wang, Oh, Courtright, & Colbert, 2011). Transformational leadership is a mutual process that “involves influence by a leader on subordinates, but the effect of the influence is to empower subordinates to participate in the process of transforming the organization” (Yukl, 1989, p. 269). Essentially, the authoritarian managerial communication style aligns with the transactional approach to leadership, whereas the collaborative managerial communication style aligns with the transformational approach. The studies conducted by Richmond et al. (1982), Wheelless and Reichel (1990), and Yrle et al. (2009) underscored specific communication behaviors that characterize these overarching styles. Such research suggests that a collaborative (person-centered, relational, transformational)

managerial communication style correlates with positive outcomes for employees, such as task attraction, organizational commitment, job success, and, most prominently, job satisfaction.

In addition to managerial communication styles as one lens through which to view supervisor–intern communicative relationships, as pointed out previously, the supervisor–intern relationship is similar to the mentor–protégée relationship. As explained in the next section, the mentoring literature also provides insight about how mentors' communication styles are correlated with similar positive outcomes for protégées that, potentially, can be generalized to interns.

### **Mentoring and Mentor–Protégé Relationships**

Learning, as mentioned previously, is an essential part of the internship experience. Building knowledge of career fields and desired future jobs, and gaining real work experience (Fonner, 2009), as well as applying theoretical knowledge (Gupta et al., 2010) and developing skills (Smayling & Miller, 2012), have been identified as primary factors that contribute to interns' satisfaction and to internship program effectiveness. Mentor–protégé/mentee relationships also seek to promote protégées' learning, and because both supervisor–intern and mentor–protégé relationships attribute a novice role to interns and to mentees, the body of research conducted about mentoring provides potentially useful information about the effects of supervisors' communication on interns' learning and satisfaction. In particular, research about mentoring has underscored its importance in organizational and academic contexts in resulting in positive outcomes for mentees, such as career benefits, job satisfaction, leadership, learning, and organizational commitment (see, e.g., Allen, Eby, Poteet, Lentz, & Lima, 2004; Aryee & Chay, 1994; Aryee, Wyatt, & Stone, 1996; Beck, 1989; Blickle, Witzki, & Schneider, 2009; Bozionelos, 2006; B. P. Brown et al., 2008; Chew, 2008; Ghosh, Reio, & Haynes, 2012; Gong,

Chen, & Lee, 2011; Hovarth, Wasko, & Bradley, 2008; Kwan, Liu, & Yim, 2011; Lankau & Scandura, 2002; Lee & Del Carmen Montiel, 2011; Lester, Hannah, Harms, Vogelgesang, & Avolio, 2011; Liu, Xu, & Weitz, 2011; Madlock & Kennedy-Lightsey, 2010; Murphy & Ensher, 2001; Orpen, 1995, 1997; Pan, Sun, & Chow, 2011; Payne & Huffman, 2005; Phornprapha & Chansrichawla, 2007; Ragins, Cotton, & Miller, 2000; Reid, Allen, Riemenschneider, & Armstrong, 2008; Richard, Ismail, Bhuian, & Taylor, 2009; Robinson & Reio, 2012; Shah et al., 2011; Spitzmüller et al., 2008; Thomas & Lankau, 2009; Weng et al., 2010; Whitely, Dougherty, & Dreher, 1991), and such research has suggested several models for conceptualizing the mentor–protégé relationship that, potentially, can be applied to the supervisor–intern relationship.

Early literature about mentoring in organizations discussed its effects on employees' satisfaction and success in organizations, but it did not take a communicative approach. Scholars highlighted some characteristics of mentoring relationships and examined their participants, but they did not adequately examine the communication processes involved in mentoring. Bullis and Bach (1989) were among the first to do so when they conducted a turning point analysis of mentor–protégé relationships to learn how specific events that signaled significant change in such relationships (called *turning points*) were related to protégés' success and satisfaction in organizations. More specifically, Bullis and Bach examined the impact of various turning points in mentor–protégé relationships on mentees' relationships with their mentors and mentees' identification with the organization for which they worked, looking at the amount of relational change produced by each type of turning point, and whether the change was immediate.

Twenty-six MA students were interviewed about turning points in their relationships with their academic advisors, with nine types of turning points emerging (listed in order based on the

degree to which they produced immediate change): personal bonding, academic recognition, mutual confirmation, perceived similarity, relational evolution, advising, relational clashes, relational decline, and miscellaneous. The results also showed the importance of both positive and negative turning points on the evolution of mentor–mentee relationships. Importantly, intense, personal turning points (including personal bonding and academic recognition) were positively correlated with greater organizational identification sooner after they occurred, whereas advising and relational clashes were associated with long-term change in mentees' relationship with their mentors and in mentees' organizational identification. Those results called into question previous assumptions about mentor–protégé relationships positively affecting mentees' organizational identification, as that organizational identification developed at different rates and in different ways. The findings also challenged models that had suggested mentor–mentee “relationships remain work-oriented and that personal intensity is not developed” (p. 209) until later stages in the relationship. The study, however, did not examine specific communication processes involved in mentoring relationships, such as whether and how person-centered, relational communication encourage mentees' organizational identification and other positive outcomes.

Buell's (2004) study expanded on the notion that relationships between mentors and mentees can be differentiated based on interactions that transpire between them and relational qualities that are produced through their interactions. The first two phases of the study consisted of open-ended interviews conducted with mentors and focus groups conducted with both university faculty mentors and university student mentees, who discussed their experiences with mentoring and types of mentoring behaviors in which they engaged and to which they were exposed, which led Buell to develop potential models of mentoring. In the final phase,

participants (mentors and mentees) formed another focus group to reflect on their experiences using the models that Buell had created. The results indicated four models of mentor–mentee relationships in academic settings, with the first three models derived from the experiences that participants shared in the interviews and focus groups, and the fourth model emerging during the final reflection phase: the cloning, nurturing, friendship, and apprentice models.

The *cloning model* describes a relationship in which mentors encourage their mentees to duplicate the mentors' values and behaviors. Mentors who adopt this style exude arrogance, use humor to embarrass mentees, and are overly demanding of mentees. Because of the element of control in this style, generally, it was perceived to be undesirable or unattractive by the university student mentees who participated in Buell's (2004) study.

In contrast, the *nurturing model* grants more autonomy to mentees in developing as individuals, with mentors taking on more of a guardian role and allowing mentees to “learn and try things for” (Buell, 2004, p. 65) themselves, to promote their independence and creativity. This model involves personal, as well as professional, communication with mentors, fostering an environment in which mentees can develop their values and find their voice. Despite the perceived benefits, a potential drawback of this style is the possibility for mentees to become dependent on mentors, similar to the way that children can become dependent on parents.

Third, the *friendship model* is differentiated from the previous two models by its focus on reciprocity between mentors and mentees. That model lacks the hierarchical structure of the cloning and nurturing models, and, instead, privileges an interpersonal bond between mentors and mentees that is similar to a friendship. Social support, as well as professional support, is key, and mentees' ability and comfort level with expressing themselves and feeling respected are essential, although the focus is not entirely on mentees in this model but, rather, is on the

mutually beneficial relationship, which had led Kalbfeisch and Keyton (1995) to compare mentoring relationships to female friendships.

The fourth model, the *apprenticeship model*, which emerged during the final phase of the study, as respondents were given the opportunity to reflect on the findings from the first two stages of the study in another focus group, is characterized by a relationship in which the interpersonal connection between mentors and mentees is prioritized less than is the professional connection, with mentors less directly involved in the relationship, and mentees sometimes watching or shadowing mentors. Mentees viewed this model as a more preferable alternative to the cloning model, as it provides more guidance than does the cloning model, although it lacks the personal investment that characterizes the nurturing and friendship models.

The four models that emerged from Buell's (2004) study represent a historical shift in mentoring styles from top-down, hierarchical styles to more relational styles, with the cloning model, the most top-down model, viewed as being the most negative (both by faculty members, who recalled being mentored in this way when they were students, and by students who participated in the study) and the other three models being favored by both faculty and students. These models were not identified as discrete types but, instead, they represent a spectrum, such that mentor-mentee relationships can be described primarily by one of the models but still have attributes of another style or styles.

Holmes (2005) also categorized mentoring behaviors and strategies used in the workplace, examining them in the context of "the predominance of a remarkably masculine conception of what makes an effective leader" (p. 1780), and calling into question U.S. cultural knowledge regarding effective leadership communication in mentoring relationships. Holmes analyzed recordings of workplace interactions that were captured over a 2- to 3-week period in a

variety of organizational settings. The coaching strategies that emerged were described as procedural, corrective, approving, advising, and indirect coaching. *Procedural coaching* involves a “mechanistic, ‘transactional’ approach” (Holmes, p. 1786), with mentors communicating primarily about professional needs, such as tasks and deadlines. This approach, thus, has some similarity to Buell’s (2004) cloning model, as both approaches emphasize formal aspects of the job and place the focus on mentors rather than on mentees. *Indirect coaching*, as the name implies, happens when mentors encourage mentees to think independently rather than prescribe answers to them, and it coincides with Buell’s nurturing model because, although the hierarchical nature of the relationship between mentors and mentees remains, mentors’ communication indicates more of a teaching or guiding role, in contrast to procedural coaching. A third approach, *advising*, is characterized by “a very supportive and positive approach to mentoring . . . more of a negotiation, with indications that the mentor and mentee are working together on the issue of how to best advance the mentee’s career development” (Holmes, p. 790). The advising strategy is reflective of the communication that might occur between mentors and mentees in Buell’s friendship model, as mentees’ personal growth, rather than just their professional development, is of concern in the interaction, and the collaborative construction of the relationship, rather than an a priori hierarchical relationship, is promoted via that style. Finally, the *corrective* mentoring strategy is enacted when mentors address deficits, mistakes, errors, or deviations from norms to communicate to mentees how to improve; the *approving* mentoring style involves providing positive feedback to mentees, and is associated with mentees’ satisfaction with the mentoring relationship. Overall, Holmes found that less direct, more mentee-centered strategies were regarded as more effective and satisfactory by mentees than were procedural strategies. Holmes compared the identified strategies to research

conducted about gender and communication, because traditionally “feminine” discursive strategies (characterized by indirect, negotiative, and appreciative talk) were more desired by mentees than were “masculine” strategies (directness, contestation, and challenge).

### **Research Question**

As the review of the literature shows, parallels can be drawn between management communication styles and mentoring styles, especially the progression over time to privileging a more relational, person-centered, collaborative view rather than a task-oriented one. To a certain extent, mentors' communication styles preferred by protégés align with the managerial communication styles that are viewed as being more effective or that are preferred by organizational employees. On one end of the spectrum, more authoritarian styles, such as the *tells* approach on the MCS instrument, share similarities with the procedural coaching strategy (Holmes, 2005) and the cloning model (Buell, 2004), in that the communication characterizing those styles is task-centered and hierarchical. The *sells* approach on the MCS instrument is similar to the corrective and approving coaching strategies (Holmes, 2005), and to the apprenticeship model (Buell, 2004), because they are slightly less authoritarian but they still lack the reciprocity that characterizes other styles. Moving toward more collaborative styles, the *consults* approach on the MCS instrument aligns with the advising coaching strategy (Holmes, 2005) and with the friendship mentoring model (Buell, 2004), in that communicative behaviors displayed in those styles are more negotiative and person-centered. On the other extreme end of the spectrum, collaborative managerial communication styles, such as the *joins* approach on the MCS instrument, are similar to the nurturing model (Buell, 2004) and to the indirect coaching strategy (Holmes, 2005), because they are person-centered and collaborative.

Given the similarities between managerial communicative behaviors and mentoring behaviors that have a propensity for positive outcomes, including employees' and protégés' satisfaction, it is plausible that the same relationships apply to interns, which, although they represent a unique population in organizations, demonstrate some similarities with both employees and protégés. The similarities between the managerial communication styles and the mentoring styles explored here are shown in Table 1.

To investigate how particular supervisors' communication styles are related to important outcomes for interns—namely, their satisfaction and learning—the following research question was posed:

RQ: Is there a difference between exposure to authoritarian and collaborative supervisor communication styles with regard to interns' satisfaction and learning?

Table 1

*Spectrum of Managerial/Supervisor Communication Styles*

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**Authoritarian Manager/Supervisor**

Authoritarian managerial communication style

“Tells” (MCS)

Cloning model (Buell, 2004): demanding and encourages duplication of values and behaviors; perceived undesirably by mentees

Procedural coaching strategy (Holmes, 2005): mechanistic, transactional approach; communication about professional needs; less preferred by mentees

Assertiveness (Wheless &amp; Reichel, 1990)

Transactional

Boss or task centered

Typically male styles (Claes, 1999): autocratic, strategic planning, business oriented

**Authoritarian–Collaborative Manager/Supervisor**

“Sells” (MCS)

Apprenticeship model (Buell, 2004): interpersonal connection is present but prioritized below professional connection; less involvement by mentors; mentees shadow or watch

Corrective strategy (Holmes, 2005): addresses deficits, mistakes, and errors; tells mentees how to improve

Approving strategy (Holmes, 2005): positive feedback; associated with mentees' satisfaction

**Collaborative–Authoritative Manager/Supervisor**

“Consults” (MCS)

Friendship model (Buell, 2004): reciprocal and no hierarchical structure; interpersonal bonds; social and professional support provided

Advising strategy (Holmes, 2005): supportive and positive; negotiative; less hierarchical and more working together

**Collaborative Manager/Supervisor**

Collaborative managerial communication style

“Joins” (MCS)

Nurturing model (Buell, 2004): mentees granted more autonomy and encouraged to develop unique values; fosters creativity and independence; personal and professional communication; perceived positively by mentees

Indirect coaching strategy (Holmes, 2005): encourages mentees to think independently; mentors assume teaching, guiding roles; more preferred by mentees

Versatility and responsiveness (Wheless &amp; Reichel, 1990)

Solution oriented and nonconfrontational (Wheless &amp; Reichel, 1990)

Transformational

Subordinate or person centered

Typically female styles (Claes): Relationship building, teamwork, collaboration, and creative management environment

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## CHAPTER 3

### METHODS

This chapter explains the methods used in the present study. The people who participated in the study first are described, followed by an explanation of the procedures used to collect the data.

#### **Research Participants**

Research participants were nonrandomly selected using a purposive method, with respondents needing to have participated in a college/university-sponsored internship program prior to January 2013. After obtaining approval from the Institutional Review Board at the University of Colorado (see Appendix B), the sample was obtained from internship programs in several academic departments at the University of Colorado Boulder. I first contacted via e-mail internship coordinators in a number of academic departments, telling them about the project and asking for their assistance in contacting students who had completed internships. Internship coordinators who elected to participate sent an e-mail to their roster of students who had completed an internship, which contained a web link to the questionnaire. This procedure resulted in obtaining 45 participants. To increase the sample size, other participants were recruited using a network sampling procedure, by contacting people I knew who had completed an internship and requesting their participation; this resulted in 63 total participants. Each participant signed an informed consent form electronically before completing the online questionnaire.

#### **Procedures**

To measure the independent variable of authoritarian and collaborative managerial communication styles employed by interns' supervisors and the dependent variables of interns'

satisfaction and learning, research participants completed a questionnaire that assessed these variables. The questionnaire was created using KwikSurveys, an online survey-building website. Because this tool did not allow for open-ended responses, participants were limited to the choices made available in the drop-down menus or check boxes for each question.

The first five items on the questionnaire asked for some demographic information, with the first two items asking about participants' age and the age of their immediate supervisor at the internship site. Participants' ages ranged from 18 to 40 years old, with an average age of 21 years (31.71% of participants); supervisors' age (measured in ranges because they were approximations) ranged from 20–24 years old to 55–59 years old, with an average age of 30–34 years old (selected by 25% of participants). The third item asked about participants' academic major and included, in descending order, communication (36.23%), business (18.84%), journalism (11.59%), environmental studies (7.25%), political science (4.35%), economics (1.45%), and sociology (1.45%); a category of "other" (18.84%) included architecture, biology, criminal justice, fashion merchandising, international affairs, and political science, among others. The fourth item asked about the internship site (whether it was a for-profit organization, 55.07%; nonprofit organization, 18.84%; governmental organization, 13.04%; academic institution, 7.25%; or something else, 5.8%) and the fifth item asked which semester participants were involved in the internship program (Fall, Spring, or Summer academic terms), dating back to 2008; that date was selected to ensure that participants could recall enough of their internship experience to accurately report on it in the questionnaire, with participants' internship experience ranging from Fall 2009 to Fall 2012.

The next six items on the questionnaire assessed the dependent variables of participants' satisfaction with the internship experience and the extent to which the internship was valuable to

their learning. Because the items assessing the dependent variables constitute psychological perceptions of affect (satisfaction) and learning, whereas the items assessing the independent variable constitute perceptions of supervisors' behaviors, the dependent variables were asked about first on the questionnaire, in the belief that there would be less chance of participants' answers on the dependent variables influencing their answers on the independent variable, in contrast to asking about the independent variable first on the questionnaire. Hence, the seventh item of the questionnaire asked participants to rate their overall satisfaction with the internship experience, using a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = *Extremely Dissatisfied*, 2 = *Very Dissatisfied*, 3 = *Dissatisfied*, 4 = *Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied*, 5 = *Satisfied*, 6 = *Very Satisfied*, 7 = *Extremely Satisfied*), with higher scores reflecting more satisfaction; the 12th item asked participants to use the same scale to rate their satisfaction with their communication with their supervisor overall. Items 8 through 11 asked participants to rate the extent to which they experienced important aspects of learning at the internship site, using a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = *Virtually None At All*, 2 = *A Little*, 3 = *Some*, 4 = *Much*, 5 = *A Lot*), with higher scores reflecting more of the type of learning being assessed. Specifically, participants rated the extent to which the internship (a) prepared them for a career in a desired field, (b) engaged them in meaningful tasks from which they learned much, (c) provided them with valuable real-world experience, and (d) taught them important job-related skills. These four items were derived from Fonner's (2009) criteria for, and from Gupta et al.'s (2010) work on, internship program effectiveness.

The remaining 22 items on the questionnaire asked participants to rate specific behaviors in which their supervisor engaged, using a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = *Virtually None At All*, 2 = *A Little*, 3 = *Some*, 4 = *Much*, 5 = *A Lot*), with higher scores reflecting more of the behavior.

The behaviors that were assessed corresponded to the authoritarian and collaborative styles that had been discovered in the research reviewed in Chapter 2 (i.e., Buell, 2004; Claes, 1999; Holmes, 2005; Richmond & McCroskey, 1982; Wheelless & Reichel, 1990). For instance, the collaborative style was assessed by asking about the degree to which interns' supervisors "disclosed thoughts and feelings about non-work-related matters to you," and "allowed you to use your judgment and take initiative"; the authoritarian style was assessed by asking the degree to which supervisors "encouraged you to duplicate him or her," or "developed a plan of action for you or told you what you were supposed to do." There were equal numbers of items (11) representing authoritarian and collaborative styles.

## CHAPTER 4

## RESULTS

This chapter discusses the findings for the data collected from research participants. The chapter first explains factor analyses that were conducted on the items that comprised the independent and dependent variables, followed by results for the entire sample, followed by results for the subsample of authoritarian and collaborative supervisors.

**Factor Analyses of Independent and Dependent Variables**

The first analysis of the data examined the items comprising the independent variable of authoritarian and collaborative supervisor communication styles. Specifically, items comprising those styles (items 13 through 34 on the questionnaire; 11 items for each style) were subjected to an exploratory factor analysis. The factor analysis resulted in seven items (all original items that were thought to characterize an authoritarian supervisor communication style) that loaded positively (.40 or greater) on a factor (labeled "Authoritarian Supervisor Communication Style") and, simultaneously, loaded less positively or negatively on a second factor (labeled "Collaborative Supervisor Communication Style"), as well as 11 items (10 original items that were thought to characterize a collaborative supervisor communication style and an item that initially was thought to characterize an authoritarian supervisor communication style) that loaded positively (.40 or greater) on the collaborative supervisor communication style factor and, simultaneously, loaded less positively or negatively on the authoritarian supervisor communication style factor (see Table 2). Scores on the salient seven items were summed to produce a total authoritarian supervisor communication style score, with higher scores reflecting a more authoritarian style; scores on the salient 11 items were summed to produce a total

collaborative supervisor communication style score, with higher scores reflecting a more collaborative style.

Table 2

*Factor Loadings for Independent Variable*

Variable	Factor1	Factor2	Factor3	Factor4	Factor5	Factor6	Uniqueness
Encouraged to duplicate	0.5190	0.5772	0.0169	0.0678	-0.2772	-0.0730	0.3104
Avoided talking about emotions	-0.1098	0.4017	0.3454	0.0930	0.0300	-0.0140	0.6975
Plan of action/told what to do	0.2216	0.4632	-0.2108	-0.1173	0.1711	-0.2746	0.5735
Model for behavior	0.6369	0.0873	-0.2070	-0.1910	0.0791	-0.0803	0.4946
Flexibility in decision-making	0.4401	-0.3372	0.1655	0.4132	0.2861	0.1589	0.3874
Encouraged you to develop own values	0.6013	-0.1602	0.3381	0.1688	0.2816	0.2041	0.3490
Genuinely wanted to get to know you	0.7872	-0.1566	-0.3147	0.1112	-0.1664	0.0056	0.2167
Disclosed about non-work matters	0.3727	0.0614	-0.1859	0.4781	-0.2240	0.1478	0.5222
Encouraged high-quality work	0.6952	0.0163	-0.1961	0.0095	0.4181	-0.0942	0.2942
Encouraged uniform procedures	0.3299	0.3952	-0.2336	-0.0783	0.0771	0.1622	0.6420

Allowed to use judgment/ take initiative	0.6119	-0.3929	0.3963	-0.2778	-0.1466	0.1210	0.2009
Let you do work the way you thought best	0.4757	-0.3648	0.4236	-0.1530	-0.1605	0.0486	0.4096
Persuaded that ideas are to your advantage	-0.1932	0.6859	0.2035	0.2505	0.0665	0.0790	0.3774
Discussed task/formal job aspects	-0.1859	0.5787	0.5872	-0.0827	0.0975	-0.0872	0.2617
Focused on errors and how to improve in feedback	0.4158	0.4839	0.1472	0.0060	-0.0338	0.0169	0.5698
Approving comments about behavior	0.6318	-0.2201	-0.0502	0.2296	0.1100	-0.2046	0.4432
Encouraged to develop your skills	0.7891	-0.1017	0.1226	-0.0341	0.1669	-0.1832	0.2894
Challenged you to think of original solutions	0.6767	-0.0236	0.3335	-0.2109	-0.1192	-0.1154	0.3584
Offered social and professional support	0.7399	0.0959	-0.1637	-0.0288	-0.3725	0.0316	0.2760
Quick to challenge	0.1999	0.4543	0.1710	0.3700	-0.1826	-0.1231	0.5377
Got to the point quickly	0.3468	0.4132	-0.1358	-0.3132	0.0693	0.2637	0.5181

Focused on deadlines and procedures	0.2950	0.5853	-0.1745	-0.1808	0.1402	0.2193	0.4394
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A paired *t*-test revealed that the collaborative supervisor communication style mean score ( $M = 4.03$ ;  $SD = .63$ ) was significantly higher than was the authoritarian supervisor communication style score ( $M = 3.02$ ,  $SD = .62$ ),  $t(62) = 9.63$ ,  $p < .001$ . Mean scores (obtained by dividing the total score by the number of items for each style), subsequently, were employed to make the scores on these two supervisor communication styles equivalent.

The second analysis of the data examined items comprising the dependent variables of interns' satisfaction and learning. Specifically, items comprising those dependent variables (items 7 through 12 on the questionnaire) were subjected to an exploratory factor analysis. The factor analysis resulted in a single factor (labeled "Positive Internship Experience") that included all six items, with all items loading .61 or more on that factor and loading less than .2 or negatively on two other factors identified by the factor analysis procedure (see Table 3). Scores on those six items were summed to produce a total positive internship experience score, with higher scores reflecting a more positive internship experience. In one case, a respondent had left one of those items blank; the respondent's scores on the other five items were averaged and the closest whole number was used to represent the missing score.

**Results for Entire Sample**

To assess the relationship between supervisors' use of authoritarian and collaborative communication styles and the dependent variable of positive internship experience, a Pearson Product Moment correlation procedure was used. That procedure revealed a marginally significant trend for the relationship between the amount of authoritarian supervisor communication style and positive internship experience,  $r(61) = .24$ ,  $r^2 = .06$ ,  $p = .06$ , and a

significant, moderate, positive correlation between the amount of collaborative supervisor communication style and positive internship experience,  $r(61) = .66, r^2 = .44, p < .001$ . There were, however, no significant relationships between the amount of authoritarian or the amount of collaborative supervisor communication style and supervisors' age.

Table 3

*Factor Loadings for Dependent Variables*

Variable	Factor1	Factor2	Factor3	Uniqueness
Internship Satisfaction	0.8761	0.1207	-0.069	0.2179
Internship Preparation	0.8700	0.0182	-0.0840	0.2357
Internship Meaningful Tasks	0.9176	-0.0580	0.0045	0.1546
Internship Real Experience	0.8672	-0.1589	0.0404	0.2211
Internship job Skills	0.8780	-0.0482	0.0096	0.2267
Supervisor Comm. Satisfaction	0.6079	0.1838	0.0518	0.5940

To further explore the relationship of supervisors' use of authoritarian and collaborative communication styles with the dependent variable, Pearson Product Moment correlations were computed between each communication style and each of the items comprising the positive internship experience score. The results revealed two significant correlations between the authoritarian supervisor communication style and (a) internship meaningful tasks,  $r(61) = .37, r^2 = .14, p < .005$ ; and (b) internship job skills,  $r(61) = .31, r^2 = .10, p < .01$ . There also were a marginally significant trend found between the authoritarian supervisor communication style and (a) internship preparation,  $r(61) = .22, r^2 = .04, p = .08$ ; and (b) internship satisfaction,  $r(61) = .22,$

$r^2 = .04, p = .08$ . Two relationships, between the authoritarian supervisor communication style and (a) internship real-world experience and (b) supervisor communication satisfaction, were not statistically significant.

The results for the collaborative supervisor communication style revealed significant relationships with all of the items comprising the dependent variable. Specifically, that style was significantly related to, in descending order of strength: (a) supervisor communication satisfaction,  $r(61) = .70, r^2 = .49, p < .001$ ; (b) internship real-world experience,  $r(61) = .58, r^2 = .34, p < .001$ ; (c) internship preparation,  $r(61) = .54, r^2 = .29, p < .001$ ; (d) internship job skills,  $r(61) = .54, r^2 = .29, p < .001$ ; (e) internship meaningful tasks,  $r(61) = .53, r^2 = .28, p < .001$ ; and (f) internship satisfaction,  $r(61) = .50, r^2 = .25, p < .001$ .

### **Results for Authoritarian and Collaborative Supervisors**

To further explore the effects of authoritarian and collaborative supervisor communication style on the dependent variable (and its items), the sample was divided into authoritarian ( $n = 8$ ) and collaborative ( $n = 55$ ) supervisors on the basis of which communication style score was highest, and  $t$ -tests were used to compare the two types of supervisors on the dependent variable (and on the items comprising it). A  $t$ -test demonstrated that the collaborative supervisor communication style ( $M = 4.32, SD = .87$ ) was significantly higher than the authoritarian supervisor communication style ( $M = 3.56, SD = 1.31$ ) with respect to positive internship experience,  $t(62) = 2.25, p < .05$ . That significant difference was due to significant differences for three of the items comprising the dependent variable, with the collaborative supervisor communication style being significantly higher than the authoritarian supervisor communication style with respect to: (a) internship real-world experience,  $t(62) = 2.29, p < .05$  (Collaborative:  $M = 4.34, SD = .90$ ; Authoritarian:  $M = 3.50, SD = 1.41$ ); (b) internship

meaningful tasks,  $t(62) = 2.06, p < .05$  (Collaborative:  $M = 4.09, SD = 1.00$ ; Authoritarian:  $M = 3.25, SD = 1.58$ ); and (c) supervisor communication satisfaction,  $t(62) = 1.99, p = .05$  (Collaborative:  $M = 4.93, SD = .74$ ; Authoritarian:  $M = 3.75, SD = 1.13$ ). There also was a marginally significant difference between the two supervisor communication styles for (a) internship job skills,  $t(62) = 1.91, p = .06$  (Collaborative:  $M = 4.18, SD = .90$ ; Authoritarian:  $M = 3.50, SD = 1.20$ ); and (b) internship preparation,  $t(62) = 1.78, p = .08$  (Collaborative:  $M = 4.15, SD = .91$ ; Authoritarian:  $M = 3.50, SD = 1.31$ ). There was no significant difference between the collaborative ( $M = 4.25, SD = .76$ ) and authoritarian ( $M = 3.84, SD = 1.21$ ) communication styles for internship satisfaction. Finally, there was no significant difference between authoritarian and collaborative leaders with respect to supervisors' age.

## Chapter 5

## DISCUSSION

This study was undertaken to deepen scholars' understanding of the effects of authoritarian and collaborative managerial communication styles on interns' satisfaction and learning. This chapter reviews the major findings obtained from this study and their conceptual and pragmatic implications for understanding the effects of managerial communication styles on interns, followed by a discussion of potential limitations that characterized this study and suggested directions for future research on this topic.

**Findings and Implications**

As the results of this study demonstrated, interns who participated in this research, generally, had a very positive internship experience, as assessed by scores on the dependent variable ( $M = 4.43$  on a 5-point scale) and on the items that comprised it. Hence, this study adds to the literature on the benefits that have been identified for internship programs. For instance, studies conducted by D'abate et al. (2009), Fonner (2009), and Gupta et al. (2010) found similar results regarding interns' satisfaction, which they attributed to a variety of factors associated with the internship (e.g., increased perceived work experience and workplace knowledge, and opportunities to learn and for career development) and factors associated with the intern-supervisor relationship (e.g., supervisor support). Moreover, McDonough et al. (2009) found that interns and their supervisors, largely, have congruent perceptions of the internship experience, and that those perceptions become more congruent as the internship progresses. McDonough et al., for instance, found, when measured midway through the duration of the internship, that there were significant discrepancies between supervisors' and interns' perceptions of "areas of general abilities in the workplace job-related skills, interpersonal skills,

and professional conduct” (p. 146), but that by the end of the internship, perceptions of interns’ general abilities in the workplace and job-related skills no longer were significantly different, indicating that interns achieved learning-related objectives and that supervisors acknowledged interns’ progress. Hence, internships appear to be very successful in terms of accomplishing interns’ and supervisors’ goals.

With regard to the independent variable of managerial communication style, as the results showed, the collaborative communication style was the dominant style employed by supervisors/managers, at least as perceived by interns who participated in this research. Although there were eight supervisors who were perceived by interns to exhibit more authoritarian than collaborative communication characteristics, the vast majority of the supervisors (55) were perceived to exhibit far more collaborative than authoritarian communication characteristics; moreover, there was a significant difference across the entire sample, such that supervisors were perceived to engage in more collaborative communication behaviors ( $M = 4.03$ ) than authoritarian communication behaviors ( $M = 3.02$ ).

The dominance of the collaborative managerial communication style may be a reflection of the contemporary state of organizations. As Claes (1999) observed:

At the end of the twentieth century, the workplace is radically different. Flexibility and innovation characterize global economic conditions and fast-changing technology . . . away from traditional (aggressive, competitive, individualistic) interactional norms and toward a new management style stressing flexibility, teamwork, and collaborative problem-solving. . . . Top-down authoritarianism has yielded to a networking style, in which everyone is a resource. (pp. 439, 441)

The relatively high amount of supervisors' collaborative communication style, as perceived by interns, and the overall positive internship experience found for interns in the present study might suggest that supervisors should employ that style and not employ an authoritarian communication style. However, despite the favorable findings for the collaborative communication style of leadership, in line with literature that indicates that the collaborative style is not the most successful approach in all situations (Ansell & Gash, 2012), the findings from this study did show that supervisors' authoritarian communication style demonstrated a marginally significant positive relationship with positive internship experience, and that relationship was statistically significant for two of the items comprising that dependent variable (engaging in meaningful tasks during the internship and the internship increasing providing interns with job skills), and that it was marginally significant for two other variables (internship satisfaction and preparation provided by the internship). One reason why the authoritarian communication style might have been effective is because this type of supervisor/manager/leader is more likely to give more detailed instruction, more direction, and more explanation than does a collaborative leader, behaviors that, potentially, could make tasks more meaningful to interns, for instance. These results, thus, showed that both managerial communication styles were important for creating a positive internship experience for interns, suggesting that a balance of the two styles is needed (see Yukl, 1989); indeed, according to the results of this study, the appropriate balance for supervisors, in general, is approximately two-thirds collaborative communication style and one-third authoritarian communication style.

The results of this study, thus, may suggest that after alternating from one managerial communication style (authoritarian) to the other (collaborative), supervisors (and organizations), today, adopt a more integrated approach that synthesizes the strengths of both styles. That type

of pendulum swing from one style to its opposite and, eventually, back to the middle is reflected, for instance, in the field of education, where Cuban (2008) described the evolution of curriculum theory and pedagogical practices as one that started with a conservative tradition that represented a “teacher-centered” approach, shifted to a progressive pedagogy that reflected a “student-centered” approach, and now has moved to a “middle ground” that integrates positive elements of each approach. Hence, contemporary organizations may be experiencing that same type of evolution with regard to the communicative styles and practices of managers/supervisors.

The use of an appropriate balance that integrates managers' authoritarian and collaborative communication styles is in line with Hersey and Blanchard's (1977) situational leadership theory (SLT), which highlights the importance of circumstantial factors in terms of the effectiveness of managerial communication in accomplishing organizational goals. As Yukl (1989) explained, “The situational approach emphasizes the importance of contextual factors such as the leader's authority and discretion, the nature of the work performed by the leader's unit, the attributes of subordinates, and the nature of the external environment” (p. 261). More specifically, one vein of this research positions managerial communicative behavior as the independent variable and examines ways in which situational factors influence it. The other vein, which is most applicable to the present study, seeks to discover how situational factors influence the effects of managers' behaviors and, specifically, their effectiveness (Yukl).

SLT, primarily, has been employed most in the field of public relations (see, e.g., Aldoory & Toth, 2004; Meng, Berger, & Gower, 2009; Shin, Heath, & Lee, 2011). Aldoory and Toth (2004), for instance, found that, in general, public relations employees prefer transformational leaders (who align with the collaborative style) more than transactional leaders (who align with the authoritarian style), but that “effective leaders change their style to fit the

situation and therefore may sometimes choose an autocratic style and sometimes a participatory style, depending on the circumstances and the environment” (p. 160). Meng et al. (2009) came to a similar conclusion in their research regarding ideal leadership styles in public relations, and Shin et al. (2011) employed a similar concept to explain differences in managerial communication style of public relations practitioners in the United States and in Korea. As shown in these studies, the situational approach takes into account factors that influence supervisors' communicative behaviors and the effectiveness of those behaviors. These results suggest that neither an authoritarian nor a collaborative style is “best” overall but, instead, that the most effective approach involves integrating aspects or behaviors that are characteristic of each style to account for the circumstances and, thereby, adapt communicative behavior to the situation and which invariably increases the effectiveness of the behavior.

When applied to supervisors of interns, in particular, SLT would maintain that situational factors, such as the role expectations of interns and their supervisors, types of projects that interns are assigned (e.g., whether projects are of high or low pressure, or are of a short or long term), and the type of assistance that is needed from supervisors (e.g., more vs. less), would influence the effectiveness of supervisors' communicative behaviors with interns. For instance, supervisors likely encounter situations in which interns have little or no experience with the tasks at hand; consequently, making salient job-related skills to be learned from these tasks would be important for increasing interns' positive internship experience (including their satisfaction and learning). To accomplish this goal, effective supervisors would adopt a more authoritarian communication style in that situation. However, in another situation, such as one in which interns have some experience with those tasks, or have previously completed them successfully, supervisors of interns would adopt a more collaborative style, because less emphasis on a task

orientation is necessary. Hence, “effective” supervisors adapt their communication style to best fit the needs of the situation.

Perhaps, ultimately, what the findings from this study suggest is that there needs to be new ways of talking about managerial communication styles and behaviors that take into account complex situational factors that affect those styles and behaviors. The perception of polarized authoritarian and collaborative communication styles, and emphasizing one over the other, may need to be replaced with a view of managerial communication that recognizes that particular behaviors are needed under particular circumstances, such that supervisors must be able to engage in behaviors associated both with an authoritarian managerial communication style (e.g., task oriented and directive) and with a collaborative managerial communication style (e.g., relationship oriented and relatively nondirective). Thus, what is needed is an “integrative” view of managerial communication that demands a new form of communication competence on the part of managers and supervisors.

The findings of the present study, thus, aid scholars' understanding of the nature and effects of contemporary managerial communication on employees—in this case, interns. The findings also illuminate important information about internship programs for the three primary stakeholders that are involved: individuals in organizations who supervise interns, universities that sponsor internship programs, and interns themselves. First, this research potentially helps supervisors of interns to find more effective ways of communicating with them. Despite the current popularity of the collaborative managerial communication style, and benefits that it has for organizations and individuals within them, it is not the optimal approach across all contexts, and this approach draws attention to situations when other styles may be more important to employ. As evidenced by the results of this study and the literature, variables such as

employees' self-efficacy and environmental factors influence communicative behaviors that are most effective in workplace situations. Hence, this study highlights the need for supervisors to take into account interns' needs and situational factors that are unique to them when interacting with them. By considering these types of variables when communicating with interns, supervisors will be more likely to foster the learning and satisfaction that is desired by both employees and interns.

Additionally, with regard to universities' interests, importantly, the academic component of internship programs, largely, is kept separate from the rest of the experience. For instance, it is typical for student interns to write papers for academic credit that are unrelated to tasks that they are performing at internship sites. This study suggests that integrating that work across the two sites of the universities/colleges and the organizations where internships take place (analogous to supervisors integrating authoritarian and collaborative communication), potentially, would best promote outcomes that are being sought by those who supervise interns, both university/college professors and interns' organizational supervisors. Successful integration of authoritarian and collaborative leadership styles, and similarly, consideration of interns' needs (academic and professional) could make the desired outcomes of increased learning and satisfaction more attainable as each initiative is aimed at accounting for situational factors that are unique to interns. A more integrated view of internship effectiveness that incorporates both the academic and organizational components, thus, could be beneficial for all three parties involved.

Third, the results of this study may benefit interns in terms of a greater understanding of the role of communication in cultivating important satisfaction and learning-related outcomes at stake in their internship experience. The findings also, potentially, will help interns to better

navigate the organizational world, armed with knowledge about managerial communication styles that they might encounter and benefits and drawbacks of those styles.

### **Limitations**

Although this study resulted in some important findings, those findings need to be understood in light of some potential limitations that may have characterized the study. One important limitation concerns the sample that was studied. The small sample size, for instance, resulted, as explained previously, in the vast majority of supervisors being perceived by interns as using a collaborative communication style, making it difficult to contrast authoritarian and collaborative managers, although that finding might be reflective of supervisors in today's organizations. The homogeneity of the sample, however, made it difficult to identify authoritarian supervisors, such as those described in the literature, making the comparisons between them and collaborative supervisors potentially result in less statistically significant findings compared to a sample that contained more authoritarian supervisors.

More important, although the results of this study suggest a new, integrative form of managerial communication, that finding may well just reflect interns' unique position in the workplace. Possessing less self-efficacy and autonomy, and having an increased need for instruction, direction, and guidance, interns, potentially, are very different from other organizational employees. Supervisors, for instance, perceive that interns' performance—specifically, their interpersonal skills and professional conduct, according to McDonough et al. (2009)—could be improved, which suggests that interns have some communication needs that other employees may not (see also Knouse & Fontenot, 2008; Narayanan et al., 2010; Rothman, 2007). In their model for successful internship programs, Narayanan et al. (2010) recommended that companies account for interns' unique needs by spending time “developing a project with a

focused scope, one that provides the student with an opportunity to learn specific knowledge” (p. 75), to make the internship experience more effective and satisfying for them. Focusing on the task and providing adequately detailed instruction and guidance is essential for interns in a way that may not be the case for other employees. Hence, supervisors may well use a more directive style with interns than they might with other populations in the workforce; consequently, it is unclear whether the results from this study about the valuable role that both authoritarian and collaborative communication style may play is generalizable to other organizational employees.

The procedures employed in this study also demonstrate some important potential limitations. In particular, the lack of participants being able to provide free responses prevented some demographic information (e.g., participants' majors and descriptions of internship sites that were not available in the selections provided, leading a substantial portion of participants to select the “Other” option) from being obtained and it prevented participants from offering written explanations that went deeper into their supervisors' communicative behaviors and into their positive internship experiences. Although in-depth probing of respondents' answers, undoubtedly, is better assessed through qualitative methods, such as interviews conducted with interns and supervisors, free-response writing by participants could have illuminated important information regarding when, specifically, supervisors' authoritarian and collaborative communication styles were effective with interns. A questionnaire that applies SLT by asking open-ended questions about particular situations facing interns and their supervisors, in which leaders adopted particular managerial communication styles and particular outcomes were achieved, would provide greater understanding of the moderating role that situation plays on the correlation between particular communicative behaviors and the effectiveness of those behaviors. Similarly, the questionnaire did not assess particular situations in the internship

experience; consequently, a questionnaire that asked about situations that interns encountered with their supervisors and communicative behaviors/styles that occurred in those situations could have been helpful as well.

Another limitation with the procedures employed is that only interns completed the questionnaire (about their supervisors and their internship experiences); consequently, the data assessed interns' perceptions of supervisors' communicative behavior rather than supervisors' perceptions of their communicative behavior. Of course, interns' perceptions may not provide the most accurate account of supervisors' communicative behaviors. Because the supervisor–intern relationship is central to the internship experience, assessing the perceptions of both parties, as well as the congruence between them, is important.

Not assessing interns' and supervisors' gender, and the combinations formed in supervisor–intern relationships, also could be a limitation in light of some studies that indicate interaction effects for gender, communication style, and particular outcomes (see, e.g., Smayling & Miller, 2012). However, other studies on managerial communication styles (see, e.g., Birdsall, 1980; Korabik, Baril, & Watson, 1993) have found that gender has little or no influence on organizational and individual outcomes.

Finally, interns' learning of how academic concepts applied in the internship setting was not assessed. Learning is an important potential outcome of an internship experience, and, partially it is derived from the academic component of it (applying classroom knowledge to tasks at the internship site or putting learned theory into practice), although the learning that takes place at the internship site (for instance, receiving technical training or learning job-related skills) seems to be prioritized. The application of theoretical, classroom knowledge to the internship context is vitally important to the experience, but the academic component was not

integrated into this study, which is reflective of the way that internship programs currently are commonly conceived (i.e., with academic work completed for the supervising professor/teacher). As indicated by the lack of questions about academic learning on the questionnaire, there does not seem to be much cohesion between the two primary aspects of learning in internships, as the academic work is separated from the learning achieved at the internship site.

### **Future Research**

The present study takes a broad, global view of managerial communication styles and their effects on interns as a specific population in the workforce. An important next step, as explained previously, would be to examine particular situations/conditions under which managerial communication styles are most effective for accomplishing the outcomes studied.

To accomplish that goal, this quantitative study would be complemented by a qualitative study that examined situations in the workplace that interns and their supervisors encounter, that went into greater depth regarding some of the practices employed and outcomes achieved in the internship experience. In light of research about the appropriateness of collaborative leadership styles in various situations, such a study would address questions about when collaborative and authoritarian managerial communication styles are necessary. For instance, asking questions about which managerial communication styles supervisors employed during times of crisis, when tasks have deadlines, during conflict, or under other high-pressure circumstances, and assessing their effectiveness and interns' satisfaction might provide insightful information about situations in which more authoritarian styles prevail with regard to favorable outcomes. Additionally, invariably, interns differ in terms of how much structure they desire and other factors that potentially influence their perceptions of and preferences for authoritarian and collaborative leadership styles, which might be better assessed via a qualitative study. Thus, examining

situational behaviors of interns and other employees, in addition to supervisors' situational leadership behaviors, is necessary to capture a more nuanced understanding of situational behavior relative to the various positions and goals of each actor. To that end, because it is not known what particular tensions or problems are created by each leadership communication style, and various learner types with which they interact, perhaps examining significant moments in the supervisor–intern relationships (via, for instance, a turning point analysis) might produce a fuller understanding of what aspects or features of, or events in, such relationships affect interns' positive internship experience, and supervisors' positive experiences as well.

### **Conclusion**

This study extends research about the relatively new and growing population of interns in the organizational world by focusing on the effects of two types of supervisor communication styles—authoritarian and collaborative—on interns' satisfaction and learning. The results reveal the extent to which the collaborative managerial communication style has taken hold in organizations, and the powerful ways in which it is related to interns' satisfaction and learning, but the results also show that there is a need for the authoritarian managerial communication style, which may be particularly important for interns, who often need more guidance than do other organizational employees. Hence, a new type of organizational leader may well be needed, one who integrates these two communication styles, depending on the type of employees with whom they interact and situational factors facing those employees, their supervisors, and the organizations for which they both work. In the case of the new population of interns in the organizational context, undoubtedly, there is a learning curve for interns and supervisors alike, as well as for the university faculty who sponsor internships, to make sure that the internship experience is valuable for all of the parties involved.

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Appendix A  
Questionnaire

**Question: 1. CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY**

Study Title: Effects of Managerial Communication Styles on Interns' Satisfaction and Learning

Principal Investigator: Kayla Benson

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Your participation in this research study is voluntary. Please think about the information below carefully. Feel free to ask questions before making your decision whether or not to participate. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to electronically sign this form..

1. Purpose and Background

The purpose of this project is to understand how supervisory communication affects student interns. Specifically, the study investigates the effects of supervisors' management communication styles on the satisfaction and learning of interns, as affected by supervisors' and interns' demographic variables (such as age and gender). As interns become more prevalent in organizations, they have received increased attention from communication researchers, although the majority of that research has focused on internship program effectiveness. Because interactions with supervisors are critical to the internship experience, studying the communication styles that supervisors use with interns is important. Historically, organizational communication scholars have studied the effects of managerial communication styles on employee outcomes, such as employees' job satisfaction and communication satisfaction. The present study extends

this research to interns as a specific population in the organizational context. Although relationships between supervisors and interns are similar to relationships between supervisors and other organizational employees, they, perhaps, are more functionally similar to the relationship between mentors and protégés. Communication scholarship regarding mentoring has focused on communication styles of mentoring, which, in turn, led to particular outcomes for mentees, including satisfaction and learning. This project extends research about managerial communication styles and about mentor-protégé relationships to understand the role of communication in internship experiences, particularly with regard to interns' satisfaction and learning.

2. Study Tasks and Procedures

If you agree to take part in the study, you will be asked to complete a survey that contains questions about your internship experience, including demographic information and aspects of communication styles that you were exposed to.

3. Duration

The total time commitment for participants is less than ten minutes.

4. Study Withdrawal

You have the right to withdraw your consent or stop participating at any time. You also have the right to refuse to answer any survey question. Withdrawing from the study will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

5. Risks and Discomforts

There are no direct benefits to you for participating in the study except for the opportunity to share about your internship experience and the potential to improve internship programs with this information.

6. Benefits

There are no direct benefits to participants in the study except for the opportunity to discuss their internship experiences and contribute to the research about internship learning and interns' satisfaction.

7. Confidentiality These are some reasons that we may need to share the information you give us with others: (a) If it is required by law, (b) If we think you or someone else could be harmed, (c) Sponsors, government agencies or research staff sometimes look at forms like this and other study records. They do this to make sure the research is done safely and legally. Organizations that may look at study records include: (a) Office for Human Research Protections or other federal, state, or international regulatory agencies, (b) The University of Colorado Boulder Institutional Review Board, (c) The sponsor or agency supporting the study. Confidentiality will be assured to participants in the study. The PI will take care to protect the anonymity of participants during data collection and the data will be stored on the PI's password-protected computer. No names of any participant will be used in the written report. The data will be destroyed after the research project is completed and the thesis is submitted.

8. Compensation

You will not be compensated for participating in the study.

9. Participant Rights

Taking part in this study is your choice. You may choose either to take part or not take part in the study. If you decide to take part in this study, you may leave the study at any time. No matter what decision you make, there will be no penalty to you in any way. You will not lose any of your regular benefits. We will tell you if we learn any new information that could change your mind about being in this research study. For example, we will tell you about information that could affect your health or well-being.

10. Contacts and Questions

For questions, concerns, or complaints about this study, call Kayla Benson at (720) 989-4895. If you are injured as a result of participating in this study or for questions about a study-related injury, call [redacted]. If you have questions about your rights as a research study participant, you can call the Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB is independent from the research team. You can contact the IRB if you have concerns or complaints that you do not want to talk to the study team about. The IRB phone number is (303) 735-3702. By checking the box below, I am indicating that I have read (or someone has read to me) the above Consent Form. I am aware that I am being asked to be in a research study. I have had a chance to ask all the questions I have at this time. I have had my questions answered in a way that is clear. I voluntarily agree to be in this study. I am not giving up any legal rights by signing this form.

**Question 2:** Your Age:

17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40

**Question 3:** Approximate age of your immediate supervisor:

Under 20	20–24	25–29	30–34	35–39	40–44	
45–49	50–54	55–59	60–64	65–69	70–74	75+

**Question 4:** Your major:

Communication	Economics	Sociology
Women and Gender Studies	Environmental Studies	Political Science
Business	Journalism	Other

**Question 5:** Which of the following best describes your internship site?

For-profit organization	Nonprofit organization	
Government Organization	Academic institution	Other

**Question 6:** When did you participate in the internship?

Fall 2012	Summer 2012	Spring 2012	Fall 2011
Summer 2011	Spring 2011	Fall 2010	Summer 2010
Spring 2010	Fall 2009	Summer 2009	Spring 2009
Fall 2008	Summer 2008	Spring 2008	Before Spring 2008

**Question 7:** Please use the following scale to indicate how satisfied you are with the overall internship experience: 7 = Extremely Satisfied, 6 = Very Satisfied, 5 = Satisfied, 4 = Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied, 3 = Dissatisfied, 2 = Very Dissatisfied, 1 = Extremely Dissatisfied

Please use the following scale to indicate the extent to which the internship: 5 = A Lot, 4 = Much, 3 = Some, 2 = A Little, 1 = None at All

**Question 8:** Prepared you for a career in a desired field

**Question 9:** Engaged you in meaningful tasks from which you learned much

**Question 10:** Provided you with valuable real-world experience

**Question 11:** Taught you important job-related skills

**Question 12:** Please use the following scale to indicate how satisfied you are with communication with your supervisor overall: 7 = Extremely Satisfied, 6 = Very Satisfied, 5 = Satisfied, 4 = Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied, 3 = Dissatisfied, 2 = Very Dissatisfied, 1 = Extremely Dissatisfied

Please use the following scale to indicate the extent to which your immediate supervisor: 5 = A Lot, 4 = Much, 3 = Some, 2 = A Little, 1 = None at All

**Question 13:** Encouraged you to duplicate him or her:

**Question 14:** Changed the topic when his or her feelings are brought into the conversation, or avoided talking about emotions

**Question 15:** Developed a plan of action for you or told you what you were supposed to do

**Question 16:** Served as a model for behavior for you

**Question 17:** Showed flexibility in making decisions

**Question 18:** Encouraged you to develop your own values

**Question 19:** Genuinely wanted to get to know you

**Question 20:** Disclosed thoughts and feelings about non-work-related matters to you

**Question 21:** Encouraged you to do high-quality work

**Question 22:** Encouraged you to use uniform procedures

**Question 23:** Allowed you to use your judgment and take initiative

**Question 24:** Let you do your work the way that you thought was best

**Question 25:** Tried to persuade you that his or her ideas were to your advantage

**Question 26:** Discussed only tasks and formal aspects of the job with you

**Question 27:** Focused on your errors and how you could improve when giving feedback

**Question 28:** Made approving comments about your performance

**Question 29:** Encouraged you to develop your skills

**Question 30:** Challenged you to think of original solutions

**Question 31:** Offered social support, in addition to professional support, to you

**Question 32:** Was quick to challenge

**Question 33:** Got to the point quickly when speaking

**Question 34:** Focused on deadlines and procedures

## Appendix B

## Human Research Committee Approval



University of Colorado  
Boulder

Institutional Review Board  
563 UCB  
Boulder, CO 80309  
Phone: 303.735.3702  
Fax: 303.735.5185  
FWA: 00003492

25-Jan-2013

**Amendment Acknowledgement - Exempt**

Benson, Kayla

Protocol #: 12-0730

Title: The Effect of Managerial Communication Styles on Intern Satisfaction and Learning

Dear Kayla Benson,

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed the amendment described below and determined that it does not affect the exempt status of this protocol.

**Acknowledged Date:** 25-Jan-2013

**Description of Amendment:** Updated to include an electronic check-box consent mechanism for online surveys.

Click here to find the IRB reviewed documents for this protocol: [Study Documents](#)

The IRB has reviewed this amendment in accordance with federal regulations, university policies and ethical standards for the protection of human subjects. In accordance with federal regulation at 45 CFR 46.112, research that has been approved by the IRB may be subject to further appropriate review and approval or disapproval by officials of the institution. The investigator is responsible for knowing and complying with all applicable research regulations and policies including, but not limited to, Environmental Health and Safety, Scientific Advisory and Review Committee, Clinical and Translational Research Center, and Wardenburg Health Center and Pharmacy policies. Approval by the IRB does not imply approval by any other entity.

Please contact the IRB office at 303-735-3702 if you have any questions about this letter or about IRB procedures.

Douglas Grafel  
IRB Admin Review Coordinator  
Institutional Review Board