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Examining student employees' perceptions of their roles in an outbound call center

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Examining Student Employees' Perceptions of Their Roles in an Outbound Call Center

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Dedication

I dedicate my research to my parents, William King and Bonita Spriggs (a.k.a. “Man” and “Woman”), for their continuous support and encouragement. I would not have made it this far without your love (even when it’s tough love), as well as your willingness to listen and offer advice. I love you two so much, and I hope that I have made you proud.

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Abstract

A number of case studies in the research literature address the negative effects and perceptions associated with working at a call center. The present study focused on student employees who work at an outbound call center operated by and for their university. The purpose of this study was to examine the students' perceived roles as call center employees, as well as how these perceptions change over time. The researcher also examined organizational identification and self-efficacy. The sample comprised approximately 38 employees at Madison Connection, an outbound call center operated by James Madison University in Harrisonburg, Va. The researcher collected data using quantitative and qualitative methods via an online survey and interviews, which were conducted within 30 days of employment and again after 60 days. Results from the research suggest that student employees held positive perceptions of their roles, reporting low levels of role ambiguity and conflict. In addition, organizational identification and self-efficacy were found to have a positive impact on their role perceptions. Therefore, call center managers should communicate clear organizational and role expectations, pair new employees with experienced employees, allow new employees a sufficient amount of time to practice, provide constructive feedback, and model the behaviors that they expect from their employees.

Keywords: call center, telemarketing, direct marketing, student employees, role perception, role ambiguity, role conflict, organizational identification, self-efficacy, colleges and universities.

Chapter 1: Introduction

In 2008, contributors of the List Universe (a Web site of ranked lists on various topics) ranked the telemarketer as the number one worst urban job in America (Frater, 2008). According to the contributors, telemarketers tend to call people during the most inconvenient times, such as during dinner, while watching a movie, or after putting the baby to sleep. They also attributed the #1 ranking to the telemarketers' tendency to speak as if they were reading from a script. In addition, they discussed the fact that these workers are glued to headsets and have tightly monitored breaks and lunches.

While there is debate as to when telemarketing began (Hamilton & Jackson, 2004; Hillmer, Hillmer, & McRoberts, 2004; Jackson, 2010; Moss, Salzman, & Tilly, 2008; Spencer, Brigandi, Dargon, & Sheehan, 1990), the call center flourished as a way for companies to provide customer service, sell products and services, raise money, and more (Jackson, 2010). The way in which individual call centers operate can vary from the technologies used, the types of calls made, the types of clients served, and the services provided (Gorjup, Ryan, & Valverde, 2009). In essence, the employees who work in these call centers serve as "the public face" for many companies (Aksin, Armony, & Mehrotra, 2007); and in many instances, they are the first and only contact a customer has with a company (Gray, 2009).

Even colleges and universities have incorporated call centers (Wallace, 1996). These call centers are used as a means to raise funds from alumni. Charitable alumni donations are a vital source of revenue for public institutions (Bingham, Quigley, & Murray, 2002; McAlexander & Koenig, 2001; Quigley, Bingham, & Murray, 2002), especially in a time when state funding for higher education is continuously declining (Wallace, 1996; Weerts, Cabrera, & Sanford, 2010; Weerts & Ronca, 2009).

Problem Statement

A number of case studies in the research literature reveal that call center employees experience negative perceptions of their role in terms of role ambiguity and conflict (de Ruyter, Wetzels, & Feinberg, 2001; Holdsworth & Cartwright, 2003; Johnson et al., 2005; Lazo, 2008); however, no studies show whether this effect applies to student employees who work at call centers. Therefore, the present study focused on student employees who work at Madison Connection, an outbound call center operated for and by James Madison University, located in Harrisonburg, Va. The researcher assessed employees' perceived roles as telemarketers, as well as how these perceptions changed over time. Moreover, the researcher evaluated whether organizational identification and self-efficacy affected these perceptions. A conceptual framework of the problem can be found in Figure 1.

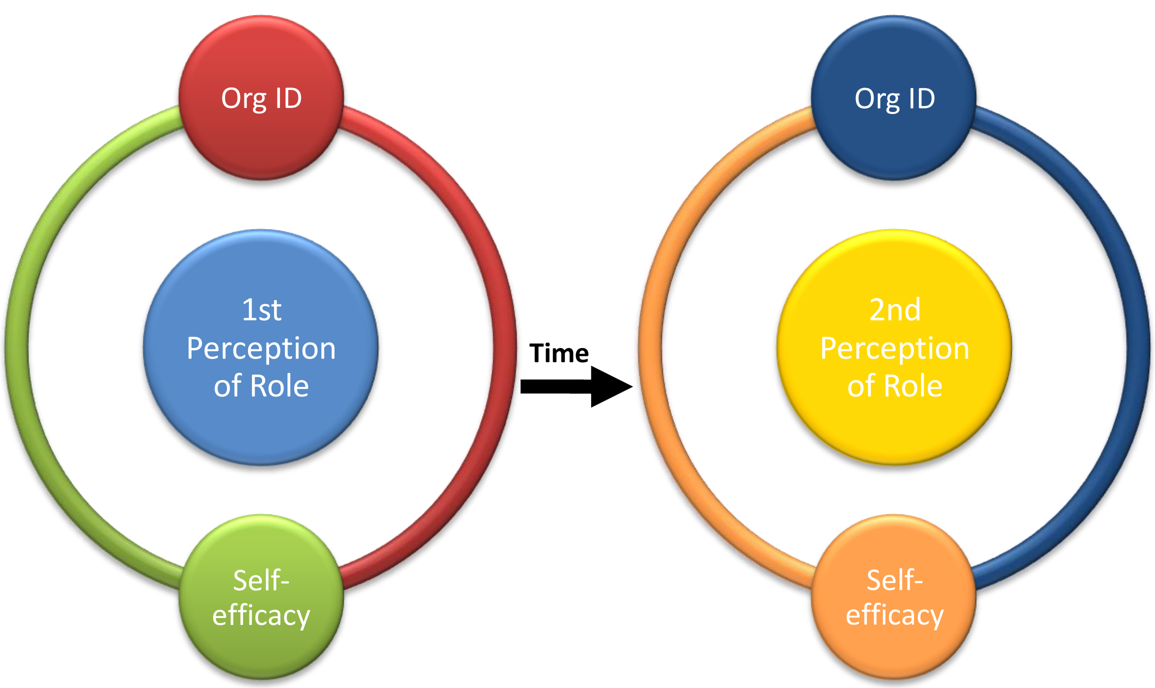

Figure 1.1. Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework illustrates how the following variables change over time: student employees' perception of their role, organizational identification, and self-efficacy. The researcher used survey research and interviews at two separate time periods to collect data and examine how these variables change over time. Employees were surveyed and interviewed during the Fall 2010 semester within 30 days of employment and after 60 days. The researcher also determined how organizational identification and self-efficacy influenced the student employees' perception of their role as outbound call center employees.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine how student employees perceived their role as call center employees, as well as how these perceptions changed over time. The researcher also considered organizational identification and self-efficacy as factors in this change. In addition, this study was initiated to provide practical guidelines for universities who rely on call center efforts to solicit alumni donations, as well as for managers who oversee the operations of outbound call centers.

The researcher's interest in the topic arose from personal experience in working in both inbound and outbound call centers during her undergraduate career. Having worked at two sites, she has firsthand experience with the joys and frustrations that employees face each workweek. Specifically in the outbound call center, she recognized that her perception of her role shifted from positive to negative within several weeks of employment. Through this study, however, she expected to discover how much of an impact organizational identification and self-efficacy have on the population of student employees.

Research Questions

The research questions for this study are as follows:

***R*$_1$**: What are the role perceptions of student employees who work as outbound call center employees, and how do these perceptions change over time?

R*$_2$:* What is the relationship, positive or negative, between role perception and organizational identification?

***R*$_3$**: What is the relationship, positive or negative, between role perception and self-efficacy?

Hypotheses

Overall, the hypotheses for this research study are as follows:

***H*$_1$**: Initially, the student employees will have a positive perception of their roles. Over time, the new employees will have a less positive perception than their experienced counterparts.

H*$_2$:* Role perception and organizational identification have a positive relationship.

***H*$_3$**: Role perception and self-efficacy have a positive relationship.

First, the researcher hypothesized that during the initial assessment, the student employees will have relatively positive perceptions of their roles (i.e., no role ambiguity or conflict) (***H*$_1$**). However, the role perceptions of the new employees will be slightly lower than the experienced student employees who previously worked at the call center. The rationale behind this premise is that the newer student employees may not readily understand the role, whereas the experienced student employees will have understood their role, thus exhibiting a more positive perception. Although the newer student employees may not understand their role, they will still have a positive perception because they will have gone through a brief initial honeymoon period, which is characterized by high levels of enthusiasm and commitment to the organization (Chang & Choi, 2007). Over time, however, the researcher argued that the role perceptions of the new employees will decrease, because they will have transitioned from the honeymoon phase, encountering situations in which they faced role ambiguity or conflict. Moreover, the researcher hypothesized that the perceptions of the experienced student employees will remain positive, because they have become accustomed to the work atmosphere within the call center, and they may not be able to identify whether they have encountered situations that present role ambiguity or conflict.

Second, the researcher theorized that role perception and organizational identification have a positive relationship ($\boldsymbol{H_2}$). As previously mentioned, the research site is an outbound call center that is operated for and by James Madison University. The students who work at Madison Connection contact alumni to achieve three objectives:

- To update demographic information;
- To connect with them through prevalent memories experienced at the university; and
- To solicit funds for the university (Office of Annual Giving, 2010).

Because the student employees are providing a service for all facets of *their* university (e.g., faculty, staff, students), the researcher argued that organizational identification positively affects role perception.

Lastly, the researcher hypothesized that role perception has a positive relationship with self-efficacy ($\boldsymbol{H_3}$). If the student employees understand their role and no conflict exists, then they should feel confident that they can execute the duties associated with their role. In addition, results from other related (Mulki, Lassk, & Jaramillo, 2008) and non-related studies have demonstrated this relationship between role perception and self-efficacy (Grissett, 2009; Jex & Gudanowski, 1992; Karatepe, Yavas, Babakus, & Avci, 2006; Perrewé et al., 2002).

Nature of Study

This research study comprised a mixed-methods approach and occurred in two phases. The participants in this study were approximately 38 student employees (26 new employees, 12 returning employees) working at the call center. Upon the approval of the call center coordinator and James Madison University's Institutional Review Board, each of the employees received an e-mail that included the consent form and the hyperlink to the quantitative survey. Survey questions measured their role perception, as well as their organizational identification and self-efficacy, as a call center employee. The survey also requested demographic information, including age, gender, classification, and tenure with Madison Connection. Within a week and a half of distributing the survey, the researcher individually interviewed four student employees (two new employees and two returning employees) to obtain a more detailed, accurate account of their experiences. Interview participants were asked questions regarding whether they understood their roles upon training, as well as how they feel about being a student at the university. After 60 days, the researcher repeated the procedure to assess whether significant changes occurred.

Assumptions, Limitations, and Scope

One assumption was that all participants involved in the study will give open and honest responses to the questions presented to them. This may have not have been the case. Some student employees may have feared that their answers would be used against them, especially because the call center coordinator distributed the survey instead of the researcher. However, in the consent form, the researcher ensured the participants that she would maintain confidentiality and anonymity throughout the study.

Another assumption was that the participants identified with their organization (i.e., the university). As previously mentioned, the student employees provide a service for all facets of their university. With the high level of school spirit associated with James Madison University (U.S. News & World Report, 2011), the researcher assumed that the participants would have high regard for their university and a perceived oneness with their organization.

In terms of limitations, this particular study was only conducted at one outbound call center at a university; therefore, the results cannot be generalized. However, several factors regarding the variables at hand may apply to other outbound and inbound call centers. In addition, there is limited research literature focusing specifically on outbound call centers; therefore, this study can provide a practical framework for future research.

In addition, the scope of this study is relatively small. The researcher examined 38 student employees in one outbound call center at one university. Because many universities throughout the nation have established call centers for their fundraising efforts (Wallace, 1996), the findings of this study may offer practical implications for other universities who employ call centers as a means to solicit funds from their alumni.

Significance of Research

A significant amount of literature exists in regard to inbound call centers; however, far less research has been performed on outbound call centers. The abundance of literature on inbound call centers versus outbound call centers may possibly reflect the viewpoint of Moss et al. (2008) that inbound call centers are more likely to have "evolutionary processes, shaped by concern for level of service" (p. 178). In other words, inbound call centers are more likely than outbound call centers to make significant changes in the way in which they operate. Despite the lack of literature on outbound call centers, a number of studies urge researchers to explore these types of call centers (Gray, 2009; Tuten & Neidermeyer, 2004). Moreover, the literature on call centers in general is mostly derived from an international perspective (e.g., the United Kingdom, India) rather than a national perspective.

Taking prior research into account, one significant aspect of the present study is that it attempts to fill the gaps in the literature on outbound call centers and call centers in the United States. Therefore, the results of the present study will add more knowledge to the call center industry. Managers of outbound call centers for universities and other businesses can use the findings to better clarify roles within their establishments, thus reducing role conflict and role ambiguity, indicators of organizational stress (de Ruyter et al., 2001; Johnson et al., 2005; Tosi, 1971; Tuten & Neidermeyer, 2004). Organizational stress is defined as "employee's awareness or feeling of personal dysfunction as a result of perceived conditions or happenings in the workplace" (Chen & Silverthorne, 2008, p. 573).

Another significant component of the present study is that it examines role perceptions of student employees who work in call centers. This component will add to the literature in terms of role conflict and ambiguity for call center employees. For example, the literature already shows that higher levels of role conflict and ambiguity lead to low job satisfaction and low organizational identification, which result in poor job performance and increased turnover (de Ruyter et al., 2001; Tuten & Neidermeyer, 2004). In addition, the present study measured how these perceptions change over time, which will also add to the body of literature for the call center industry.

Definitions of Terms

The key terms associated with the research questions are explicated in Table 1.

Table 1.1

Definitions of Key Terms

Key Term	Definition	Citation(s)
Call center	An establishment that "provides telephone-mediated service and/or sales to customers"	(Batt, 2002, p. 590)
Outbound call center	A call center that "primarily makes calls to customers." Employees often referred to as telemarketers or agents	(Winiecki, 2009, p. 708)
Inbound call center	A call center that receives phone calls from customers.	(Batt, 2002; Winiecki, 2009)
Role	A "set of expected activities associated with the occupancy of a given position"	(Kahn & Katz, 1978, p. 200)
Role perception	The perceived role conflict and ambiguity among expected behaviors and responsibilities	(Schuler, 1979)
Role ambiguity	The "uncertainty about what the occupant of a particular office is supposed to do"	(Kahn & Katz, 1978, p. 206)
Role conflict	The "simultaneous occurrence of two or more role expectations such that compliance with one would make compliance with the other more difficult"	(Kahn & Katz, 1978, p. 204)
Organizational identification	A "perceived oneness with an organization and the experience of the organization's successes and failures as one's own"	(Mael & Ashforth, 1992, p. 103)
Self-efficacy	The "beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments"	(Bandura, 1997, p. 3)
Social learning theory	Theory that claims that people learn from one another by observing others and experiencing through trial and error	(Bandura, 1978)

Organization of Remaining Chapters

In this chapter, the researcher introduced the variables of role perception, organizational identification, and self-efficacy for student employees in outbound call centers. Overall, this study will fill in several literature gaps and offer implications for call center managers to use within their operations. In the next chapter, the researcher will provide an extensive literature review that will explicate the variables and theories that guided the nature of the study. Theories and frameworks that will be discussed include social learning theory (Bandura, 1977, 1978), self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1969, 1978, 1997), role theory (Kahn & Katz, 1978), and social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). In Chapter 3, the researcher will discuss the methodology behind the study and describe the data collection process. In Chapter 4, the researcher will analyze the data collected; and in Chapter 5, the researcher will discuss the limitations, findings, and implications associated with the study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The following literature review will describe the theories and research that guide the present study. First, the researcher will begin with social learning theory (Bandura, 1969, 1977, 1978), which is the foundation of the study's theoretical framework (see Figure 2.1). She will then explain the theories associated with the research variables: self-efficacy theory (self-efficacy) (Bandura, 1969, 1978, 1997); role theory (role perception) (Kahn & Katz, 1978); and social identity theory (organizational identification) (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). After discussing these theories, the researcher will review the literature on student employees and call centers.

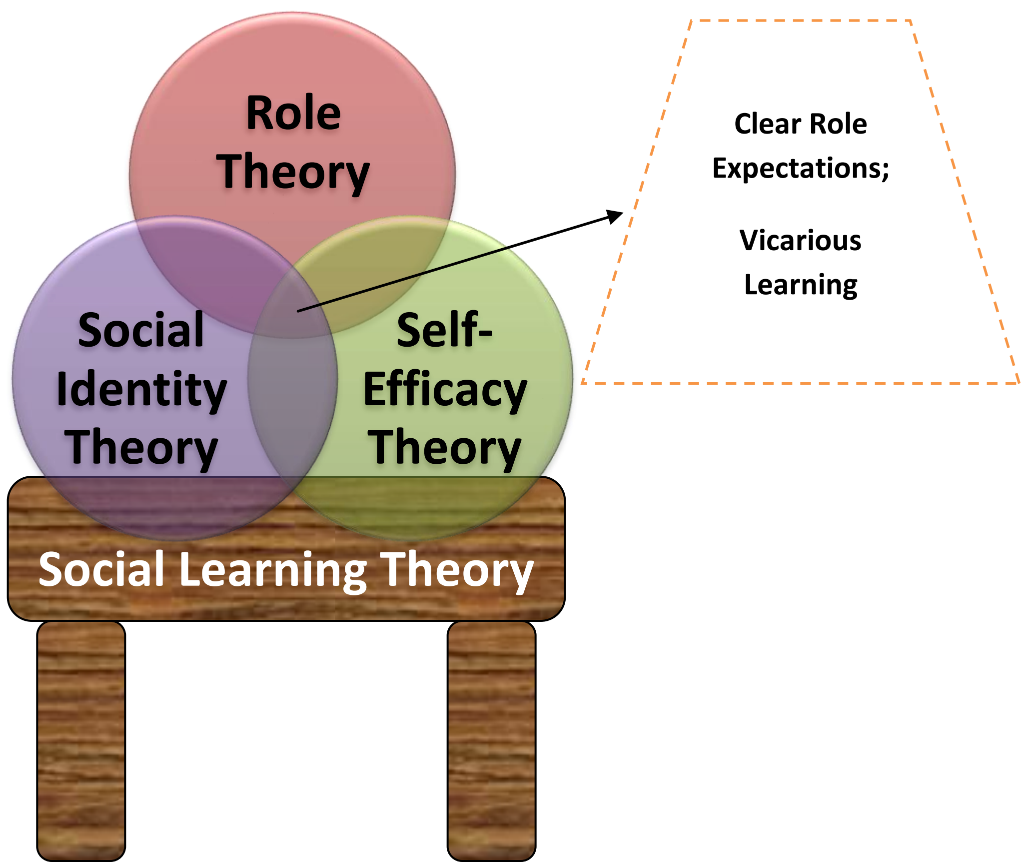

Figure 2.1. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework illustrates that social learning theory (Bandura, 1969, 1977, 1978) is the foundation of the present study. Elements of social learning theory are present in each of the other three theories: self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1969, 1978, 1997), role theory (Katz & Kahn, 1978), and social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). In fact, self-efficacy theory is rooted in social learning theory (Bandura, 1997). The three remaining theories share two common themes: the importance of clear role expectations and vicarious learning. When employees understand their role, they are more likely to have higher perceived self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997), which increases their trust in their managers and co-workers (Schuler, 1979), thus enhancing organizational identification (Ashforth & Mael, 1989) and resulting in a positive role perception (low role ambiguity and/or conflict) (Katz & Kahn, 1978). They can learn to understand their role by observing and modeling others (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Bandura, 1977, 1997).

Social Learning Theory

The foundation of the present study is rooted in Albert Bandura's social learning theory (1969, 1977, 1978, 1986). Social learning theory derives its name from the emphasis placed on learning from other people (Bandura, 1977, 1978; Davis & Luthans, 1980). According to Bandura (1977), "most human behavior is learned observationally through modeling" (p. 22). Therefore, people learn vicariously through observing others' behaviors and their consequences (Bandura, 1977, 1978). When people observe others and their behaviors, they learn what behaviors are acceptable and unacceptable. As a result, they avoid making unnecessary and costly errors.

Subprocesses of vicarious learning. Four distinct subprocesses influence the degree of vicarious learning: attentional, retention, production, and motivational/incentive processes (Bandura, 1969, 1977, 1986, 1997). Figure 2.2 conceptualizes the four processes that govern vicarious learning.

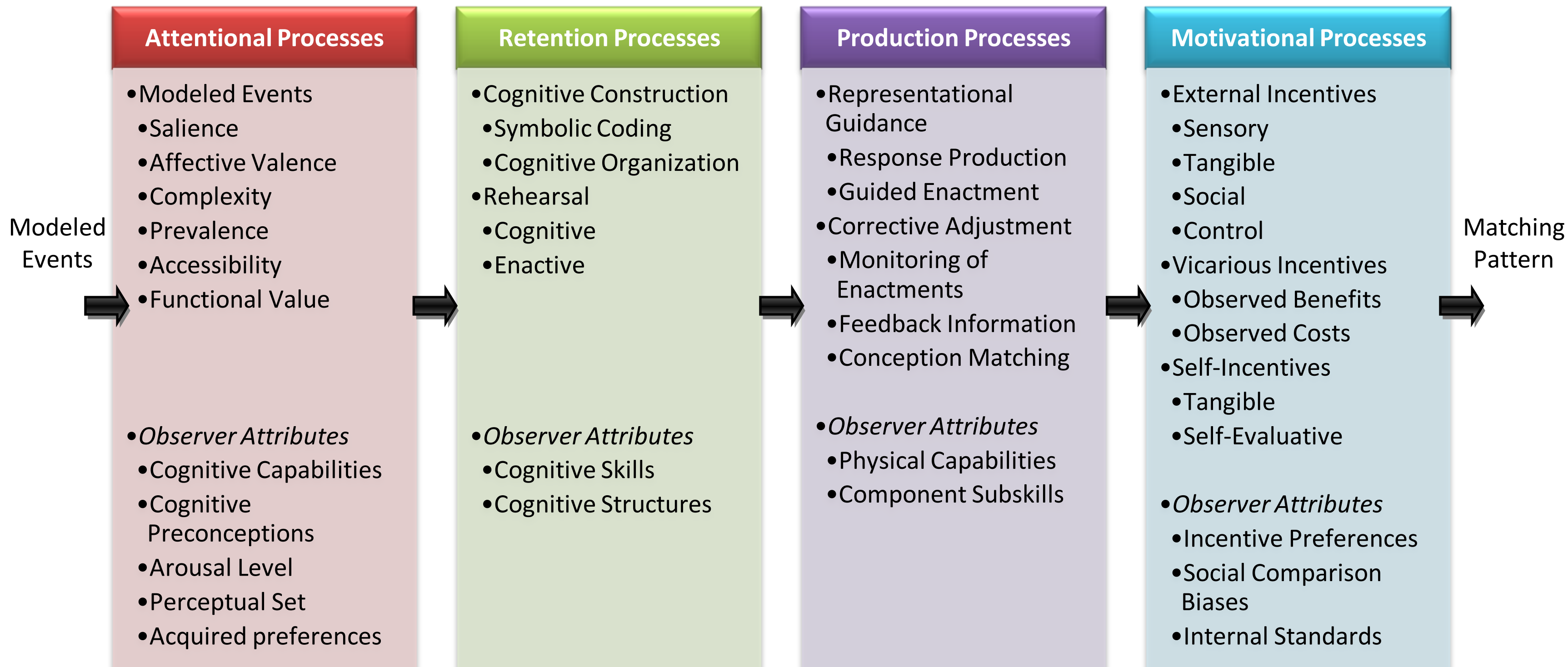

Figure 2.2. Four Subprocesses Governing Observational Learning (Bandura, 1986)

Attentional processes. First, attentional processes determine whether an individual pays attention to a particular model, as well as recognizes and differentiates the model's behaviors (Bandura 1969, 1977, 1986). Bandura asserts that simply exposing a model to an observer does not necessarily mean that the observer will attend to the model's cues or perceive them accurately. Physical, environmental, and psychological conditions easily influence attention.

Retention processes. Second, retention processes involve how much the observer remembers from the model's behaviors (Bandura, 1969, 1977, 1986). Rehearsal can enhance retention of observed behaviors. When people mentally rehearse or perform modeled behaviors, they are less likely to forget them than if they never thought about nor practiced what they have seen. Although some behaviors cannot be overtly practiced due to social prohibitions or lack of opportunity, individuals should at least visualize themselves performing the appropriate behavior for retention purposes.

Production processes. Third, production processes entail the observer's ability to replicate the behaviors of the model (Bandura, 1969, 1977, 1986). The observer will rarely perform the correct action on first attempt; however, through corrective adjustment (e.g., feedback, monitoring), the observer ultimately will perform accurately. Skills are not perfected through observation or trial-and-error solely; they are refined through informative feedback. However, if the observer is not physically or mentally capable of performing the behavior, then modeling cannot occur.

Motivational processes. Lastly, motivational or incentive processes refer to the observer's want to demonstrate observed, modeled behavior (Bandura, 1969, 1977, 1986). This want is heavily influenced by the perceived negative and positive outcomes of the behavior. For example, if a co-worker is admonished for performing a certain behavior, then the observer is less likely to perform the same behavior due to its negative consequence. Bandura (1969) even claims that inadequate positive reinforcement can also hinder an observer's motivation to perform modeled behavior. In other words, people are more likely to acquire, retain, possess, and execute behaviors if the consequences are valuable and rewarding for them.

Implications for managers. Several researchers identify and emphasize the importance of managers incorporating modeling principles into practice (Manz & Sims, 1981; Rich, 1997; Sloan, 2007). Rich (1997) argues that modeling is critical in a sales environment, because the job of selling is challenging. Most salespeople work alone, and they have to deal with the demands and attitudes of customers (Dean & Rainnie, 2009; Rich, 1997). Through her experience with working in call centers, the researcher recognizes the challenge of selling a pitch to potential customers, or "leads." Telemarketers do work alone, and they deal with uninterested and rude customers on a daily basis (Rich, 1997). However, managers can counteract the job demands by being a positive example to their employees and guiding them in handling sales calls, behaving ethically, and working hard.

Manz and Sims (1981) offer two suggestions for managers to incorporate social learning theory into practice. These suggestions include daily managerial behavior and modeling in training. In terms of daily managerial behavior, managers should realize that "employees are more likely to imitate [their] behavior than a co-worker because of the status, experience, and prestige of those holding managerial positions" (p. 109). Therefore, managers should be mindful of their own behaviors and recognize that the behavior of their employees could be a reflection of their actions. Managers can also reinforce behaviors through rewards. In addition to rewarding employees directly, which reflects operant conditioning, they could also reward employees publicly. Once other employees see their co-worker rewarded for a certain behavior, they are more likely to emulate the behavior in hopes of attaining a similar rewarding consequence. In regards to incorporating modeling into training, Manz and Sims (1981) propose four components:

1. *Models of the desired behavior*. Managers can show models of desired behaviors through means such as video or a live model. In relation to the study, managers have returning employees perform practice calls for the new employees, thus demonstrating the behaviors that are expected.
2. *Behavioral rehearsal*. This process enables learners to practice and retain the desired behaviors on their own. For example, new telemarketers can practice mock calls to one another while the manager observes.
3. *Social reinforcement.* Social reinforcement involves giving feedback. Managers can give constructive feedback to new telemarketers to help strengthen desired behaviors.
4. *Transfer of training*. The final phase entails the learners' transfer of newly learned behaviors to the actual job. Manz and Sims offer practical applications to achieve this step, such as holding individual follow-up meetings, determining training issues, and identifying real scenarios before implementing the training.

Social learning versus operant conditioning. Although the relationship of behaviors and consequences is prevalent in social learning theory, particularly in vicarious learning, it is important to differentiate this theory with operant conditioning theory (Davis & Luthans, 1980; Manz & Sims, 1981). Operant conditioning theory also places emphasis on consequences of behavior. However, the difference between the two theories is that in social learning, the learner does not experience the consequences; instead, they observe them as experienced by the model. In addition, Bandura (1977) posits that operant conditioning dismisses the idea that outcomes change human behavior through thought. He states: "Because learning by response consequences is largely a cognitive process, consequences generally produce little change in complex behavior when there is no awareness of what is being reinforced" (p. 18).

Summary. Overall, social learning theory is used as the foundation of this study, because its principles associate with all of the research variables: role perception, organizational identification, and self-efficacy. For example, if telemarketers view their managers as positive models, then they are more than likely to trust them and have a higher commitment to the organization (Rich, 1997). In addition, when new telemarketers can identify desired behaviors from the returning employees, they become more knowledgeable of what is expected of them, thus heightening their role perception (by reducing role ambiguity/conflict) and increasing their self-efficacy (Manz & Sims, 1981).

Self-Efficacy Theory

Self-efficacy stems from Bandura's (1969, 1977, 1986) social learning theory and refers to an individual's belief that they can perform a job successfully and competently (Bandura, 1997). This belief system is causally related to behavior and outcomes (Bandura, 1997; Driscoll, 2005; Taliaferro, 2010). In other words, people judge their abilities to perform certain actions based on a desired outcome; afterward, they decide whether to perform those actions. The causal relationship between beliefs of personal efficacy and outcome expectations is shown in Figure 2.3.

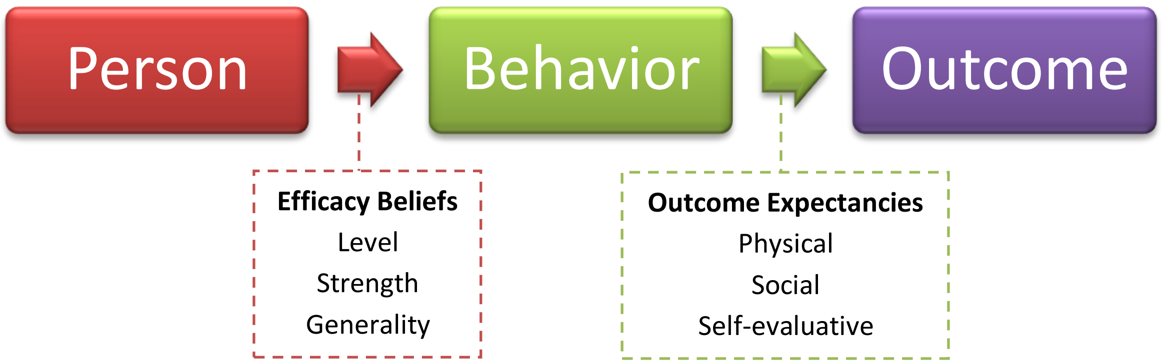

Figure 2.3. Relationship between Efficacy Beliefs and Outcomes (Bandura, 1997)

Efficacy beliefs and outcome expectancies. Self-efficacy beliefs vary from level, strength, and generality (Bandura, 1997). Level refers to the belief of performing tasks ranging from most simple to most difficult. Strength represents the degree of confidence one has to complete a task; and generality refers to whether efficacy beliefs can be applied to other tasks or situations (Bandura, 1997; Peterson & Arnn, 2005).

On the other hand, outcome expectations comprise three forms: physical effects, social effects, and self-evaluative reactions (Bandura, 1986, 1997; Driscoll, 2005). Within each form, the positive expectations serve as incentives, while the negative expectations are disincentives (Bandura, 1997). Table 2.1 provides examples of the incentives and disincentives associated with each form of outcomes.

Table 2.1

Outcomes: Incentives and Disincentives

Outcome Expectation	Incentives	Disincentives
Physical Effects	Pleasure	Pain, physical discomfort
Social Effects	Approval, social recognition, status, power	Disapproval, social rejection, censure, imposed penalties
Self-evaluative reactions	Self-satisfaction, sense of pride	Self-dissatisfaction, self-censure

Sources of self-efficacy. According to Bandura (1997), self-efficacy derives from four sources of information:

1. *Enactive mastery experiences.* These experiences are the most influential source of self-efficacy beliefs because they provide the most authentic information to learners on their ability to do what it takes to succeed.
2. *Vicarious experiences.* After seeing others perform a task, people judge whether they, too, can do the same, thus forming beliefs about their own competencies.
3. *Verbal persuasion.* This source refers to others persuading learners that they are capable of succeeding at a particular task. Learners must perceive this feedback as authentic and reasonable to attain (Peterson & Arnn, 2005).
4. *Psychological states.* People base their perceived self-efficacy on their "gut feeling," which convinces them whether they will succeed or fail at a task (Driscoll, 2005).

Implications for managers. Managers can incorporate the four sources of information to develop their employees' self-efficacy (Gist & Mitchell, 1992; Malone, 2001; Peterson & Arnn, 2005; Shoemaker, 1999; Stadjkovic, Luthans, & Slocum, 1998; Tams, 2008; Wang & Netemeyer, 2002). Table 2.2 illustrates these implications.

Table 2.2

Managerial Implications for Using Sources of Self-Efficacy in the Workplace

Source of Self-Efficacy	Implication(s)	Source(s)
Mastery experiences	• During training, provide thorough instruction, opportunities to practice, and feedback focused on skills learned and goals achieved. • Celebrate small victories with employees and encourage them to maintain their performance. • Empower employees in deciding how to address various problems that could occur within the job and how to best serve customers • Provide opportunities and resources to facilitate employees' learning and competence development.	(Peterson & Arnn, 2005; Tams, 2008; Wang & Netemeyer, 2002)
Vicarious experiences	• Include behavioral modeling (e.g., shadowing) during training. • Adhere to espoused values (i.e., lead by example).	(Malone, 2001; Rich, 1997; Shoemaker, 1999; Tams, 2008)
Verbal persuasion	• Provide employees with verbal feedback and realistic encouragement. • Ensure that employees are not prematurely placed into situations where success is unlikely. • Enable new employees to expect more of themselves prior to their actual work experience.	(Malone, 2001; Stadjkovic et al., 1998; Tams, 2008)
Psychological states	• Encourage employees to think and be positive, especially when their performance is low. • Eliminate environmental stresses. • Encourage employees to take care of their own well-being.	(Gist & Mitchell, 1992; Malone, 2001; Tams, 2008)

Self-efficacy versus self-esteem. The concepts of perceived self-efficacy and self-esteem are often used interchangeably (Bandura, 1997); however, they represent two different aspects. Perceived self-efficacy represents judgment of one's *capabilities*, while self-esteem indicates judgment of one's *self-worth*. According to Bandura (1997), there is no relationship between beliefs about one's capabilities and whether one appreciates and likes oneself. However, Pierce, Gardner, Cummings, and Dunham (1989) cite Bandura (1977) stating that "employees with high self-esteem are likely to have a strong sense of self-efficacy" (as cited in Pierce et al., 1989, p. 625). After reviewing Bandura's *Social Learning Theory* text (1977), the researcher was unable to find where he makes this contradictory statement. Nonetheless, Bandura (1997) agrees that people tend to develop their capabilities in tasks that provide them a sense of self-worth; however, he argues that empirical analyses confined to such tasks would

> …inflate correlations between self-efficacy and self-esteem, because the analyses ignore both domains of functioning in which people judge themselves inefficacious but could care less and those in which they feel highly efficacious but take no pride in performing the activity well because of its socially injurious consequences. (p. 11)

Measuring self-efficacy. Self-efficacy has been measured on various levels of specificity, including task-specific (e.g., computer self-efficacy) and general (Schyns & Sczesny, 2010; Tai, 2006). No all-purpose self-efficacy measure exists (Peterson & Arnn, 2005); however, Bandura (1997) offers several suggestions in measuring this concept:

- Items should be phrased in terms of “can do,” rather than “will do,” because the word “can” is a judgment of capability; the word “will” connotes intention.
- Efficacy scales should be unipolar, ranging from 0 to a maximum strength. Do not include negative numbers.
- Include preliminary instructions (e.g., ask participants to judge their capabilities as of now, versus in the future).
- Measure people’s beliefs in their abilities to complete different levels of task demands. Self-efficacy cannot be measured through a single item.

Many researchers lean toward creating task-specific measures of self-efficacy versus general measures (Lubbers, 2003; Stadjkovic et al., 1998); however, the present study examines the employees’ self-efficacy with their job overall, not in terms of specific tasks. Therefore, for the purposes of this study, the researcher incorporated the New General Self-Efficacy (NGSE) Scale (Chen, Gully, & Eden, 2001). This eight-item scale was scored on a 5-point Likert-type scale from “strongly disagree” (1) to “strongly agree” (5). In terms of validity, coefficient alpha values ranged from 0.86 to 0.90. In the survey, the researcher included preliminary instructions, asking employees to judge their capabilities as call center employees, thus adding some level of specificity (Bandura, 1997). She was able to obtain additional information through conducting interviews.

Related Studies. A number of studies measured self-efficacy in call center employees (Feinberg & Kennedy, 2008; Lee, 1988; van der Klink & Streumer, 2002; Wilk & Moynihan, 2005; Xie, 2007). Lee’s (1988) study is most similar to the present study. Lee sampled the same target population and measured self-efficacy over time. The study incorporated 23 full-time undergraduate students who worked part-time for their university's call center to solicit alumni donations. However, the study analyzed the goal setting aspect of a bonus pay system and its effects on self-efficacy levels. Lee found that self-efficacy increased toward the end of the study, because the incentives associated with the bonus system were "dependent on the achievement of something" (p. 371). While the present study measured self-efficacy over time, it was not the primary focus of the study.

Mulki, Lassk, and Jaramillo (2008) conducted a study on salespeople to measure the effect of self-efficacy on salesperson work overload and pay satisfaction. According to the authors, their study is the first empirical study that has explored the direct influence of salespeople's self-efficacy on role conflict and role ambiguity. The researcher explored this influence in the present study, as well. Their sample comprised 219 salespeople working at a large retailer that sells boats and other marine-related products. To collect data, they received buy-in from the company's management and mailed a survey to the salespeople; as a result, they were able to yield a 63% completion rate (n=138). The researcher also incorporated management buy-in to obtain high survey response rates (Phase 1 = 76%; Phase 2 = 53%), as well.

Mulki et al. (2008) measured self-efficacy using a three-item scale (Cronbach's $\alpha = .90$), and they used a three-item scale to measure role conflict and role ambiguity (Cronbach's $\alpha = .76$); however, the researcher thinks the study is flawed because these variables cannot be assessed with so few questions. In the research study at hand, the researcher incorporated an eight-item scale to measure self-efficacy (Cronbach's $\alpha = .86$-$.90$), an eight-item scale to measure role conflict (Cronbach's $\alpha = .71$-$.87$), and a six-item scale to measure role ambiguity (Cronbach's $\alpha = .71$-$.95$).

Overall, the results of the Mulki et al. (2008) study confirmed that there was a negative relationship between self-efficacy and role conflict and role ambiguity. According to the authors, “salespeople who are confident in their abilities to complete job tasks are less likely to believe that job roles are ambiguous or in conflict” (p. 292). These results are consistent with the researcher’s hypothesis.

Summary. Several researchers argue that individuals who believe they can perform their job well have high job satisfaction (Judge & Bono, 2001; Todd & Harris, 2009), high job performance (Judge & Bono, 2001; Stajkovic et al., 1998; Wang & Netemeyer, 2002), and lower levels of stress (Avey, Luthans, & Jensen, 2009; Mulki et al., 2008). The present study will assess the self-efficacy of student call center employees and determine whether a relationship exists between self-efficacy and role perception.

Role Theory

Role perception is a key variable in the present study. Within the study, the term is defined as the perceived role conflict and ambiguity among expected behaviors and responsibilities (Schuler, 1979). These concepts are included in Katz and Kahn’s (1978) role theory.

Katz and Kahn (1978) define human organizations as a system of roles. Members within the system communicate the do’s and don’ts of the organization to the focal person. Afterward, the focal person formulates a perception of the role expectations and acts upon it. This role episode is an interdependent and recurring process that is shaped by individual, interpersonal, and organizational factors. Figure 2.4 illustrates the factors involved in the role episode.

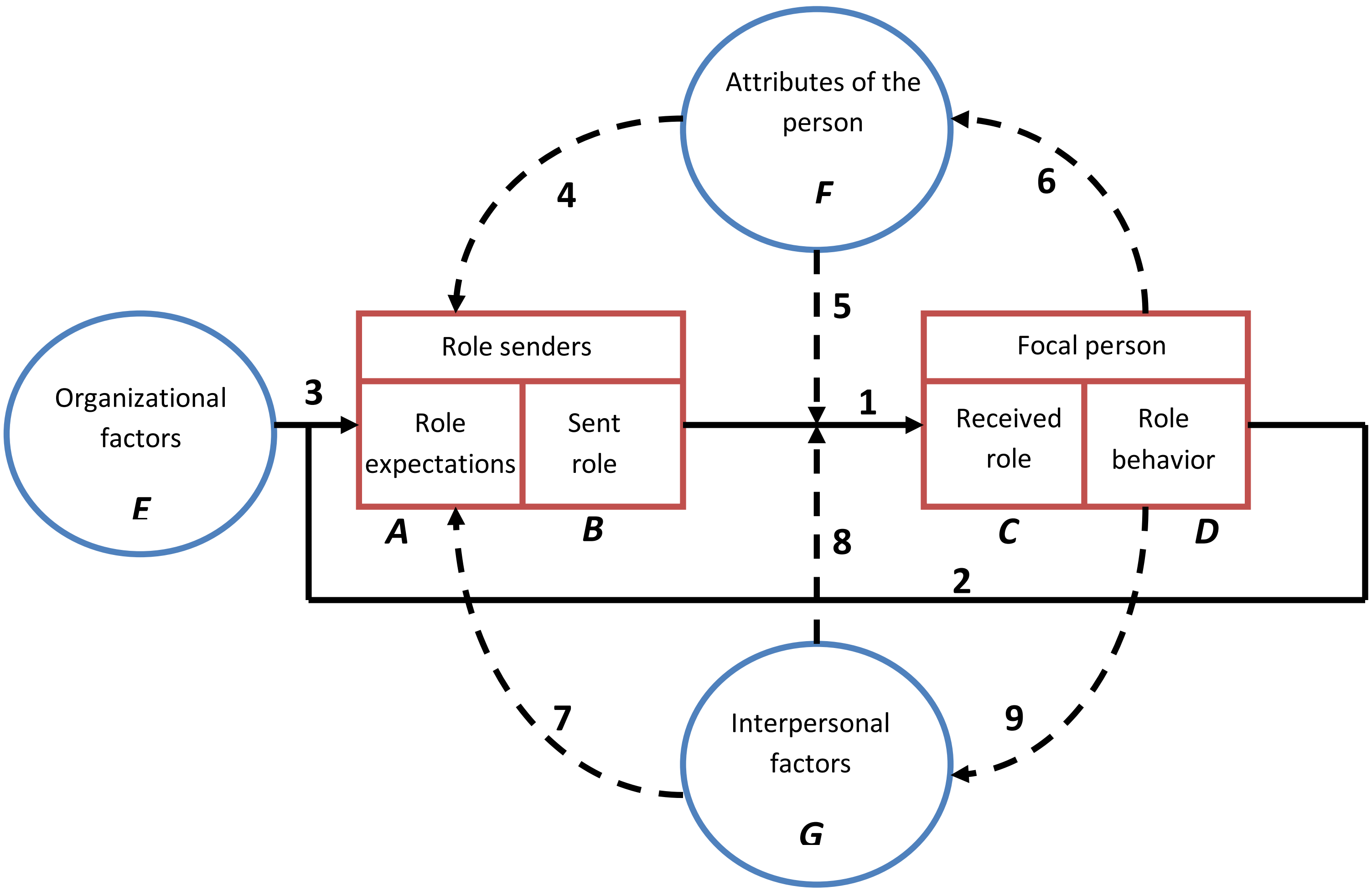

Figure 2.4. Factors in the Role Episode (Katz & Kahn, 1978)

The role episode, as previously described, is illustrated through Boxes A through D and Arrows 1 and 2 (Katz & Kahn, 1978). Arrow 3 represents the relationship between the organizational factors (Circle E) and the role expectations associated with and sent to a specific position. The attributes of the person (e.g., motives, values, defense mechanisms, fears) (Circle F) affect role taking, as well: some traits may bring about certain evaluations and behaviors from role-senders (Arrow 4); communications about a role (sent-role) may be experienced differently by other people (Arrow 5); and role behavior (i.e., the focal person acting upon what was received) can affect personality (Arrow 6), which entails the focal person becoming what he/she does.

Role ambiguity and conflict. During a role episode, the employee (i.e., focal person) receives expectations from supervisors or co-workers (i.e., role senders) (Katz & Kahn, 1978). In turn, the employee perceives what was sent in terms of role ambiguity and/or conflict. Role ambiguity refers to uncertainty about one's role, while role conflict is the "simultaneous occurrence of two or more role expectations such that compliance with one would make compliance with the other more difficult" (p. 204). In a call center, role ambiguity may result when an employee is unaware of the supervisor's expectations or how his/her performance will be evaluated (de Ruyter et al., 2001). On the other hand, role conflict may result when the supervisor expects telemarketers to use time efficiently; however, the supervisor also expects them to meet customers' demands and resolve issues, which could take a great deal of time. Employees experiencing low role ambiguity and/or conflict will enhance their relationship with their supervisors and co-workers, because their level of trust, liking, and respect for them will increase (Schuler, 1979). However, those employees experiencing high role ambiguity and/or conflict will withdraw from or confront their supervisors and co-workers as a means to reduce the ambiguity and conflict.

Implications for managers. Managers can help to reduce role conflict and role ambiguity by incorporating the following strategies (Brunel & Grima, 2010; de Ruyter et al., 2001; Jones, Kantak, Futrell, & Johnston, 1996; Lazo, 2008; Low, Cravens, Grant, & Moncrief, 2001; Sharp & Shieff, 1992; Wilk & Moynihan, 2005):

- Recognize the importance of their behavior as a leader.
- Invest personal time in new hire orientation and training. Use the time to clarify goals and expectations of the new hires.
- Identify those employees experiencing role conflict and ambiguity and emphasize ways for them to address it or direct them to resources that will help them address it.
- Implement policies that reduce role conflict and ambiguity.
- Work to enhance job satisfaction.

Measuring role perception. To measure role perception, the researcher borrowed the role conflict and ambiguity scales developed by Rizzo, House, and Lirtzman (1970). These measures were the first to assess role conflict and ambiguity (Fields, 2002), and they have been used extensively by researchers (Fields, 2002; House, Schuler, & Levanoni, 1983; Jackson & Schuler, 1985; Tubre & Collins, 2000). However, critics have questioned its validity because the role ambiguity scale items are presented as positive statements, while the role conflict scale items are presented negatively (Fields, 2002; Lazo, 2008). They assumed that participants would agree with positive statements and disagree with the negative statements (Lazo, 2008); however, the research literature has dispelled these assumptions and concluded that the role ambiguity and conflict scales were satisfactory in assessing the role constructs (House et al., 1983; Jackson & Schuler, 1985; Tubre & Collins, 2000). Although House, Schuler, and Levanoni (1983) developed a modified version of the original role conflict and ambiguity scales, the researcher chose to use the original version because several of the scales' items did not apply to the Madison Connection student employees.

Related Studies/Summary. A number of studies measure role ambiguity and conflict with call center employees (de Ruyter et al., 2001; Dean & Rainnie, 2007; Dwyer & Fox, 2006; Johnson et al., 2005; Lazo, 2008; Tuten & Neidermeyer, 2004). Overall, these studies address the relationship between role conflict and ambiguity and job satisfaction and performance. Results show that role conflict and ambiguity negatively impacts both job satisfaction and performance. However, in Tuten and Neidermeyer's (2004) study, role conflict and ambiguity had a positive direct relationship with job satisfaction. They attributed this finding to the fact that "call center employees in this study received bonuses related to performance, [therefore,] the relationship between satisfaction and stress could be a function of the stress-performance relationship" (p. 32). None of the above studies addressed student employees and how their role perceptions changed over time. In addition, the researcher did not compare role ambiguity and conflict with job satisfaction nor performance.

Researchers have also explored role perceptions with student employees in general (Brunel & Grima, 2010; Butler, 2007; Jogaratnam & Buchanan, 2004; Larsen, 2005; Markel & Frone, 1998). According to Larsen (2005), "all student employees are first and foremost students, no matter their status (undergraduate, graduate, nontraditional) or the job for which they are hired" (p. 56). However, student employees may face role conflict as they balance the roles of a student and an employee (Brunel & Grima, 2010; Butler, 2007; Jogaratnam & Buchanan, 2004; Markel & Frone, 1998). For example, Markel and Frone (1998) suggest that work-school conflict occurs when work requires time away from school-related activities, as well as when work hinders school performance (e.g., grades, meeting deadlines). Several studies found that workload, job demands, job dissatisfaction, and job hours contributed to the work-school conflict (Butler, 2007; Markel & Frone, 1998). Other studies have found that learning coping strategies will help reduce work-school conflict in student employees (Brunel & Grima, 2010; Butler, 2007). Overall, as college tuition rates and expenses continue to rise, students will have to work; however, these student employees are likely to encounter negative role perceptions, especially role conflict, while trying to balance being a student and an employee.

Social Identity Theory

Organizational identification, one of the variables analyzed in the present study, is rooted in social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Tajfel and Turner (1979) define social identity as "those aspects of an individual's self-image that derive from the social categories to which he perceives himself as belonging" (p. 40). This theory posits that people classify themselves and others into various social groups (Mael & Ashforth, 1992; Turner, 1982). These groups can include organizational memberships, gender, age, religious affiliations, and other categories (Mael & Ashforth, 1992; Todd & Harris, 2009).

According to Ashforth and Mael (1989), social identification suggests four principles:

1. To identify with a social group, individuals do not need to exert effort toward the group's goals; instead, they need to perceive themselves as psychologically connected to the fate of the group (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Mael & Ashforth, 1992).
2. Social identification entails taking the successes and failures of the group personally (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Lui, Ngo, & Tsang, 2001; Tuzen, 2009).
3. Identification and internalization are distinct concepts. Identification involves individuals associating with social categories (I am), while internalization refers to "the incorporation of values, attitudes, and so forth within the self as guiding principles (I believe)" (Ashforth & Mael, 1989, p. 22).
4. Identifying with a group is similar to identifying with a person (e.g., one's parent) or a reciprocal-role relationship (e.g., doctor-patient) "inasmuch as one partly defines oneself in terms of a social referent" (p. 22).

Organizational identification. Organizational identification is a specific form of social identification (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Mael & Ashforth, 1992; Reza, 2009), and the concept is defined as "a perceived oneness with an organization and the experience of the organization's successes and failures as one's own" (Mael & Ashforth, 1992, p. 103). According to social identity theory, when individuals strongly identify with their organizational roles, they tend to feel most authentic when they are conforming to role expectations (e.g., being the extroverted salesperson) (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993). In addition, they tend to view their jobs more positively (Todd & Harris, 2009). However, inconsistent role demands placed on these individuals can lead to role conflict, which affects job satisfaction (Liu et al., 2001). Nevertheless, individuals exhibiting strong organizational identification tend to partake vicariously in the attitudes, behaviors, and actions of the group (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Chughtai & Buckley, 2010; Mael & Ashforth, 1992), thus highlighting the concept of organizational identification: individuals defining themselves in relation to their membership within a particular organization (Mael & Ashforth, 1992). Figure 2.5 conceptualizes organizational identification as a continuum from narrow to broad formulations of identification (Ashforth, Harrison, & Corley, 2008).

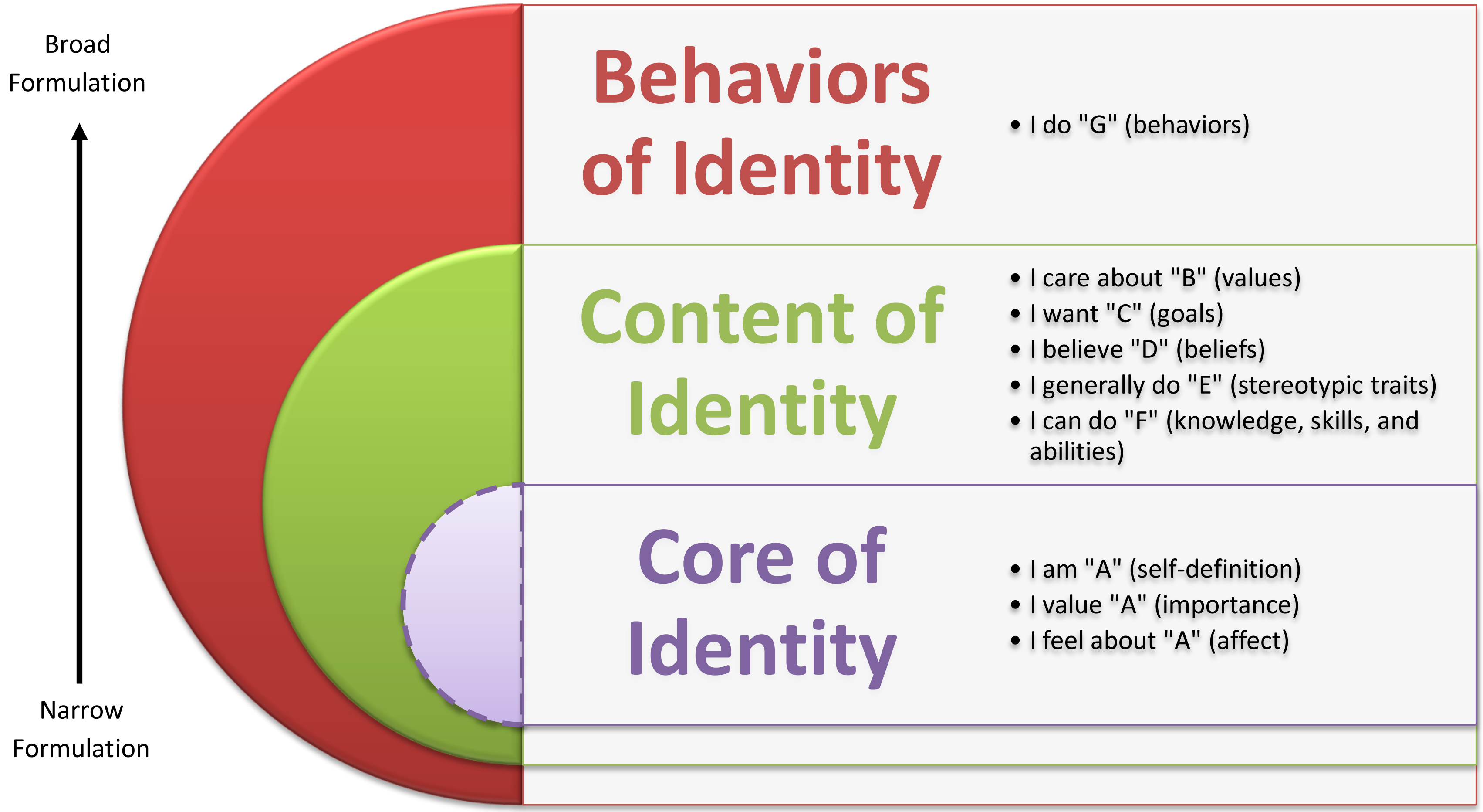

Figure 2.5. Identification as a Continuum (Ashforth , Harrison, & Corley, 2008)

The narrow end of the continuum, or core of identity, reflects the heart of organizational identification, in which employees define themselves as their organization (Ashforth et al., 2008). One example includes the IBM® commercials in which the employees declare toward the end: “I am an IBMer” (IBM, 2011). The next broader portion of the continuum, or content of identity, involves the attributes that define what it means to be “A”, the organization (i.e., values; goals; beliefs; stereotypic traits; and knowledge, skills, and abilities). Continuing with the IBM® example, after the employees state “I am an IBMer,” they add: “Let’s build a smarter planet” (IBM, 2011), which reflects a goal (“C”). The broad end of the continuum represents the behaviors of identity, which reflect the idea that employees with strong identification will engage in behaviors that support the organization as a whole (e.g., working harder to meet a goal/deadline) (Ashforth et al., 2008).

The dotted ring between core of identity and content of identity represents the notion that organizational identification does not have to encompass all of the content attributes (i.e., the second circle) (Ashforth et al., 2008). Some attributes may not be clearly communicated by the organization; therefore, employees are unable to make a connection with and accept them as their own. However, the authors argue that “the stronger the identity, the more that identification involves not only the elements in the first ring (I am, it’s important, I feel) but I care about, I want, I believe, I generally do, and I can do” (p. 331).

Organizational identification versus organizational commitment. An issue in the research literature is the interchangeable use of the terms “organizational identification” and “organizational commitment” (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Mael &

Ashforth, 1992; Tuzun, 2009). However, Porter, Steers, Mowday, and Boulian (1974) define organizational commitment as “the strength of an individual’s identification with and involvement in a particular organization” (p. 604). In addition, it is characterized by the following factors (Porter et al., 1974):

- Belief in and acceptance of the organization’s goals and values;
- Willingness to exert effort on behalf of the organization; and
- Desire to maintain membership.

According to Mael and Ashforth (1992), organizational identification is organization-specific, whereas organizational commitment may not be. For instance, Company X may share the same goals and values as Company Y. If Jane Doe has a strong commitment to Company X, she could transfer to Company Y having the same belief and acceptance of Company Y’s goals and values. However, if Jane Doe has a strong identification with Company X, then leaving the organization would impact her more negatively.

Implications for managers. The research literature offers several ways in which managers can enhance organizational identification amongst their employees (Chughtai & Buckley, 2010; DeConinck, 2011; Korte, 2007; Todd & Harris, 2009):

- Hire and retain employees whose values are similar to the organization’s values.
- Incorporate socialization when orienting new employees. Pair them with mentors so that they can vicariously learn about the mission, values, norms, and other attributes of being an employee for the particular organization.

- Inform employees about the accomplishments of the organization to build a sense of pride, which is a significant predictor of both organizational identification and self-efficacy.
- Treat subordinates with the utmost respect and fairness.

Measuring organizational identification. The researcher borrowed Mael's (Mael & Ashforth, 1992) organizational identification scale, which is one of the two most commonly used measures of the construct (Riketta, 2005). This scale comprises six items and was tested on college alumni, student employees, managers, and other populations (Mael & Ashforth, 1992). The other most commonly used measure is the Organizational Identification Questionnaire (Cheney, 1983), which comprises 25 items. The researcher did not incorporate this scale for several reasons. First, she thought that her sample would abandon her survey if it was too long. Second, according to Riketta (2005), eight of the questions were "virtually identical" to items from organizational commitment scales; as previously mentioned, organizational commitment is distinct from organizational identification (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Mael & Ashforth, 1992; Tuzun, 2009). Lastly, results from Riketta's (2005) meta-analysis indicate that the Mael scale (Mael & Ashforth, 1992) is the most representative organizational identification measure in terms of its empirical outcomes.

Related studies/Summary. Research on the relationship between organizational identification and antecedents of stress (i.e., role conflict and ambiguity) has not been extensive (Wegge, van Dick, Fisher, Wecking, & Moltzen, 2006). However, Schaubroeck and Jones (2000) found that employees with lower organizational identification reported higher role demands and physical symptoms of stress. Wegge et al. (2006) conducted two studies that examined the impact of organizational identification on work motivation and well-being in call center employees. They found that organizational identification improved work motivation and well-being. Other non-related studies have illustrated how the construct impacts job satisfaction (Todd & Harris, 2009; Tuzen, 2009; Van Dick et al., 2004); turnover and turnover intentions (DeConinck, 2011; Van Dick et al., 2004); organizational citizenship behaviors (Mayfield & Taber, 2010); as well as in-role job performance, error communication, and learning goal orientation (Chughtai & Buckley, 2010), Nonetheless, the present study will examine the relationship that organizational identification has on role perceptions, particularly the dimensions of role conflict and ambiguity.

Student Employees

The sample of the present study comprises student employees who work at Madison Connection, a call center operated for and by James Madison University in Harrisonburg, Va. Therefore, the researcher included a brief section that outlines literature about student employees. Topics will include a description of today's student employees, as well as implications for them and their managers.

Overview of student employees. In order for supervisors to create meaningful work experiences for student employees, they must understand who they are and what ideals that they typically represent (Carr, 2005). Today's typical undergraduate student employees were born between 1980 and 2000 (Carr, 2005; Knofla, 2001; Zemke, Raines, & Filipczak, 2000). They are referred to as Generation Y, the Nexters, the Internet Generation, Nintendo Generation, Echo Boomers, Generation 2001, or the Millennials.

The Millennials represent several core values: optimism, civic duty, confidence, achievement, sociability, morality, street smarts, and diversity (Zemke et al., 2000). For example, their confidence derives from the fact that a majority of their parents planned to have them; therefore, the Millennials have always felt like they were wanted. Recruiters from businesses and other organizations flock to colleges and universities to showcase that their respective companies "want" these Millennials, as well. In addition, they are more aware and tolerant of multiculturalism, and they are typically exposed to serious adult issues (e.g., divorce, AIDS) by the time they turn 10.

As workers, Millennials are optimistic about the future, yet realistic about the present (Zemke et al., 2000). Moreover, they expect to work more than 40 hours a week to attain their goals and dreams and to benefit the collective good. Millennials will question policies and procedures that make no sense to them, and the "hierarchical system makes little sense to them because they can e-mail just about anyone, about anything in the world" (Knofla, 2001, p. 18). This generational group is motivated by personal gain, fun, independence, power, and prestige. In addition, they consider titles, responsibility, and supervisory support as very important. Overall, supervisors appreciate Millennials because of their "belief in collective action, optimism about the future, trust in centralized authority, a will to get things done, and a heroic spirit in the face of overwhelming odds" (Zemke et al., 2000, p. 144). However, potential on-the-job liabilities include a need for supervision and structure, as well as little to no experience with addressing difficult customers.

Implications for managers. When working with student employees, managers should realize the profound impact they are making toward society (Sharp & Shieff, 1992). They are preparing these students for the "real world" by not only providing students with work experience but, also, by helping them to foster the qualities and skills that they will need once they enter the workforce. The research literature offers several implications that managers should consider when working with student employees (Knofla, 2001; Larsen, 2005; Sharp & Shieff, 1992; Zemke et al., 2000):

- *Policies and Guidelines.* Carefully review the policies and guidelines with the new hires. If possible, post these guidelines or handbook online for their reference. Therefore, they will be able to understand what is expected of them in every aspect of the job.
- *Sense of Ownership.* Give student employees a sense of ownership by allowing them to navigate through and learn from their own mistakes, as well as provide feedback on how to improve the organization's operations.
- *Social Opportunities.* Create opportunities for employees to socialize with their co-workers outside of the work environment. These opportunities could be as simple as eating dinner together on campus or as complex as planning and implementing a holiday party.
- *Feedback.* Provide informal and formal opportunities to let student employees know how they are doing. Many managers tend to shy away from doing so because of lack of time or fear of confrontation. However, the student employees should have a clear picture of what they are doing well and what areas they need to improve.

Implications for student employees. Carr (2005) offers several implications for student employees, as well. She suggests that student employees do the following:

- Determine and evaluate skill sets before entering a student employment position. Student employees should discuss with their managers what skills they would like to improve upon and develop a plan on how to do so.
- Go above and beyond work requirements in order to enhance capabilities and skills.
- Reflect on the experience and the learning gained as a student employee. Share these reflections with the manager regularly.
- Create a portfolio of the student employment experience. Student employees can use performance evaluations and praise notes from managers to show during interviews with potential employers upon graduation.

Summary. Overall, today's student employees, also known as Millennials, want to work and succeed (Knofla, 2001). They must be fully aware of their role expectations and be given clear instructions so that they can be successful. In turn, they will build upon their self-efficacy and increase their organizational identification (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Bandura, 1997; Katz & Kahn, 1978; Schuler, 1979).

Call Centers

The research site of the present study is Madison Connection, which is a JMU-operated call center designed to solicit alumni donations. The researcher will provide a review of the call center literature. Topics in this section will include: the history and description of call centers, as well as university call centers.

History of call centers. As previously mentioned in Chapter 1, there is debate as to when telemarketing began (Hamilton & Jackson, 2004; Hillmer et al., 2004; Jackson, 2010; Moss et al., 2008; Spencer et al., 1990). Paulet (2004) even asserts that research on the history and development of the call center industry has been overlooked. Nonetheless, estimated time frames of the industry's emergence include the 1920s (Spencer et al., 1990), during World War II (Hamilton & Jackson, 2004), the 1960s (Hillmer et al., 2004; Jackson, 2010), and the early 1980s (Moss et al., 2008). Researchers also disagree with who founded the industry (Hamilton & Jackson, 2004; Hillmer et al., 2004; Jackson, 2010; Spencer et al., 1990). Suggested originators include con artists who tried to deceive penny stock investors (Spencer et al., 1990); insurance agents who had to rely on the telephone due to gas rationing in World War II (Hamilton & Jackson, 2004); the aviation industry (Hillmer et al., 2004); and Murray Roman, who opened Campaign Communications as a means to sell subscriptions for the *Saturday Review* (Jackson, 2010).

Overview of call centers. Batt (2002) defines a call center as an office that provides service and/or sales to customers via telephone. Call centers provide various functions including: customer service, help desk, emergency response services, telemarketing, and order taking (Gans, Koole, & Mandelbaum, 2003; Spencer et al., 1990). These offices range in size and scope from small sites with few employees (i.e., agents, telemarketers) to large national and international sites that employ thousands of agents. A majority of these employees work within a large room of open-space cubicles, sitting in front of computer terminals and wearing headsets (Gans et al., 2003).

One primary characteristic of a call center is whether it is inbound or outbound in nature (Gans et al., 2003; Lazo, 2008). Inbound call centers receive phone calls from customers (Nicholson, 2009). These types of centers provide customer support, help-desk services, sales support, and order-taking functions (Gans et al., 2003). On the other hand, outbound call centers initiate phone calls (Nicholson, 2009). These centers are primarily associated with telemarketing and survey research (Gans et al., 2003). According to Lazo (2008), most studies either consider inbound call centers or both types. Lazo (2008) and Gans et al. (2003) even claim that the only scholarly article that focused only on outbound call centers was conducted by Samuelson in 1999. One possible reason for the lack of literature in outbound call centers is that 80% of call centers are inbound (Nicholson, 2009). In addition, Moss et al. (2008) contend that inbound call centers are more likely to change its operations versus outbound call centers. Nonetheless, researchers have urged other researchers to study outbound call centers (Gray, 2009; Tuten & Neidermeyer, 2004). The present study focuses on an outbound call center within a university.

University call centers. Porteus (2001) asserts that a new generation of call centers is emerging—those affiliated in education. Universities have adopted call centers as a means to answer prospective students' and their parents' questions about admissions criteria (Gomm, 2005; Porteus, 2001), as well as to solicit alumni donations (Wallace, 1996). For the purposes of this study, the researcher will only focus on the fundraising aspect of university call centers.

According to Wallace (1996), "university fund raising is a tough business. There's no product to sell—only that warm feeling that people get from doing something good" (p. 26). State funding for higher education is continuously declining (Wallace, 1996; Weerts et al., 2010; Weerts & Ronca, 2009); therefore, public institutions rely on charitable alumni donations as a source of revenue (Bingham et al., 2002; McAlexander & Koenig, 2001; Quigley et al., 2002). Nonetheless, Joe Bradley, director of annual giving at the University of Delaware claims: "The key to successful university fund raising is having the information at hand to personalize appeals and cement relationships" (Wallace, 1996, p. 29). College and university personnel find that using call centers makes fundraising efforts more personal, allows alumni donors to ask questions and communicate concerns, and produces better results. Employees within these centers are able to increase donations and nurture alumni relationships simultaneously.

Summary. The researcher conducted the present study with the student employees of Madison Connection. Results from the study will add to the literature of call centers based in the United States and outbound in nature. In addition, it will add to the literature regarding university call centers.

Summary

The researcher has provided a theoretical framework of the present study, which includes the following theories: social learning theory (Bandura, 1969, 1977, 1978); self-efficacy theory (Bandura 1969, 1978, 1997); role theory (Kahn & Katz, 1978); and social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). She also reviewed the literature on student employees and call centers. In the next chapter, the researcher will discuss the methodology used in the present study.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The purpose of this study was to examine how student employees perceive their role as call center employees, as well as how these perceptions change over time. The researcher also considered organizational identification and self-efficacy as factors in this change. Therefore, the research questions for this study include:

R_1: What are the role perceptions of student employees who work as outbound call center employees, and how do these perceptions change over time?

R_2: What is the relationship, positive or negative, between role perception and organizational identification?

R_3: What is the relationship, positive or negative, between role perception and self-efficacy?

To answer the research questions, the researcher used a mixed-methods approach, collecting both quantitative survey and qualitative interview data. This approach strengthens the study because it provides a more comprehensive analysis of the situation versus selecting either a quantitative or qualitative approach (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006). The remainder of this chapter will describe the research formulation, sample, and design.

Research Formulation

This study was formulated through a review of relevant research literature, insight from her thesis committee, and the researcher's passion for the subject. As previously mentioned, she has worked at both inbound and outbound call centers; therefore, she intended to conduct a study that would contribute to the call center industry. Upon receiving advice from her committee, the researcher decided to conduct research with Madison Connection at James Madison University in Harrisonburg, Va. While the nature of Madison Connection and other outbound call centers may be different, the researcher argues that the findings from this study can be applied to call centers of various types.

Obtaining site and research approval. On August 30, 2010, the researcher met with the university's associate director of annual giving and the coordinator of Madison Connection to explain her research protocol and request permission to use their site for research. The researcher also discussed participant confidentiality, data collection, and delivery of results. These components will be described later in this chapter. Both the associate director and the call center coordinator were extremely supportive and granted permission. The researcher drafted a Site Permission Letter (see Appendix A, page 81), in which the call center coordinator signed.

Upon obtaining site approval, the researcher completed the research protocol, as outlined by James Madison University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) (see Appendix B, page 82). The researcher submitted the research protocol on September 17, 2010, and obtained IRB approval on September 22, 2010. Data collection began on September 29, 2010, and ended on November 16, 2010.

Description of Sample

The population of this study included student employees of university call centers in the United States. However, the accessible population and available sample for this study comprised all 38 student employees of James Madison University's outbound call center, Madison Connection. Twenty-six (68.4%) were new employees who began working in early September 2010, and 12 (31.6%) were returning employees who worked at the call center previously. All participants were sophomores, juniors, and seniors of the university.

Due to the relatively low number of student employees, the researcher distributed the survey to all 38 student employees. For the interview protocol, the researcher selected a convenience sample of four student employees (two new employees and two returning employees). Of the four student employees, a male was selected as a means to create a sample that was more representative of Madison Connection's population. Figure 3.1 shows the representativeness of the interview sample in accordance with Madison Connection's Fall 2010 population (call center coordinator, personal communication, September 1, 2010).

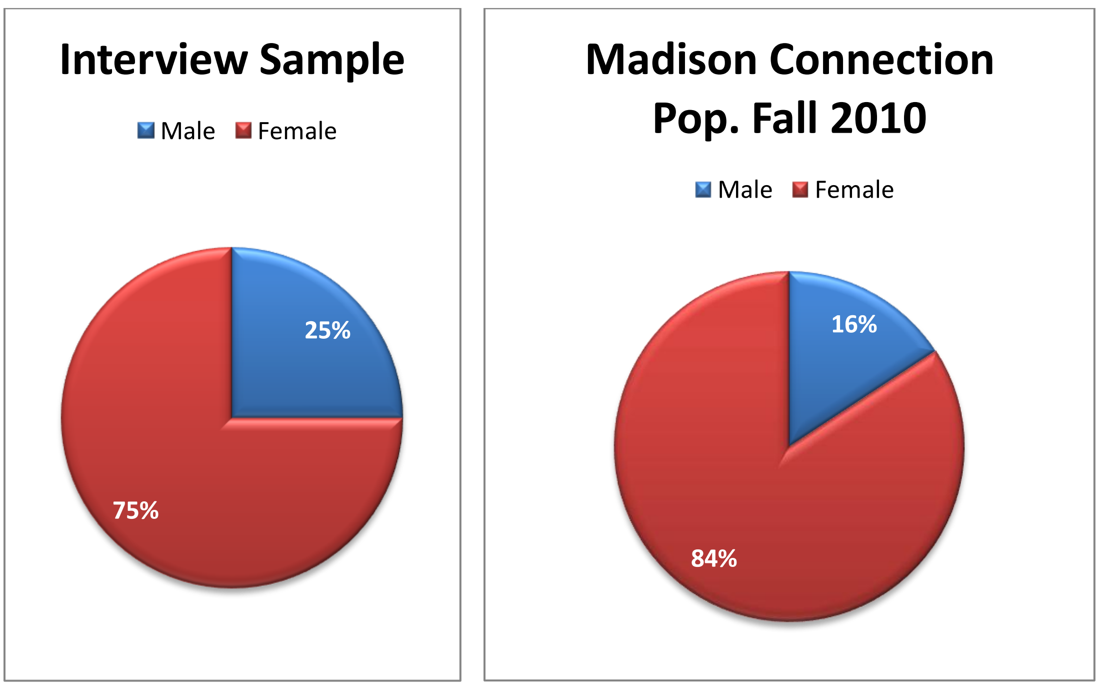

Figure 3.1. Gender Comparison of Interview Sample and Madison Connection Population Fall 2010. Interview sample (n=4), Madison Connection (n=38).

Survey Instrumentation

The survey portion of this study was created using Qualtrics™, an online survey database system sponsored by James Madison University. The researcher incorporated several design principles to ensure effectiveness and reduce abandonment. For example, the researcher included a welcome screen to motivate the employees to proceed with the survey (Mitra, Jain-Shukla, Robbins, Champion, & Durant, 2008; Umbach, 2004), as well as a progress bar to indicate how much of the survey they completed (Couper, Traugott, & Lamias, 2001; Crawford et al., 2001; Umbach, 2004).

Overall, the electronic survey comprised 33 questions, which were divided into four sections: demographics, organizational identification, role perception, and self-efficacy. The survey was designed to take no longer than 10 minutes to complete. The five demographic questions were developed by the researcher and validated by her thesis committee and peers. The questions for the remaining sections were borrowed from various scales found in the literature (Chen, Gully, & Eden, 2001; Mael & Ashforth, 1992; Rizzo, House, & Lirtzman, 1970).

Organizational identification. The researcher measured organizational identification by using Mael's (Mael & Ashforth, 1992) six-item scale. Responses ranged from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (5). Coefficient alpha was 0.87.

Role perception. Role perception was measured using Rizzo, House, and Lirtzman's (1970) eight-item role conflict scale and six-item role ambiguity scale. Responses ranged from "very false" (1) to "very true" (7). Coefficient alpha values for the role conflict scale ranged from 0.71 to 0.87, while the coefficient alpha values for the role ambiguity scale ranged from 0.71 to 0.95 (Fields, 2002).

Self-efficacy. The researcher measured self-efficacy using Chen, Gully, and Eden's (2001) New General Self-Efficacy Scale. This eight-item scale was scored on a

5-point Likert-type scale from “strongly disagree” (1) to “strongly agree” (5). Coefficient alpha values ranged from 0.86 to 0.90.

Interview Protocol

The qualitative component of this study consisted of a seven-item semi-structured interview. The researcher used a semi-structured interview format for several reasons. The interviews should be highly focused so that the interviewees’ time was used efficiently (Creswell, 1998; Patton, 2002); in addition, the format allows responses to be easily analyzed and compared (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006; Patton, 2002). When comparing responses over time, Patton (2002) asserts that the same questions need to be asked each time.

The researcher developed these questions as a way to elicit specific answers from the employees (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006). The questions were reviewed by her thesis committee, as well as her colleagues within her graduate program. Overall, responses to the questions provided a better understanding of the research variables at hand: role perception, organizational identification, and self-efficacy. Table 3.1 displays which variables the questions address.

Table 3.1

Interview Questions and Corresponding Variables

Question	Variable
Are you a new or returning employee?	N/A (demographic)
Why did you decide to apply for a job at Madison Connection?	Organizational identification
Explain how training had an effect on your understanding of your role.	Role perception (role ambiguity)
In your first few weeks, did you ever feel you didn't know what you were doing?	Role perception (role ambiguity)
Thus far, have you ever felt you had to "cut corners" or not follow policy in order to get a task done?	Role perception (role conflict)
Do you feel you know the duties of your job well (Do you feel that you have this job "in the bag")?	Self-efficacy
How do you feel about being a student at JMU?	Organizational identification

Data Collection

The researcher used a mixed-methods design for this study for several reasons. First, the sample size was relatively small; therefore, the researcher used qualitative data as a means to explain and validate the quantitative findings (Creswell, 1998; Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006; Plano Clark, Creswell, Green, & Shope, 2008). In addition, a mixed-methods design results in a better understanding of the problem being studied (Creswell, 1998; Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006; Plano Clark et al., 2008) and reduces researcher bias (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006). Overall, this study occurred in two phases, as illustrated in Figure 3.2.

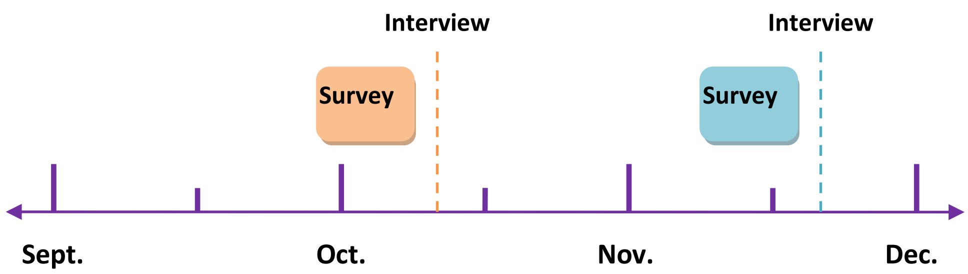

Figure 3.2. Phases of Study

Phase 1 Survey. The first phase began on September 29, 2010. The researcher sent the call center coordinator an e-mail to forward to the 38 student employees. The e-mail included a cover letter explaining the purpose of the research study and requesting their consent to participate, as well as the hyperlink to the survey (see Appendix C, page 89). Results from Joinson and Reips' (2007) study illustrate that students who receive surveys via a personalized e-mail from a high power source (e.g., the call center coordinator) are more likely to respond than those who receive them from a neutral power source (e.g., the researcher). To increase response rates, the researcher asked the call center coordinator to e-mail a reminder to the employees about taking the survey two days after the initial e-mail (Crawford, Couper, & Lamias, 2001; Muñoz-Leiva, Sánchez-Fernández, Montoro-Ríos, & Ibáñez-Zapata, 2010; Umbach, 2004). Out of the 38 student employees who received the e-mail, 32 (84%) opened the survey. However, 29 student employees completed the survey, which results in a 76% completion rate. The three incomplete responses were discarded. The researcher closed the survey on October 6, 2010.

Phase 1 Interview Protocol. On October 10, 2010, the researcher individually interviewed four employees: two new employees and two returning employees. The call center coordinator granted the researcher permission to conduct the interviews at Madison Connection. Specifically, the researcher conducted the interviews in the student manager's office, where no one was able to hear the content of the interview. The researcher also asked the student manager not to enter the room during the interviews. Before the interviews were conducted, the researcher presented the interviewees with an informed consent letter (see Appendix D, page 91). Interviewees were able to ask questions before agreeing to participate in the interview. All qualitative data were recorded using Audacity, a free digital audio editor.

Phase 2 Survey. The second phase of the study began on November 9, 2010. Once again, the researcher sent the call center coordinator the cover letter and survey link to forward to the 38 student employees. Out of the 38 student employees who received the e-mail, 24 (63%) opened the survey. However, 20 of them (53%) completed the survey. The four incomplete responses were discarded. The call center coordinator sent reminder e-mails to the employees, and the researcher closed the survey on November 16, 2010.

Phase 2 Interview Protocol. On November 18, 2010, the researcher went to Madison Connection to interview the same four employees; however, one of the employees had resigned due to his busy schedule (call center coordinator, personal communication, November 18, 2010). The researcher's thesis chairperson suggested interviewing the three remaining employees. Because the study is a mixed-methods approach, their interview responses would suffice in explaining and validating the survey results (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006; Plano Clark et al., 2008). Again, the researcher presented each interviewee with an informed consent letter for signature. Interviews were conducted in the break room, because the student manager office was in use. The researcher asked the student manager to ensure that no one entered the break room during the interviews. Again, all qualitative data were recorded through Audacity.

Data Analysis / Protection of Participants

As previously mentioned, responses to the survey were collected via Qualtrics™, and the researcher collected the interview responses via Audacity. The quantitative data collected through Qualtrics™ were analyzed using the survey software, as well as SPSS. In addition, the qualitative data were coded using Microsoft® Office Word 2007. Each interviewee was given a code name (e.g., N1, R2, R3, N4). “N” denotes a new employee, while “R” denotes a returning employee. Upon completion of the interviews, the researcher transcribed the responses and secured the data in a closet in a locked file cabinet located in Memorial Hall, room 3345A. The senior administrative assistant to the Learning, Technology, and Leadership Education department chair controls access to this locked file cabinet. The only individuals who have the potential to access the raw data include: the senior administrative assistant, the department chair, the researcher’s thesis chair, and the researcher.

Summary

This chapter highlighted how the researcher formulated the study, as well as her rationale for the study’s methodology. The researcher also explicitly described the sample and data collection process. The next chapter will focus on the researcher’s methods of analyzing the data, as well as the research findings.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis

To examine the student employees' role perceptions (and how they changed over time), organizational identification, and self-efficacy, the researcher used a mixed-methods design. Quantitative data were collected twice via Qualtrics™, an online survey database; qualitative data were collected twice via semi-structured interviews recorded through Audacity, a free digital audio editor. The remainder of this chapter will describe the analysis procedures, as well as display and explain the results.

Storage of Data

Quantitative survey data were stored in the Qualtrics™ survey database within the researcher's password-protected account. Interview transcriptions were stored in a locked file cabinet, located in Memorial Hall, room 3345A. Individuals with access to this file cabinet comprised the Learning, Technology, and Leadership Education Department's senior administrative assistant and department chair, as well as the researcher and her thesis chair.

Data Analysis Procedures

To analyze the quantitative survey data, the researcher used descriptive and inferential statistical tests. To examine the qualitative data, the researcher used a coding system. She will describe these procedures in detail.

Quantitative survey data analysis. The researcher used both descriptive and inferential statistics to analyze the quantitative survey data. Specifically, she used PASW 18.0 (i.e., SPSS) to conduct independent sample *t*-tests and Spearman correlation tests. She also used means to describe central tendency.

Independent sample *t*-tests were conducted and means were analyzed to examine the first hypothesis ($\boldsymbol{H_1}$). Subject matter experts within James Madison University's

Department of Mathematics and Statistics strongly recommended these tests for the purposes of the present study.

> ***H_1***: Initially, the student employees will have a positive perception of their roles. Over time, the new employees will have a less positive perception than their experienced counterparts.

The independent sample *t*-tests were more suitable than ANOVA tests, because the researcher only compared two groups (Cone & Foster, 2006). In addition, a *t*-test for independent samples was used because different participants were in the two groups. For example, the 11 new employees who took the first survey more than likely were not the same 11 new employees who took the second survey.

Spearman correlation tests were conducted to assess the second and third hypotheses (***H_2*** and ***H_3***):

> ***H_2***: Role perception and organizational identification have a positive relationship.
>
> ***H_3***: Role perception and self-efficacy have a positive relationship.

For the purposes of this study, the Spearman correlation tests were more suitable than Pearson correlation tests (Cone & Foster, 2006). The reason is that the researcher's data on both sets of variables (i.e., role perception and organizational identification; role perception and self-efficacy) were ordinal, or able to be ranked-ordered (Trochim, 2006).

Qualitative interview data analysis. To analyze the qualitative interview data, the researcher transcribed the interviews to ensure accuracy (Patton, 2002), and she coded the responses using a priori codes. According to Patton, a priori elements are inevitable in all scientific research; specific questions must be asked before answers are given. An excerpt of the coded qualitative data can be found in Appendix E, page 93. In addition, she asked a colleague who had recently graduated from her degree program to conduct an external audit on the qualitative results. In doing so, the auditor evaluated the researcher's interpretation of the data, which minimized researcher bias and enhanced the study's credibility (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The external auditor was selected after the end of the study. Lincoln and Guba (1985) claim that external auditors selected toward the study's termination are less involved in the study; therefore, they are fairer than those external auditors selected at the beginning of the study. Another way in which the researcher minimized bias and enhanced the study's validity is through triangulation (Creswell, 1998; Creswell & Miller, 2000; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2002). She used both quantitative and qualitative data to strengthen the study.

Quantitative and Qualitative Data Results

In this section, the researcher will provide the results of the study. Rather than displaying results for each question from each phase's survey and interviews, she will organize the data results according to the research questions and hypotheses. In doing so, she will guide the reader in focusing on what is most relevant to the study.

Role perceptions. The primary research question ($\boldsymbol{R_1}$) and hypothesis ($\boldsymbol{H_1}$) are as follows:

$\boldsymbol{R_1}$: What are the role perceptions of student employees who work as outbound call center employees, and how do these perceptions change over time?

H_1: Initially, the student employees will have a positive perception of their roles. Over time, the new employees will have a less positive perception than their experienced counterparts.

Tables 4.1 and 4.2 illustrate the results of the independent sample *t*-tests from the role perception sections of the first and second surveys, respectively. The purple-shaded boxes indicate the most important portion of the table.

Table 4.1

Independent Sample *t*-Test Results: Survey 1

		t-test for Equality of Means						
							95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
RPQ1	Equal variances assumed	-.440	27	.664	-.16667	.37915	-.94461	.61128
	Equal variances not assumed	-.478	26.306	.637	-.16667	.34862	-.88287	.54954
RPQ2	Equal variances assumed	.385	27	.703	.16667	.43261	-.72097	1.05430
	Equal variances not assumed	.403	24.289	.690	.16667	.41349	-.68620	1.01953
RPQ3	Equal variances assumed	-.108	27	.915	-.03030	.28090	-.60666	.54605
	Equal variances not assumed	-.121	27.000	.904	-.03030	.24971	-.54267	.48206
RPQ4	Equal variances assumed	-.332	27	.742	-.13636	.41038	-.97839	.70566
	Equal variances not assumed	-.381	26.743	.706	-.13636	.35766	-.87056	.59783
RPQ5	Equal variances assumed	-.115	27	.909	-.04040	.35128	-.76117	.68036
	Equal variances not assumed	-.117	22.569	.908	-.04040	.34468	-.75418	.67337
RPQ6	Equal variances assumed	-1.162	27	.256	-.30303	.26087	-.83830	.23224
	Equal variances not assumed	-1.077	16.615	.297	-.30303	.28127	-.89750	.29144
RPQ7	Equal variances assumed	-.295	27	.770	-.17677	.59988	-1.40763	1.05409
	Equal variances not assumed	-.277	17.355	.785	-.17677	.63825	-1.52126	1.16772
RPQ8	Equal variances assumed	-.566	27	.576	-.29293	.51774	-1.35524	.76938
	Equal variances not assumed	-.583	23.297	.566	-.29293	.50253	-1.33175	.74589
RPQ9	Equal variances assumed	-.073	27	.942	-.04545	.62160	-1.32086	1.22995
	Equal variances not assumed	-.075	23.197	.941	-.04545	.60424	-1.29484	1.20393

RPQ10	Equal variances assumed	-1.505	27	.144	-.93434	.62062	-2.20776	.33907
	Equal variances not assumed	-1.600	25.208	.122	-.93434	.58403	-2.13667	.26798
RPQ11	Equal variances assumed	-.707	27	.485	-.42929	.60697	-1.67469	.81610
	Equal variances not assumed	-.753	25.342	.458	-.42929	.56977	-1.60195	.74337
RPQ12	Equal variances assumed	-.833	27	.412	-.44444	.53338	-1.53884	.64995
	Equal variances not assumed	-.884	25.100	.385	-.44444	.50290	-1.47998	.59109
RPQ13	Equal variances assumed	-1.545	27	.134	-.46970	.30408	-1.09362	.15423
	Equal variances not assumed	-1.769	26.795	.088	-.46970	.26557	-1.01479	.07540
RPQ14	Equal variances assumed	-1.438	27	.162	-.71212	.49532	-1.72843	.30419
	Equal variances not assumed	-1.701	25.298	.101	-.71212	.41872	-1.57398	.14974

Note. RPQ# indicates Role Perception Question #. For example, RPQ1 indicates the first question in the survey that measures role perception.

Table 4.2

Independent Sample *t*-Test Results: Survey 2

		t-test for Equality of Means						
							95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
RPQ1	Equal variances assumed	-.852	18	.405	-.44444	.52140	-1.53986	.65097
	Equal variances not assumed	-.872	17.998	.395	-.44444	.50956	-1.51500	.62611
RPQ2	Equal variances assumed	-.200	18	.844	-.06061	.30303	-.69725	.57604
	Equal variances not assumed	-.198	16.510	.845	-.06061	.30590	-.70745	.58624
RPQ3	Equal variances assumed	-.677	18	.507	-.16162	.23856	-.66281	.33958
	Equal variances not assumed	-.720	15.505	.482	-.16162	.22442	-.63859	.31536
RPQ4	Equal variances assumed	-1.217	18	.239	-.32323	.26555	-.88112	.23466
	Equal variances not assumed	-1.272	17.161	.220	-.32323	.25413	-.85901	.21255
RPQ5	Equal variances assumed	.604	18	.554	.27273	.45173	-.67632	1.22178
	Equal variances not assumed	.566	11.095	.583	.27273	.48214	-.78736	1.33281
RPQ6	Equal variances assumed	-1.751	18	.097	-.70707	.40376	-1.55534	.14120
	Equal variances not assumed	-1.915	11.943	.080	-.70707	.36921	-1.51193	.09779
RPQ7	Equal variances assumed	-1.225	18	.236	-.80808	.65962	-2.19390	.57774
	Equal variances not assumed	-1.193	14.872	.252	-.80808	.67754	-2.25330	.63714
RPQ8	Equal variances assumed	.108	18	.916	.07071	.65756	-1.31077	1.45218
	Equal variances not assumed	.102	12.379	.920	.07071	.69227	-1.43251	1.57393
RPQ9	Equal variances assumed	.723	18	.479	.54545	.75454	-1.03977	2.13068
	Equal variances not assumed	.713	16.076	.486	.54545	.76544	-1.07659	2.16750

RPQ10	Equal variances assumed	-.757	18	.459	-.59596	.78704	-2.24948	1.05756
	Equal variances not assumed	-.743	15.632	.469	-.59596	.80222	-2.29985	1.10793
RPQ11	Equal variances assumed	-.071	18	.945	-.04040	.57239	-1.24295	1.16214
	Equal variances not assumed	-.069	15.684	.946	-.04040	.58311	-1.27857	1.19776
RPQ12	Equal variances assumed	-.714	18	.485	-.47475	.66527	-1.87243	.92293
	Equal variances not assumed	-.708	16.682	.488	-.47475	.67017	-1.89073	.94124
RPQ13	Equal variances assumed	-.432	18	.671	-.22222	.51417	-1.30246	.85801
	Equal variances not assumed	-.436	17.688	.668	-.22222	.50989	-1.29482	.85038
RPQ14	Equal variances assumed	.439	18	.666	.32323	.73614	-1.22333	1.86979
	Equal variances not assumed	.435	16.528	.669	.32323	.74294	-1.24764	1.89411

Note. RPQ# indicates Role Perception Question #. For example, RPQ1 indicates the first question in the survey that measures role perception.

As previously mentioned, the purple-shaded boxes display the most important information in the tables. These results indicate that there was no statistically significant difference between the new employees and returning employees' perceptions of their role. However, these results support the part of the researcher's hypothesis that assumed that there would be no difference, because the student employees (both new and returning) would have a positive perception of their role. To measure whether the new employees had a positive perception of their role (i.e., low role conflict and ambiguity), the researcher analyzed the means of the scales. Table 4.3 depicts the means of the role perception section of the first survey to indicate whether the student employees had a positive perception of the role.

Table 4.3

Role Perception Means: Survey 1

	Employee1	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
RPQ1	.00	11	6.0000	.77460	.23355
	1.00	18	6.1667	1.09813	.25883
RPQ2	.00	11	6.0000	1.00000	.30151
	1.00	18	5.8333	1.20049	.28296
RPQ3	.00	11	6.6364	.50452	.15212
	1.00	18	6.6667	.84017	.19803
RPQ4	.00	11	6.3636	.67420	.20328
	1.00	18	6.5000	1.24853	.29428
RPQ5	.00	11	6.1818	.87386	.26348
	1.00	18	6.2222	.94281	.22222
RPQ6	.00	11	6.3636	.80904	.24393
	1.00	18	6.6667	.59409	.14003
RPQ7	.00	11	4.5455	1.80907	.54545
	1.00	18	4.7222	1.40610	.33142
RPQ8	.00	11	1.8182	1.25045	.37703
	1.00	18	2.1111	1.40958	.33224
RPQ9	.00	11	2.4545	1.50756	.45455
	1.00	18	2.5000	1.68907	.39812
RPQ10	.00	11	2.4545	1.36848	.41261
	1.00	18	3.3889	1.75361	.41333
RPQ11	.00	11	2.1818	1.32802	.40041
	1.00	18	2.6111	1.71974	.40535
RPQ12	.00	11	2.0000	1.18322	.35675
	1.00	18	2.4444	1.50381	.35445
RPQ13	.00	11	1.3636	.50452	.15212
	1.00	18	1.8333	.92355	.21768
RPQ14	.00	11	1.4545	.68755	.20730
	1.00	18	2.1667	1.54349	.36380

Note. .00 represents the new employees (n=11), and 1.00 represents the returning employees (n=18). In addition, RPQ# indicates Role Perception Question #.

Role perception was measured using Rizzo, House, and Lirtzman's (1970) six-item role ambiguity scale and eight-item role conflict scale. Responses ranged from "very false" (1) to "very true" (7). The first six questions in the survey represent role ambiguity; thus, mean values between 5 and 7 indicate low role ambiguity. As shown in Table 4.3, the mean values were within that range. Therefore, within 30 days of employment, the student employees generally perceived that they knew what was expected of them. During the first phase of interviews, a majority of the employees cited training (e.g., performing mock calls, shadowing returning employees) as a factor in the low role ambiguity.

The role conflict scale is reverse-scored; therefore, mean values from 1 to 3 indicate low role conflict. Table 4.3 shows that all the mean values fell within that range, except for Question 7, the first question in the role conflict scale. The statement is: "I have to do things that should be done differently under certain conditions." Its mean values were 4.54 for the new employees and 4.72 for the returning employees. Half of the interviewees mentioned that when they were told to ask certain alumni for large donations, they refused because of the bad economy. They feared that the alumni would choose not to donate at all, if presented with a high amount to give. Nonetheless, the means show that in general, the student employees had low role conflict, as well.

To analyze how the student employees' perceptions changed over time, the researcher compared the means of the role perception sections of the first and second surveys. Table 4.4 illustrates the comparison.

Table 4.4

Comparison of Role Perception Means: Surveys 1 and 2

	Employee1	Mean	Mean
RPQ1	.00	6.0000	6.0000
	1.00	6.1667	6.4444
RPQ2	.00	6.0000	6.2727
	1.00	5.8333	6.3333
RPQ3	.00	6.6364	6.7273
	1.00	6.6667	6.8889
RPQ4	.00	6.3636	6.4545
	1.00	6.5000	6.7778
RPQ5	.00	6.1818	6.2727
	1.00	6.2222	6.0000
RPQ6	.00	6.3636	6.1818
	1.00	6.6667	6.8889
RPQ7	.00	4.5455	4.6364
	1.00	4.7222	5.4444
RPQ8	.00	1.8182	2.1818
	1.00	2.1111	2.1111
RPQ9	.00	2.4545	2.5455
	1.00	2.5000	2.0000
RPQ10	.00	2.4545	3.1818
	1.00	3.3889	3.7778
RPQ11	.00	2.1818	2.1818
	1.00	2.6111	2.2222
RPQ12	.00	2.0000	2.6364
	1.00	2.4444	3.1111
RPQ13	.00	1.3636	2.0000
	1.00	1.8333	2.2222
RPQ14	.00	1.4545	2.5455
	1.00	2.1667	2.2222

Note. .00 represents the new employees, and 1.00 represents the returning employees. RPQ# indicates Role Perception Question #.

[a] New employees (n=11) and returning employees (n=18)

[b] New employees (n=11) and returning employees (n=9)

Rows shaded in green represent a slight change for the better. Rows shaded in yellow indicate no change, and rows shaded in red represent a slight change for the worse. Most of these changes in mean averages were not by much; however, the researcher would like to highlight a few of them. For the new employees, the following statements changed by at least .5 points for the worse:

RPQ10: I work with two or more groups that operate quite differently. (.73 points)

RPQ12: I do things that are apt to be accepted by one person and not others. (.63 points)

RPQ13: I receive an assignment without adequate resources or materials to execute it. (.64 points)

RPQ14: I work on unnecessary things. (1.09 points)

No qualitative interview data explained the changes in statements 10 and 12. However, in statement 13, one interviewee recalled an incident in which another campus organization worked with the call center. The interviewee was confused by the assignment and did not think that the managers helped as much in the situation as desired. In terms of statement 14, another interviewee mentioned that the job was a bit repetitive; however, repetitive things do not equate to unnecessary things.

For the returning employees, the following statements changed by at least .5 points:

RPQ2: I know that I have divided my time properly. (.5 change for better)

RPQ7: I have to do things that should be done differently under certain conditions. (.72 change for worse)

RPQ9: I have to buck a rule or policy in order to carry out an assignment. (.5 change for better)

RPQ12: I do things that are apt to be accepted by one person and not by others. (.67 change for worse)

For statement 2, interviewees expressed their confidence in knowing what they were doing, which explains the improvement in time management. In statement 7, an interviewee revealed non-compliance with reading the script and asking for specified amounts of donations; however, this interview data goes against the results from statement 9, which indicate that more returning employees did not have to challenge rules or policies. Statement 12 was not supported by the interview data.

All in all, the results from the *t*-tests and comparison of means show that the student employees experienced low role ambiguity and conflict, thus having a positive perception of their roles. This finding goes against other studies in which call center employees were found to experience high levels of role ambiguity and conflict (de Ruyter et al., 2001; Dean & Rainnie, 2007; Dwyer & Fox, 2006; Johnson et al., 2005; Lazo, 2008; Tuten & Neidermeyer, 2004). Over time, the new employees experienced slightly more role conflict, which supports Chang and Choi's (2007) concept of leaving the honeymoon phase and entering the encounter stage, which is characterized by experiencing reality shocks and unmet expectations. Nonetheless, the new employees experienced slightly less role ambiguity, which resulted from working for a longer period of time.

Role perception and organizational identification. The second research question ($\boldsymbol{R_2}$) and hypothesis ($\boldsymbol{H_2}$) are follows:

R_2: What is the relationship, positive or negative, between role perception and organizational identification?

H_2: Role perception and organizational identification have a positive relationship.

Tables 4.5 and 4.6 illustrate the results of the Spearman correlation tests from the role perception and organizational identification sections of the first and second surveys, respectively.

Table 4.5

Role Perception and Organizational Identification: Survey 1

			OIQ1	OIQ2	OIQ3	OIQ4	OIQ5	OIQ6
Spearman's rho	RPQ1	Correlation Coefficient	.817**	.630**	.687**	.587**	.696**	.730**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.001	.000	.000
	RPQ2	Correlation Coefficient	.891**	.815**	.760**	.862**	.838**	.822**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
	RPQ3	Correlation Coefficient	.688**	.544**	.818**	.688**	.677**	.417*
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.002	.000	.000	.000	.024
	RPQ4	Correlation Coefficient	.804**	.583**	.814**	.687**	.658**	.484**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.001	.000	.000	.000	.008
	RPQ5	Correlation Coefficient	.870**	.676**	.800**	.751**	.838**	.728**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
	RPQ6	Correlation Coefficient	.849**	.618**	.815**	.686**	.763**	.529**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.003
	RPQ7	Correlation Coefficient	.882**	.845**	.648**	.866**	.852**	.765**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
	RPQ8	Correlation Coefficient	.846**	.786**	.513**	.745**	.709**	.813**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.004	.000	.000	.000
	RPQ9	Correlation Coefficient	.819**	.709**	.546**	.731**	.884**	.784**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.002	.000	.000	.000
	RPQ10	Correlation Coefficient	.916**	.778**	.756**	.759**	.742**	.752**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
	RPQ11	Correlation Coefficient	.929**	.768**	.631**	.800**	.804**	.802**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
	RPQ12	Correlation Coefficient	.894**	.771**	.599**	.729**	.818**	.843**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.001	.000	.000	.000
	RPQ13	Correlation Coefficient	.813**	.710**	.521**	.679**	.686**	.767**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.004	.000	.000	.000
	RPQ14	Correlation Coefficient	.795**	.726**	.485**	.689**	.726**	.792**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.008	.000	.000	.000

Notes. n=29. *p < .05. **p < .01. RPQ# indicates Role Perception Question #, and OI indicates Organizational Identification Question #.

Table 4.6

Role Perception and Organizational Identification: Survey 2

			OIQ1	OIQ2	OIQ3	OIQ4	OIQ5	OIQ6
Spearman's rho	RPQ1	Correlation Coefficient	.798**	.601**	.862**	.726**	.827**	.513*
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.005	.000	.000	.000	.021
	RPQ2	Correlation Coefficient	.711**	.693**	.808**	.776**	.822**	.497*
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.001	.000	.000	.000	.026
	RPQ3	Correlation Coefficient	.644**	.604**	.419	.565**	.616**	.465*
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.002	.005	.066	.009	.004	.039
	RPQ4	Correlation Coefficient	.682**	.536*	.725**	.620**	.707**	.459*
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.015	.000	.004	.000	.042
	RPQ5	Correlation Coefficient	.750**	.606**	.876**	.801**	.819**	.564**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.005	.000	.000	.000	.010
	RPQ6	Correlation Coefficient	.542*	.536*	.725**	.483*	.599**	.192
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.014	.015	.000	.031	.005	.417
	RPQ7	Correlation Coefficient	.690**	.616**	.876**	.744**	.825**	.329
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.004	.000	.000	.000	.157
	RPQ8	Correlation Coefficient	.789**	.660**	.625**	.851**	.881**	.603**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.002	.003	.000	.000	.005
	RPQ9	Correlation Coefficient	.720**	.638**	.715**	.790**	.786**	.608**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.002	.000	.000	.000	.004
	RPQ10	Correlation Coefficient	.873**	.701**	.856**	.797**	.874**	.484*
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.001	.000	.000	.000	.031
	RPQ11	Correlation Coefficient	.806**	.634**	.856**	.858**	.902**	.600**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.003	.000	.000	.000	.005
	RPQ12	Correlation Coefficient	.842**	.651**	.869**	.856**	.908**	.494*
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.002	.000	.000	.000	.027
	RPQ13	Correlation Coefficient	.840**	.689**	.854**	.779**	.888**	.503*
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.001	.000	.000	.000	.024
	RPQ14	Correlation Coefficient	.784**	.648**	.788**	.848**	.866**	.649**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.002	.000	.000	.000	.002

Notes. n=20. *$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. RPQ# indicates Role Perception Question #, and OI indicates Organizational Identification Question #.

Tables 4.5 and 4.6 show a statistically significant and positive correlation between role perception and organizational identification. Qualitative interview data also support this correlation. Almost all of the interviewees stated that they felt connected to both Madison Connection and James Madison University. In addition, they felt that working at Madison Connection aligned with their goals of promoting the university. One interviewee stated: “If this was any other job…I wouldn’t be as passionate about it.” Because they identify with their organization, they also reported relatively positive perceptions of their role. These results support Schaubroeck and Jones’ (2000) study. They found that employees with lower organizational identification reported higher levels of role stress (e.g., role ambiguity and role conflict). The present study found that employees with higher organizational identification reported lower levels of role stress, which indicates that organizational identification impacts role perception.

Role perception and self-efficacy. The third research question ($\boldsymbol{R_3}$) and hypothesis ($\boldsymbol{H_3}$) are as follows:

$\boldsymbol{R_3}$: What is the relationship, positive or negative, between role perception and self-efficacy?

$\boldsymbol{H_3}$: Role perception and self-efficacy have a positive relationship.

Tables 4.7 and 4.8 illustrate the results of the Spearman correlation tests from the role perception and self-efficacy sections of the first and second surveys, respectively.

Table 4.7

Role Perception and Self-Efficacy: Survey 1

			SEQ1	SEQ2	SEQ3	SEQ4	SEQ5	SEQ6	SEQ7	SEQ8
Spearman's rho	RPQ1	Correlation Coef.	.713**	.704**	.776**	.776**	.716**	.694**	.754**	.750**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
	RPQ2	Correlation Coef.	.790**	.806**	.760**	.760**	.769**	.797**	.829**	.871**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
	RPQ3	Correlation Coef.	.748**	.655**	.579**	.579**	.716**	.834**	.724**	.671**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.001	.001	.000	.000	.000	.000
	RPQ4	Correlation Coef.	.700**	.639**	.737**	.737**	.647**	.785**	.753**	.689**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
	RPQ5	Correlation Coef.	.812**	.801**	.903**	.903**	.834**	.808**	.796**	.797**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
	RPQ6	Correlation Coef.	.827**	.768**	.737**	.737**	.779**	.923**	.753**	.798**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
	RPQ7	Correlation Coef.	.744**	.721**	.854**	.854**	.747**	.692**	.746**	.783**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
	RPQ8	Correlation Coef.	.699**	.656**	.879**	.879**	.711**	.610**	.708**	.732**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
	RPQ9	Correlation Coef.	.736**	.689**	.864**	.864**	.757**	.650**	.716**	.745**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
	RPQ10	Correlation Coef.	.799**	.779**	.816**	.816**	.754**	.790**	.874**	.878**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
	RPQ11	Correlation Coef.	.841**	.786**	.875**	.875**	.804**	.750**	.745**	.817**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
	RPQ12	Correlation Coef.	.797**	.745**	.871**	.871**	.831**	.713**	.766**	.798**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
	RPQ13	Correlation Coef.	.713**	.669**	.892**	.892**	.722**	.620**	.732**	.714**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
	RPQ14	Correlation Coef.	.663**	.623**	.830**	.830**	.672**	.576**	.706**	.717**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.001	.000	.000

Notes. n=29. **p* < .05. ***p* < .01. RPQ# indicates Role Perception Question #, and SE indicates Self-Efficacy Question #.

Table 4.8

Role Perception and Self-Efficacy: Survey 2

			SEQ1	SEQ2	SEQ3	SEQ4	SEQ5	SEQ6	SEQ7	SEQ8
Spearman's rho	RPQ1	Correlation Coef.	.798**	.707**	.734**	.734**	.790**	.798**	.551*	.701**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.012	.001
	RPQ2	Correlation Coef.	.652**	.694**	.718**	.718**	.679**	.652**	.733**	.659**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.002	.001	.000	.000	.001	.002	.000	.002
	RPQ3	Correlation Coef.	.608**	.621**	.496*	.496*	.584**	.608**	.400	.646**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.004	.003	.026	.026	.007	.004	.080	.002
	RPQ4	Correlation Coef.	.665**	.579**	.675**	.675**	.659**	.665**	.441	.573**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.007	.001	.001	.002	.001	.052	.008
	RPQ5	Correlation Coef.	.753**	.768**	.795**	.795**	.761**	.753**	.791**	.753**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
	RPQ6	Correlation Coef.	.471*	.414	.490*	.490*	.482*	.471*	.289	.390
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.036	.070	.028	.028	.031	.036	.216	.089
	RPQ7	Correlation Coef.	.642**	.711**	.696**	.696**	.693**	.642**	.653**	.644**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.002	.000	.001	.001	.001	.002	.002	.002
	RPQ8	Correlation Coef.	.697**	.762**	.719**	.719**	.761**	.697**	.813**	.709**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.000	.000	.000	.000	.001	.000	.000
	RPQ9	Correlation Coef.	.625**	.705**	.740**	.740**	.701**	.625**	.743**	.662**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.003	.001	.000	.000	.001	.003	.000	.001
	RPQ10	Correlation Coef.	.828**	.852**	.831**	.831**	.870**	.828**	.743**	.842**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
	RPQ11	Correlation Coef.	.745**	.763**	.901**	.901**	.779**	.745**	.815**	.717**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
	RPQ12	Correlation Coef.	.816**	.827**	.804**	.804**	.854**	.816**	.725**	.774**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
	RPQ13	Correlation Coef.	.756**	.758**	.799**	.799**	.802**	.756**	.729**	.743**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
	RPQ14	Correlation Coef.	.702**	.749**	.843**	.843**	.746**	.702**	.811**	.693**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.000	.000	.000	.000	.001	.000	.001

Notes. n=20. *$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. RPQ# indicates Role Perception Question #, and SE indicates Self-Efficacy Question #.

Tables 4.7 and 4.8 show a statistically significant and positive correlation between role perception and self-efficacy. Once again, qualitative interview data support this correlation. All of the interviewees felt that they knew what they were doing, and one interviewee stated that "even if you are confused, you kinda figure it out on your own." These results support the Mulki et al. (2008) study, which confirmed that there was a negative relationship between self-efficacy and role conflict and role ambiguity. According to the authors, "salespeople who are confident in their abilities to complete job tasks are less likely to believe that job roles are ambiguous or in conflict" (p. 292). Therefore, self-efficacy also impacts role perception.

Summary

Overall, the results from this study support the researcher's hypotheses. Student employees at Madison Connection held positive perceptions of their roles, reporting low levels of role ambiguity and conflict. Over time, these perceptions remained positive; however, the new employees faced less role ambiguity, but more role conflict. The returning employees encountered some role conflict over time, but not significantly. In addition, the results found that organizational identification and self-efficacy has a positive relationship with role perception. Student employees with high levels of organizational identification and self-efficacy also reported lower levels of role ambiguity and conflict.

The final chapter will review how and why this study was conducted and interpret the findings. In addition, the researcher will provide recommendations for action and further research. The chapter will conclude with reflective remarks.

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations

The present study was conducted to examine the role perceptions of student employees who work at Madison Connection, an outbound call center operated for and by James Madison University in Harrisonburg, Va.; in addition, she wanted to measure how these role perceptions changed over time. The researcher also wanted to assess whether organizational identification and self-efficacy impacted these perceptions. To answer the research questions, she used a mixed-methods approach, collecting both quantitative survey data and qualitative interview data. In this chapter, the researcher will review the findings, discuss the limitations of the study, suggest recommendations for future research and action, and reflect upon her overall experience.

Interpretation of Findings

To review, the present study comprised the following research questions:

R_1: What are the role perceptions of student employees who work as outbound call center employees, and how do these perceptions change over time?

R_2: What is the relationship, positive or negative, between role perception and organizational identification?

R_3: What is the relationship, positive or negative, between role perception and self-efficacy?

Through analyzing the quantitative survey data and qualitative interview data, the researcher discovered the following:

A_1: The student employees who work as outbound call center employees held positive role perceptions, thus reporting low role ambiguity and conflict (see Table 4.3. page 63). Over time, these perceptions remained positive (see Table 4.4, page 65). The new employees, however, experienced more role conflict, but less role ambiguity. The returning employees also experienced role conflict, but not significantly.

***A_2*:** Role perception and organizational identification have a positive relationship (see Tables 4.5 and 4.6, pages 69 and 70).

***A_3*:** Role perception and self-efficacy have a positive relationship (see Tables 4.7 and 4.8, pages 72 and 73).

Overall, these findings support several studies (Chang & Choi, 2007; Mulki et al., 2008; Schaubroeck & Jones, 2000). However, most call center employees report having high role ambiguity and conflict (de Ruyter et al., 2001; Dean & Rainnie, 2007; Dwyer & Fox, 2006; Johnson et al., 2005; Lazo, 2008; Tuten & Neidermeyer, 2004). Nonetheless, this study showed that organizational identification and self-efficacy impacts role perception, as shown in the conceptual framework (page 2). In addition, the study supports the theoretical framework's (page 12) underlying message, as well: when employees understand their role, they have higher perceived self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997) and they trust their managers and co-workers (Schuler, 1979), thus enhancing their organizational identification (Ashforth & Mael, 1989); as a result, they have positive perceptions of their role (i.e., low role ambiguity and conflict) (Katz & Kahn, 1978).

Limitations of the Study

The main limitation of this study is the sample size. The researcher only conducted research at an outbound call center in one university; therefore, results may not be generalized to the entire population. However, this limitation prompts a need for future research, which the researcher will outline later in this chapter.

Another limitation involves the use of the organizational identification scale (Mael & Ashforth, 1992). In the survey, the researcher asked the participants to answer the question in terms of James Madison University, not Madison Connection, the actual organization. Nonetheless, the researcher was able to use qualitative interview data to determine the student employees' perceived oneness with the call center.

A third limitation of the study is time constraints. If the researcher had more time, she would have measured the role perceptions 30 days after employment and six months after employment. According to Chang and Choi (2007), the initial honeymoon period lasts between one and six months after employees enter the organization; however, because of the time constraints, the researcher conducted the second phase after two months of employment.

Recommendations for Further Study

Due to the limitations and scope of this study, the researcher offers several recommendations for future research. First, a longitudinal study of how role perceptions change over time is warranted. As previously mentioned, the researcher was only able to measure the student employees' role perceptions 30 days and 60 days after employment; however, the researcher thinks that a longer period of time (e.g., 30 days and six months) will generate interesting findings. Second, the researcher suggests a comparative study between two or more university call centers. The study's findings illustrate that the Madison Connection student employees had positive role perceptions, as well as high levels of organizational identification and self-efficacy; however, future research should examine whether this applies to other university call centers, as well. Lastly, the researcher recommends examining turnover and intent to turnover in university call centers. During the second phase of interviews, one of the participants resigned from the call center. Moreover, turnover is a major topic in the call center literature (Aksin et al., 2007; Batt, 2002; Carlaw, Carlaw, Deming, & Friedmann, 2002; de Ruyter et al., 2001; Gray, 2009; Hillmer et al., 2004; Kirby, 2006; Landale, 2002; Moss et al., 2008; Nicholson, 2009; Townsend, 2007; Tuten & Neidermeyer, 2004).

Recommendations for Action

As state funding for higher education continues to decrease (Wallace, 1996; Weerts et al., 2010; Weerts & Ronca, 2009), universities will need to rely on fundraising efforts to increase revenue. Call centers provide a way for universities to do so. Chapter 2 offered an extensive number of implications for call center managers of universities and beyond. The researcher purposefully targeted the managers because they usually enforce, promote, and sustain change efforts (Melaçon, 2007).

While reviewing the literature and interview findings, the researcher found that training was a major factor in setting and communicating clear role expectations, as well as building employees' self-efficacy and organizational identification. Therefore, during training, call center managers should:

- Ensure that the organization's mission, vision, values, and its policies and procedures are clearly communicated. In addition, be clear about expectations of them.
- Pair new employees with experienced employees so that they can shadow them and vicariously learn about role expectations and norms.
- Allot a sufficient amount of time for new employees to practice their duties before placing them in situations where they may not succeed.

- Provide feedback during training and beyond so that employees will know and understand in what areas they excel and in what areas they need to improve.
- Model the behaviors that are expected of the employees. Be sure that espoused values and behaviors align.

Reflective Remarks

Although the researcher chose the topic of call centers from her personal experience, she minimized researcher bias by using a mixed-methods approach and having a colleague conduct an external audit. Using a mixed-methods research design proved very helpful. The interviews allowed the researcher to understand and explain the survey results, and helped fill the gaps from the survey. For example, as previously mentioned, the researcher used the organizational identification scale to assess the student employees' identification with James Madison University rather than Madison Connection. However, one of the interview questions asked them why they chose to apply for a position with Madison Connection, and the interviewees' responses made up for the survey's shortcoming. One challenge of incorporating a mixed-methods approach was transcribing and coding the qualitative interview data. The process was time-consuming, yet necessary to explicate the survey results.

During the entire process, the researcher learned the importance of maintaining constant communication with her thesis chair. Her thesis chair provided her with relevant literature, as well as words of encouragement. She made the researcher's perceived mountains look like mole hills, and she appreciated her for her guidance. In addition, she learned the importance of having others read her work. In her thesis class, members of her cohort read her drafts and provided excellent feedback. They challenged her, they encouraged her, and she appreciated their honesty and feedback.

Overall, the researcher was pleased to be able to research a topic that piqued her interest. Because she was passionate about the topic, conducting research and writing this document did not seem as painful. She wanted to learn more so that she could show call center managers how to create and foster better work experiences for their employees—an experience she wish she had.

Conclusion

This study shows how student employees perceive their role in an outbound call center, as well as how these perceptions changed over time. In addition, the study indicated that organizational identification and self-efficacy positively impact these perceptions. Managers play a major role in ensuring that their employees receive clear expectations and understand their roles. Too often, however, managers focus on profit rather than people; although, people are the organization's greatest asset! Employees know whether they are valued, and they will leave if they do not feel satisfied with their work experience. Therefore, managers should remember that if they take care of their employees, then they will take care of the organization.

Appendices

Appendix A: Site Letter of Permission

Site Permission Letter

September 13, 2010

Institutional Review Board
James Madison University
MSC 5726
JMAC-5, Suite 26
Harrisonburg, VA 22807

Members of the Institutional Review Board,

I hereby agree to allow Chiquita King, a graduate student from James Madison University, to conduct her research at Madison Connection. I understand that the purpose of the study is to examine student perceptions of their roles as outbound call center employees.

By signing this letter of permission, I am agreeing to the following:

- Chiquita King has permission to be on the premises of the call center and to have access to call center employees in order to administer her survey and conduct interviews.
- Chiquita King has access to the data collected to examine student role perceptions, organizational identification, and self-efficacy.

Sincerely,

P.J. Kania, Telefund Coordinator
Office of Annual Giving

Appendix B: Institutional Review Board Protocol

Research Proposal Checklist
for Submission to the Institutional Review Board on the Use of Human Subjects in Research

Title of Study:	Examining the Perceptions of Student Employee Roles in an Outbound Call Center		
Name of Investigator(s):	Chiquita King	**Phone:**	
Campus Address:	N/A	**MSC:**	6913
Email Address:	kingci@dukes.jmu.edu		
Research Advisor (if applicable):	Dr. Jane Thall	**Phone:**	540-568-5531
Email Address:	thalljb@jmu.edu	**MSC:**	6913

(Investigator - Please Organize Material on the following page using the Topics Below)

PURPOSE OR OBJECTIVE(S)
☒ Limited to one page

PROCEDURES (Included are:)
☒ Research design and sampling
☒ Method of collecting data (emphasize possible risks, and protection of subjects)
☒ Time frame of study

DATA ANALYSIS
☒ Discussed how confidentiality of subjects and their responses will be maintained
☒ Discussed how data will be stored to ensure confidentiality of subjects

REPORTING PROCEDURES
☒ Identified audience to be reached in the report of the study
☒ Identified the presentation method(s) to be used
☒ Discussed how feedback will be provided to subjects

EXPERIENCE OF THE RESEARCHER
☒ Prior relevant experience of the researcher, supervisor, and/or consultants

ADDITIONAL ATTACHMENTS (if applicable:)
☒ Consent forms
☒ Letters of permission
☒ Cover letter(s)
☒ Questionnaire
☐ Tests
☐ Additional attachments relevant to the study

NOTIFY OSP OF INTENT TO SUBMIT FOR EXTERNAL FUNDING
☐ Project will be submitted for External Funding
If yes, submit proposal to Sponsored Programs: MSC 5728

Funding Agency ____

Program ____

☒ ***SUBMIT PROPOSAL AND CHECKLIST ELECTRONICALLY TO:** JMU_grants@jmu.edu

TRAINING, TESTING AND FORM COMPLETION REQUIREMENTS
☒ Completed IRB training on (02/04/08) at http://www.jmu.edu/sponsprog/irb.html

*Note: Proposals cannot be reviewed by the IRB until all *required* checklist items are present. A sample form that reviewers will use to evaluate your proposal is available from the Sponsored Programs web site at:
(http://www.jmu.edu/sponsprog/irb/ProtocalEvalForm.doc)

Purpose and Objectives:

The purpose of this study is to examine how student employees perceive their role as call center employees, as well as how these perceptions change over time. The researcher will consider organizational identification and self-efficacy as factors in this change. In addition, this study is aimed to provide practical implications for universities who rely on call center efforts to solicit alumni funds, as well as for managers who oversee the operations of outbound call centers in general.

Procedures/Research Design/Methodology/Timeframe:

This study will take two semesters to complete. Research will begin pending IRB approval and will end on April 8, 2011. My research design will incorporate a mixed-methods approach. I will collect quantitative data using Qualtrics™, the JMU-sponsored online survey system. The survey comprises 33 questions, which will take approximately 10 minutes to complete. Call center employees will neither be coerced into participating in nor penalized by the coordinator for opting to not participate in the survey. To keep the survey completely anonymous, I will send the cover letter and survey link to the call center coordinator, who will electronically send the information to the 38 participants. Because the survey link is included at the bottom of the cover letter, participants will have the opportunity to read and agree to the terms. I will collect qualitative data through a series of semi-structured interviews, which will be conducted with 4 participants. The call center coordinator will select these individuals based on tenure (i.e., two participants who have worked at the call center for less than a month, and two participants who have worked at the call center for more than one month). Again, call center employees will neither be coerced into participating in nor penalized by the coordinator for opting to not participate in the interview. The call center coordinator will not reveal the names of these participants prior to the interview dates; instead, he will give me a list of time shifts in which I would need to come to the center to conduct the interviews. Prior to starting the interview, I will present each participant with an informed consent form. Once the participant has signed the form, the interview will begin. Each interview will be confidential and take about 30 minutes. In addition, each interview will be tape recorded (with the participant's consent) and transcribed to ensure accuracy. I will not ask any questions that request identifiable information (e.g., name). Because I am researching how students' perceptions of their role will change over time, this research procedure will take place twice: within 30 days of the participants' employment and after 60 days of employment.

I do not perceive more than minimal risks from the participants involvement in this study. Potential benefits from participation include a sense of self-awareness on how they perceive their role as a call center employee. In addition, the finding from this research could help benefit their overall work experience, if they plan to work at the call center in the future.

The population being studied is student employees who work at Madison Connection, a call center operated for and by James Madison University. All participants are at least 18 years of age, and their participation is voluntary.

However, if they submit an online survey, they will not be able to withdraw from the study; this statement is presented in the cover letter.

Data Analysis:

Responses to the survey will be collected via Qualtrics™, and I will collect the responses to the interview. The quantitative data collected through Qualtrics™ will be analyzed using the survey software, as well as SPSS. In addition, the qualitative data will be coded using Microsoft Office Excel 2007; each participant will be given a code name (e.g., N1, R2, R3, N4). “N” denotes a new employee, while “R” denotes a returning employee. Upon completion of the interview, I will transcribe the information and secure the data in a closet in a locked file cabinet located in Memorial Hall, room 3345A. Access to this locked file cabinet is controlled by Sandra Gilchrist, who is the senior administrative assistant to Dr. Diane Foucar-Szocki, the COE/LTLE department chair. The only individuals who have the potential to access the raw data include: Ms. Gilchrist, Dr. Foucar-Szocki, Dr. Thall, and myself.

Immediately after successful defense of my thesis, which will take place on or before April 8, 2011, I will destroy all interview recordings and transcriptions that were kept in the locked file cabinet. The survey results will remain in the password-protected Qualtrics™ system.

Reporting Procedures:

The results of my findings will be presented to my thesis committee during a two-hour defense. Overall, the defense will outline my research purpose, methodology, results, and limitations. No identifiable responses will be presented. Participants can request final aggregated results.

Experience of the researcher (and advisor, *if student*):

As a graduate student, majoring in Adult Education/Human Resource Development (AHRD), I have taken/am currently taking the following relevant courses:

- Research Methods and Inquiry in AHRD
- Performance Analysis and Needs Assessment in AHRD
- Program Evaluation and Measurement in AHRD

Dr. Thall's experience is as follows:

Educational Experience

- Ed. D., The George Washington University, May 2005
- M.S., Applied Behavioral Science, The Johns Hopkins University, May 1999
- B.A., Spanish, May 1975

JMU Teaching Experience

- JMU, COE, AHRD 600: Performance Analysis and Needs Assessment in AHRD (Fall 2006, Fall 2007, Fall 2008, Spring 2010)
- JMU, COE, AHRD 640: Program Evaluation and Measurement in AHRD (Spring 2007, Spring 2008, Fall 2010)
- JMU, COE, AHRD 630: Research Methods and Inquiry in AHRD (Fall 2008, Fall 2009)
- JMU, COE, AHRD 520: Foundations in AHRD (Fall 2008)

- JMU, COE, HRD 480: Foundations in HRD (Fall 2008, Fall 2009)

Dr. Jane Thall has also served on the graduate thesis committee as an examiner for Dr. Cheryl Church for the degree of Ed.D, The George Washington University, July 2007. In addition, she has chaired five graduate research projects at James Madison University, and she has sat on 25 graduate research committees.

Appendix C: Cover Letter (Survey)

Cover Letter

Identification of Investigators & Purpose of Study

You are being asked to participate in a research study conducted by Chiquita King from James Madison University. The purpose of this study is to examine role perceptions of students who work as call center employees. This study will contribute to the researcher's completion of her thesis, a requirement for her to obtain a Master's degree.

Research Procedures

This study consists of an online survey that will be administered to individual participants through Qualtrics™ (an online survey tool). You will be asked to provide answers to a series of questions related to your perceptions of your role as a call center employee.

Time Required

Participation in the survey component will require a maximum of 10 minutes of your time. Upon completion of the survey, you may be asked to participate in an interview, which will require an additional 30 minutes.

After 60 days, you will be asked to follow the research procedures again so that the researcher can determine any significant changes. Therefore, your involved time in the study is estimated to be either 20 minutes or 1 hour and 20 minutes.

Risks

The investigator does not perceive more than minimal risks from your involvement in this study.

Benefits

Potential benefits from participation in this study include a sense of self-awareness on how you perceive your role as a call center employee. Findings from this research could also benefit your overall work experience, as well as those students who work at other university call centers.

Confidentiality

The results of this research will be presented during a thesis defense with three James Madison University professors present. While individual responses are anonymously obtained and recorded online through the Qualtrics™ software, data is kept in the strictest confidence. No identifiable information will be collected from the participant and no identifiable responses will be presented in the final form of this study. All data will be stored in a secure location only accessible to the researcher. The researcher retains the right to use and publish non-identifiable data. At the end of the study, all records will be shredded. Final aggregate results will be made available to participants upon request.

Participation & Withdrawal

Your participation is entirely voluntary. You are free to choose not to participate. Should you choose to participate, you can withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. However, once your responses have been submitted and anonymously recorded you will not be able to withdraw from the study.

Questions about the Study

If you have questions or concerns during the time of your participation in this study, or after its completion or you would like to receive a copy of the final aggregate results of this study, please contact:

Chiquita King
James Madison University
kingci@dukes.jmu.edu

Dr. Jane B. Thall
James Madison University
Telephone: (540) 568-5531
thalljb@jmu.edu

Questions about Your Rights as a Research Subject

Dr. David Cockley
Chair, Institutional Review Board
James Madison University
(540) 568-2834
cocklede@jmu.edu

Giving of Consent

I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about this study. I have read this consent and I understand what is being requested of me as a participant in this study. I certify that I am at least 18 years of age.
By clicking on the link below, and completing and submitting this anonymous survey, I am consenting to participate in this research.

http://jmu.qualtrics.com/SE?SID=SV_doIAO3jVM6blpYg

Appendix D: Consent Letter (Interview)

Consent to Participate in Research (Interview)

Identification of Investigators & Purpose of Study

You are being asked to participate in a research study conducted by Chiquita King from James Madison University. The purpose of this study is to examine role perceptions of students who work as call center employees. This study will contribute to the researcher's completion of her thesis, a requirement for her to obtain a Master's degree.

Research Procedures

Should you decide to participate in this research study, you will be asked to sign this consent form once all your questions have been answered to your satisfaction. This portion of the study comprises a semi-structured interview. You will be asked to provide answers to a series of questions related to your perceptions of your role as a call center employee. The interview will be voice recorded with your permission.

Time Required

Participation in this portion of the study will require 30 minutes of your time.

After 60 days, you will be asked to follow the research procedures again so that the researcher can determine any significant changes. Therefore, your involved time in the study is estimated to be 1 hour and 20 minutes.

Risks

The investigator does not perceive more than minimal risks from your involvement in this study.

Benefits

Potential benefits from participation in this study include a sense of self-awareness on how you perceive your role as a call center employee. Findings from this research could also benefit your overall work experience, as well as those students who work at other university call centers.

Confidentiality

The results of this research will be presented during a thesis defense with three James Madison University professors present. Individual responses will be obtained confidentially and recorded by the researcher using a voice recorder. The data collected during the interview will be kept in a locked file cabinet in Memorial Hall and destroyed upon successful completion of the researcher's thesis defense. The researcher retains the right to use and publish non-identifiable data. While individual responses are confidential, aggregate data will be presented representing averages or generalizations about the responses as a whole. Final aggregate results will be made available to participants upon request.

Participation & Withdrawal

Your participation is entirely voluntary. You are free to choose not to participate. Should you choose to participate, you can withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind.

Questions about the Study

If you have questions or concerns during the time of your participation in this study, or after its completion or you would like to receive a copy of the final aggregate results of this study, please contact:

Chiquita King
James Madison University
kingci@dukes.jmu.edu

Dr. Jane B. Thall
James Madison University
Telephone: (540) 568-5531
thalljb@jmu.edu

Questions about Your Rights as a Research Subject

Dr. David Cockley
Chair, Institutional Review Board
James Madison University
(540) 568-2834
cocklede@jmu.edu

Giving of Consent

I have read this consent form and I understand what is being requested of me as a participant in this study. I freely consent to participate. I have been given satisfactory answers to my questions. The investigator provided me with a copy of this form. I certify that I am at least 18 years of age.

☐ I give consent to be audio taped during my interview. ________ (initials)

____
Name of Participant (Printed)

______________________________________ ______________
Name of Participant (Signed) Date

______________________________________ ______________
Name of Researcher (Signed) Date

Appendix E: Coded Qualitative Data (Excerpt)

Coding System

Phase 1 Interviews

	Role Perceptions			
	Role Ambiguity		Role Conflict	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
New Employees	- "Really didn't know what I would be asking them amount-wise." - "Certain people could have used more time"; felt pressured to pick up immediately	- Shadowed returning employees during training - "After training, I knew what I was supposed to do."* - Mock calls helped	- Don't adhere to script - Won't ask for large donations, especially when looking at past donation, because people won't donate anything	- No.
Returning Employees	- "Making calls for the first time is nerve-wrecking…you don't know what to say, you don't know what to do."* - Wish there was more one-on-one time during training	- Knows expectations because of tenure* - Good training* - Shadowed returning employees during training	- Don't adhere to script - Use more time to build rapport than supposed to - Won't ask for large donations, because people won't donate anything	- None

	Organizational Identification			
	Madison Connection		James Madison University	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
New Employees	- Relevant to academic major - Aligns with mission of promoting JMU* - Feel connected to the job - "If this was any other job…I wouldn't be as passionate about it." - Convenient location		- "I'm glad I'm here."* - Friendly people - "Everyone is real chill." - Loves challenging classes - Feel connected* - Felt more comfortable after getting involved	
Returning Employees	- "I've gotten to know the managers and P.J. definitely—he's great." - Convenient hours and location - Relevant to academic major - Aligns with mission of promoting JMU		- "I love JMU."* - "I wouldn't want to go anywhere else." - Feel connected*	

	Self-Efficacy	
	Yes	No
New Employees	- "I don't have any doubts or any problems." - "I don't think you could ever master this job of calling people. I mean,	

	you get real good yeah, but there’s always certain situations or certain things that come up.”	
Returning Employees	- Knows what to do because of tenure* - “It’s so repetitive.”	

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