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# Some Things are Better Left Not Unsaid: An Exploratory Study of the Communicatively-Restricted Organizational Stressor

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Some Things are Better Left Not Unsaid:

An Exploratory Study of the Communicatively-Restricted Organizational Stressor

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### Abstract

In organizations, individuals seek the support of others to manage their day-to-day stress. Researchers within a social support paradigm have found that individuals who have communicative outlets to discuss their stressors are healthier psychologically and physiologically. To the extent that those outlets are restricted, individuals may suffer the deleterious effects of stress. Therefore, this manuscript conceptualizes and explores one such stressor, the Communicatively-Restricted Organizational Stressor (CROS). Based on a sample of 405 organizational members, we identified the existence and explicated the nature of this stressor. Results were generally inconclusive. Discussion focused on significant findings and the need for better operationalization of this stressor. Implications and future directions explored the potential utility of this line of research.

*Keywords:* organizations, interpersonal relationships, stress, self-disclosure, topic-avoidance

### Some Things are Better Left Not Unsaid:

#### An Exploratory Study of the Communicatively-Restricted Organizational Stressor

There is no question that individuals rely on social networks to help them deal with times of stress. Family, co-workers, lovers, and friends provide crucial social support allowing individuals to vent and think through stressful life events (Collins & Feeney, 2000). While instrumental, emotional, or informational support provided by others is one way that social ties help buffer individuals from the deleterious effects of stressful life events (Cohen & Wills, 1985), the ability to interact and unburden oneself is equally as important. In organizations, social support networks are embedded into the working environment, whereby coworkers typically communicate about their workplace stressors and seek ways to collectively remediate those issues (House, 1981; Zimmermann & Applegate, 1994). When individuals experience a stressful life event and do not have the ability to release the stressor through some form of social interaction, the weight of having to deal with the issue on one's own can exacerbate the painful psychological and physiological effects of that life event. When individuals perceive those support networks as not present or not willing to provide social support, they have few other options in which to manage the stressor. Based on that notion, we first conceptualize a new variable that can be linked to stress and a lack of social support. We then test that link through a survey-based methodology, and finally we explore potential other applications for this newly conceived variable.

Most cognitive psychotherapy is based on the simple premise that individuals need to talk about their problems in order to be able to deal with them (Goncalves & Machado, 1999). Furthermore, the expressive writing paradigm first proposed by Pennebaker (1985) has consistently shown that in the absence of a conversational partner, individuals can release the

stress associated with traumatic events through the process of writing about them. Research findings across a range of stressors support the contention that translating one's emotions to narrative (i.e., putting them into linguistic form through the process of writing or speaking) can lead to deeper understanding and cognitive restructuring. In turn, the person is able to gain mindfulness and begin to deal with the stressor (Pennebaker, 1985; Pennebaker & Beall, 1986; Pennebaker, Colder, & Sharp, 1990; Pennebaker & Francis, 1996; Pennebaker & Seagal, 1999; Slatcher & Pennebaker, 2006).

Research related to social support emerged around the mid-1970s with an exploration of why some individuals are more capable of dealing with the potentially negative effects of stressors in their lives (Goldsmith, 2004). Social support can be defined as information, emotional messages, and material goods exchanged between individuals in an effort to problem-solve (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Goldsmith, 2004; House, 1981). In an organization, the exchange of socially supportive transactions occurs between co-workers as well as from supervisors to subordinates. Outside of the organization, many individuals comprise the social support network including spouses, children, and close relatives. Supportive networks also can include distant family and friends.

Having a robust support network is important predictor of individual physiological and psychological health. For instance, Cohen, Doyle, Turner, Alper, and Skoner (2003), through their controlled and quarantined trial, found that participants who reported larger social networks had significantly lower objective and subjective symptoms of an administered dose of the common cold (rhinovirus). Psychologically, social support has been seen to reduce global stress as well as positively mediate the relationship between emotional expression and depressive symptomology (Uchida & Yamasaki, 2008). In a large organizational study, social support was

significantly related to reductions in job strain (Ganster, Fusilier, & Mayes, 1986). However, these positive effects of social support can only be seen when there is an available support network to use in an organization (Zimmermann & Applegate, 1994)

People generally turn to their support networks when dealing with various stressors or problems they encounter on a day to day basis to meet these needs for social support (Collins & Feeney, 2000). Nevertheless, under certain circumstances, people may choose not to disclose about their problems for a variety of reasons. In most cases, if individuals elect not to share about their personal problems with a particular individual, they will identify others who can play a supportive role in their lives. For example, scholars examining topic avoidance have identified that certain topic areas such as sexual activity are rarely discussed with parents, but if individuals are experiencing sexual problems, they may turn to a sibling instead (Guerrero & Afifi, 1995). Usually, these choices stem from an evaluation of the risks associated with self-disclosure of negative information. These risks include self-protective motivations such as the fear of exposure, fear of abandonment, and fear of angry attacks from others, as well as relationship oriented motivations such as fear of conflict, fear of relational de-escalation, or fear of relational termination (Guerrero & Afifi, 1995). Additionally, Guerrero and Afifi identify partner unresponsiveness (fear the other will think that the issue is inconsequential/meaningless, or fear that the other does not have the requisite knowledge to help deal with the issue) and social inappropriateness as reasons people may choose not to self-disclose.

Under certain circumstances, perception of disclosure related risk can be so high, an individual may feel as though he or she cannot discuss the issue with anyone. In other words, he or she feels the stressor is *communicatively restricted*. One such stressor may be particularly common in an organizational setting. Within an organizational framework, individuals are

involved in an intricate web of interpersonal relationships and power dynamics (Morgan, 2006). As a result, stressors that arise as a result of organizational membership often cannot be discussed with other members of the organization due to the disclosure related risks discussed above. For example, if an individual is having trouble negotiating the terms of a contract with a client, he or she may not want to disclose that information to a supervisor (fear of retribution), to a co-worker (fear of competition) or to a subordinate (fear of loss of face). We label this type of stressor a *communicatively restricted organizational stressor* (CROS). We must note that a CROS is defined by the perception the individual holds regarding the extent to which the topic cannot be discussed with other members of the organization or organizational outsiders. In other words, a CROS is a stressor that is associated with either real *or* perceived disclosure related risks to anyone. Based on this proposed framework, we extend the research questions:

RQ<sub>1</sub>: Do members of organizations report that their organizational stressor is communicatively-restricted?

RQ<sub>2</sub>: Is there a relationship between members' reports of the distress about an organizational concern and the extent to which they feel they cannot discuss that stressor with members of their organization?

RQ<sub>3</sub>: Is there a relationship between the extent to which a CROS exists and perceived global stress and organizational stress?

RQ<sub>4</sub>: What reasons do organizational members give for why they feel that they cannot discuss an organizational concern with members of their organization?

We propose that what makes a CROS particularly insidious and painful is that in many cases, individuals may feel that they cannot discuss their CROSS with members outside of the organization either. We posit that this is likely due to the fear of disconfirming responses

(Guerrero & Afifi, 1995), or perceived futility of conversation (Afifi & Guerrero, 2000). In other words, we conceptualize a CROS as a stressor that is often highly specific to an organization to the point that individuals feel that they cannot discuss the issue with their family and friends because they simply will not be understood. To extend the previous example, an individual negotiating a contract may feel that individuals outside the organization may not be able to understand the technical nature of the contract, the esoteric language being argued over, or the repercussions of disagreements over semantic differences. As a result, the individual feels forced to deal with the stressor without the benefit of any social support. While fear of disconfirming responses and futility of discussion are likely reasons a CROS may be kept from organizational outsiders, we imagine other reasons exist as well. As such, we propose the next set of exploratory research questions:

RQ5: Is there a relationship between members' reports of the distress about an organizational concern and the extent to which they feel they cannot discuss that stressor with organizational outsiders?

RQ6: Is there is a relationship between the extent to which individuals feel they cannot discuss an organizational concern with organizational outsiders and global perceived stress?

RQ7: What reasons do organizational members give for why they feel that they cannot discuss an organizational concern with organizational outsiders?

We imagine that much like other stressors individuals keep inside, the presence of a CROS would lead to adverse psychological and physiological outcomes (Pennebaker, 1985). Therefore, we feel it is incumbent upon the research community to identify if, and to what extent, such stressors exist. Additionally, we suggest it is important to identify how common



these stressors are, how distressing they are, and to what extent they have an impact on people's organizational and personal lives. Finally, we think it is important to understand the nature of these stressors. Therefore, we propose one final research question:

RQ<sub>8</sub>: What topics do individuals identify as a CROS in their lives?

Beginning to examine these issues can be an important first step towards a more comprehensive understanding of the nature and source of organizational stress and towards developing interventions aimed at reducing stress in the workplace.

### **Method**

Surveyed participants were all enrolled college students who were members of an organization. We utilized a combination of closed- and open-ended questions as a means by which to explore the research questions.

### **Participants**

Respondents were recruited from research participant pools at two university locations. The participants were granted course credit for volunteering. Individuals who choose not to participate or who did not qualify (i.e., they did not belong to an organization) were offered an alternative assignment. The sample ( $N = 406$ ) consisted of 169 men (41.6%) and 234 women (57.6%) from a wide variety of ethnicities, but mostly identifying as Euro-American/white ( $n = 321, 79.1\%$ ). Participants ranged in age from 18 – 30 years old ( $M = 19.04$  years,  $SD = 1.32$ ). All participants were members of various organizations (see Table 1) and were members of those organizations for an average of 15.52 months ( $Mdn = 6$  months,  $SD = 20.43$ ).

### **Procedures**

Respondents received electronic notification indicating the study was active. Interested students clicked on a link that directed them to an online questionnaire, administered by

questionpro.com. Respondents first read an informed consent form, which was approved by both authors' respective human subjects committees. After respondents were consented, they completed the questionnaire that utilized skip-logic and piping procedures, discussed below. Participants, on average, completed the study in 15 minutes.

The first section asked participants to think about stressors in their organization with the following prompt:

In organizations, we sometimes experience things that stress us out. Considering your experiences with the organization that you selected, please tell us the main thing that really stresses you out about being a member of this organization. In the space below, please type your biggest stressor

Participants were given an opportunity to provide a text-response to this prompt. From there, participants were asked to provide a second and third stressor. The names of the stressors were used throughout the questionnaire in order to remind participants of their organizational stressors. To tap into the stressfulness of this issue, we asked the participant to indicate on a scale of 1 – 7 (higher numbers indicating more stress) how stressful this issue was to them. In this sense, we are able to focus these data to just those issues that are most stressful to this sample.

### **Instrumentation**

**CROS measure.** In order to operationalize a communicatively-restricted organizational stressor (CROS), we designed a measure that taps into participants' perceptions that they could not communicate about this particular stressor with other members of their organization and with organizational outsiders. Ten statements were generated by the authors, 5 evaluating communication with members within the organization about the stressor and the other 5 items evaluating communication about the stressor with outsiders. The five prompts were presented in

alternating order to the participant with the following prompt, “The following 10 statements ask you to think about the first stressor you indicated, which was: xxxx.” The “xxxx” was replaced with the actual language they used when identifying their first stressor. This was repeated for stressors two and three. Items were presented with a standard 5-point Likert Scale (anchors of strongly disagree to strongly agree).

Since we were interested in the most stressful organizational issue identified by participants, we only evaluated responses to the first stressor. The ten-item CROS measure was submitted to a principal components analysis with direct Oblimin rotation. We selected this rotation technique to allow for nonorthogonality (i.e., factors relating to a CROS could share variance). Factors with Eigenvalues greater than 1.0 were extracted, which was verified by a scree plot. KMO (.742) and Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity,  $\chi^2(45) = 1161.76, p < .001$ , were both at acceptable levels. This factor analytic technique returned a 2-factor rotated solution accounting for 54.68% of variance. Items were retained on a factor when they had factor loadings of at least .60 on one dimension and no more than .40 on any other dimension. Based on that 60/40 selection criterion, the two factors were labeled “inside the organization” and “outside the organization,” which was in-line with our original conceptualization of a CROS. Individual item loadings for the final rotated solution are reported in Table 2. The five items loading on the “inside the organization” had a Cronbach’s alpha of .79 (Scale  $M = 19.10, SD = 3.38$ ) and the “outside the organization” items had a Cronbach’s alpha of .78 (Scale  $M = 18.49, SD = 3.44$ ). Mean scores were used for each factor in subsequent analyses.

**Perceived global stress.** To measure participants’ reported level of perceived global stress, Cohen, Kamarck, and Mermelstein’s (1983) 4-item Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-4) was used. The PSS-4 has been validated and is used widely in psychological stress research, in fact

the original validation study utilized a sample of 332 college students and found high concurrent validity (Cohen et al.). Furthermore, given the 4-item nature of this scale, the measure is particularly parsimonious over other longer measures for studies utilizing multiple dependent measures, such as the present investigation. The measure asks participants to rate how often they feel negatively impacted by stressors in their lives on a Likert-type scale with anchors ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (very often), with “3” being the hypothetical midpoint of each scale item.

Since the scale deals with global psychological stress, items were not modified to refer to any specific situational context (i.e., an organization). Certain items in the original measure are reflected in the scale and those items were recoded prior to data analysis, keeping in line with the original authors’ advice on the reflection of items. The measure possessed acceptable levels of internal consistency with Cronbach’s alpha of .77 ( $M = 10.19$ ,  $SD = 2.87$ ). Mean PSS scores were used in all subsequent analyses.

**Organizational stress.** To evaluate organizational stress, an eight-item scale first used by Sosik and Godshalk (2000) that evaluated job stress. Since this measure was used successfully by them and later authors, we decided to employ it in this study. However, since the original measure explored “job stress,” we had to reframe the items to represent the more broad perspective of organizational stress (since many of the participants in this study were not reporting on workplaces). For instance, we rephrased item one from “Your job makes you upset” to “My organization makes me upset,” item two we rephrased from “Your job makes you frustrated” to “my organization makes me frustrated.” In this sense, the primary purpose of the measure remained intact with the context slightly shifted.

While we expected this to be a single-dimension measure, we still submitted the eight items to a principal components analysis with varimax rotation. This rotation method was

selected as the factors should be orthogonal ( $KMO = .92$ , Bartlett's Test of Sphericity,  $\chi^2(28) = 1801.50, p < .001$ ). Only eigenvalues above 1.00 were extracted, which resulted in a single-factor solution accounting for 61.45% of the variance. This was verified by a scree plot, whereby components leveled out at factor 2. The eight-items comprising this scale had very high internal consistency (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .91$ , scale  $M = 26.07, SD = 10.06$ ). Mean scores for this measure were utilized in subsequent analyses.

**Open-ended items.** We allowed the participants to provide open-ended responses detailing the reasons why they felt a CROS existed in their lives. To that end, we asked participants to answer two questions with the following prompts, "If there has been a time where you have had an issue related to your organization that you felt you could NOT talk to members of the organization about, please tell us why you felt that way. If you have not been in this situation, please leave this box blank;" and, "If there has been a time where you have had an issue related to your organization that you felt you could NOT talk to people outside of the organization about, please tell us why you felt that way. If you have not been in this situation, please leave this box blank."

## Results

Important to the results reported below is an understanding that these data are exploratory in nature. Therefore, we did not engage in formal inductive coding utilizing coders blind to the nature of the research. Themes were identified by the first author if they appeared at least three times and the second author concurred with the identification of the theme. In future iterations of this research we plan to conduct a more formal analysis of the thematic content of the open ended responses utilizing both software and independent coders. For quantitative results, we utilized standard inferential tests, where indicated.

**Research Question 1**

In order to answer the first research question, we evaluated participants' scores on the CROS measure for both the inside and outside dimensions. Scores could range from 1 – 5 for each dimension, with 3 being a hypothetical midpoint. For the inside dimension participants reported a mean score of 3.80 ( $SD = .68$ ) and a mean of 3.70 ( $SD = .68$ ) for the outside dimension. These average scores are higher than the hypothetical scale midpoint, indicating that these participants were likely reporting on stressors that were communicatively-restricted.

To further explore this finding, the individual scores on both dimensions were standardized (z-scored) and cut into three groups of low, medium, and high<sup>1</sup>. These groups represent the reported frequency of how much this stressor was considered communicatively-restricted. Based on only the high scores (i.e., individuals who felt high communication restrictedness), 62 participants (15.31%) reported high restrictedness inside the organization with 62 participants also reporting high restrictedness outside the organization. Finally, 95 participants (23.47%) reported high restrictedness both inside and outside the organization, indicating that their stressor was a CROS. The distribution of frequencies for those individuals who reported high restrictedness on either dimension ( $n = 219$ ) was significantly different than chance for this sample,  $\chi^2(2) = 6.63, p < .05$ .

**Research Question 2**

The second research question asked if there is a relationship between members' reports of distress about an organizational concern and the extent to which they felt they were restricted in communicating about that issue with members of their organization. To answer this question, we computed a simple linear regression with scores on issue stressfulness (a single-item question asked after the participant reported their stressor) as the predictor variable and average inside

CROS score as the criterion. The result of the regression was not significant,  $F(1, 392) = .23$ ,  $p = .64$ ,  $R^2 = .001$ . Based on this result, we answer this research question in the negative.

### **Research Question 3**

The third research question asked if there is a relationship between the extent to which a CROS exists and both global and organizational stress. To answer this research question, we evaluated Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficients between these variables. Scores on the inside dimension were not correlated with scores on the outside dimension,  $r(403) = .05$ ,  $p = .30$ . Scores on the inside dimension were correlated significantly and negatively with both global perceived stress,  $r(403) = -.14$ ,  $p < .001$  and organizational stress,  $r(403) = -.18$ ,  $p < .001$ . Scores on the outside dimension were not significantly correlated with both global stress,  $r(403) = .09$ ,  $p = .06$  or organizational stress,  $r(403) = .03$ ,  $p = .50$ .

### **Research Question 4**

To answer the fourth research question, we examined the responses to our open ended question using the procedure described above. The most common reason given for why members of an organization felt they could not discuss their stressor with other members of the organization was fear of hurt feelings, ruined friendships, or other social consequences. One respondent wrote:

I can not talk to the members of my organization about not wanting to hang out with them every minute of every day. I can't do this because I don't want them not to want to hang out with me and exclude me from them.

Social consequences accounted for approximately 19% of the total responses. Futility of discussion or fear of disconfirming responses typified by statements such as "it was sometimes difficult communicating with the rest of my teammates because in some cases they just would

not listen to me. Some people are very high strung and are not willing to put their pride aside” accounted for 17% of the responses. Other reasons given included wanting to avoid conflict (15%), fear of looking bad or incompetent (12%) and feeling too low in the hierarchy to say anything (11%). The remainder of the responses did not correspond with a higher order category (e.g., “Once one of my bosses hit on me, and he was young and attractive. He took me to dinner, then tried to blackmail me into doing things because he would ruin my reputation”) or did not address the question asked.

### **Research Question 5**

The fifth research question asked if there is a relationship between members’ reports of distress about an organizational concern and the extent to which they felt they were restricted in communicating about that issue with organizational outsiders. To answer this question, we computed a simple linear regression with scores on issue stressfulness (a single-item question asked after the participant reported their stressor) as the predictor variable and average outside CROS score as criterion. The result of the regression was not significant,  $F(1, 392) = 2.10, p = .15, R^2 = .01$ . Based on this result, we answer this research question in the negative.

### **Research Question 6**

The sixth research question asked if there is a relationship between the extent to which an individual felt outside restrictedness and global stress. To answer this research question, a one-tailed correlation (as we would theoretically expect there to be a positive linear relationship) revealed a positive and significant relationship,  $r(403) = .09, p = .03$ . However, this accounts for a relatively small effect (less than 1% shared variance). Based on this, we conclude that a marginal relationship exists; however, it is not strong enough to answer the research question in the affirmative.



**Research Question 7**

To answer the seventh research question, we again examined the responses to our open ended questions. Using the procedure described above, we identified six reasons for why individuals feel that they cannot discuss their organizational stressors with organizational outsiders. By far, the most common reason given, accounting for 49% of the responses was a fear that others simply would not understand the nature of their problem. For example, one participant wrote, “I felt as if I could not talk to people outside of the organization because they simply just don't understand the way you do and it is more frustrating to try to explain something they will never get.” A second group of responses pertained to the need for confidentiality. For example, one participant stated that “The organization I work with deals with a lot of confidential information. This confidential information is clearly something I would not talk about with member outside of the organization.” This group of responses accounted for 19% of the responses. The other categories represented concerns about interpersonal relationships (5%), a fear of looking bad or incompetent (5%), a fear of making the organization look bad (4%) and other (19%) where people reported idiosyncratic reasons such as “the religious views we have on others” or simply did not understand the nature of the question.

**Research Question 8**

Provided that individuals indicated that their first organizational issue exerted the most amount of stress on their lives, the first stressor for each person was coded by topic in the same manner as the other open ended responses. The most frequently reported issue pertained to conflict, interpersonal problems, teamwork, and/or collaboration. These topics accounted for 30% of the responses. The remaining responses pertained to time management concerns (27%), psychological stress such as pressure to succeed (22%), money (4%), and other.

### Discussion

The primary purpose of this project was to determine if individuals report the existence of organizational stressors that they feel is communicatively-restricted (a CROS). In that sense, an individual would appraise a stressor as communicatively-restricted if he or she could not discuss that stressor with other members of the organization or with organizational outsiders. In addition, we were also interested to see what reasons individuals gave for not being able to discuss their stressor as well how restrictedness associates with both global and organizational stress.

Respondents in this investigation identified with a variety of organizations; however, their reports of organizational-level stressors are common in the literature (e.g., Hawksley, 2007; Sosik & Godshalk, 2000). Indeed, when considering reported their stressors (see discussion of Research Question 8), most respondents indicated that their main stressor was related to other members of the organization. Other reported stressors were job-function related (e.g., time-management) or job-outcome related (e.g., money). Based on participant responses, we felt that the sample represented a wide cross-section of organizations and organizational issues.

Importantly, we sought to determine if individuals would report that their organizational stressors were communicatively-restricted. This was the most important element of the present investigation, as we argued a stressor could be most stressful (and thereby potentially harmful to the individual) if no outlet existed to discuss the stressor. In the context of the second hypothesis, individuals ( $n = 95$ , 23.45% of the sample) reported that they could not talk about their stressor with other organizational members or organizational outsiders. This finding is important, as it underscores the prevalence of a CROS. Almost one-quarter of this sample reported that they were restricted in communicating to others about their stressor.

Contextualizing this within the framework of self-disclosure and social support literature, these individuals would be at a greater risk of the deleterious effects of stress than would individuals who do not have communicatively-restricted stressors (Goldsmith, 2004; Guerrero & Afifi, 1995; Pennebaker & Francis, 1996; Zimmermann & Applegate, 1994).

Initially, the results from the analysis of research question three seemed counter-institutive; however, after examining the open-ended responses, we believe that many of our participants may not have felt the need to discuss their stressors with members inside their organization. Therefore high scores on the inside dimension may correlate with lower stress, because participants felt that they had nothing to talk about. Importantly, these findings should not be considered causal, which is to say that individuals reporting low levels of organizational stress may have felt no reason to restrict their communication. When we evaluated the correlation between the outside dimension and global stress, the relationship was positive (albeit nonsignificant). This makes sense, given that an individual who reports high global stress (i.e., stress in multiple domains of his or her life) may feel restricted, regardless of context.

The CROS measures used in the present study were newly created and as such, have not been previously validated. Therefore, we focused on the free response answers to determine a) if participants truly understood the nature of the type of stressor we were attempting to tap into, and b) if participants' reasons for feeling restricted supported our conceptualization of a CROS. Based on the responses provided, it appears that participants closely identify with the idea of communicatively-restricted stressors. By providing reasons for restrictedness that were in-line with the research on disclosure related risk, these data support our contention that certain stressors can be difficult (or impossible) to discuss with other people.

The reasons individuals provided (e.g., fear of social judgment, fear of retribution, and fear of disconfirming responses) largely paralleled those identified in past research (see Guerrero & Afifi, 1995). An interesting pattern of responses emerged, wherein the social hierarchy inherent within organizations prevented discussion of particular stressors. Much like rules of social appropriateness may dictate the topics individuals discuss with their families (Guerrero & Afifi, 1995), rules of social appropriateness appear to restrict individuals' ability to communicate about problems in organizational settings.

As expected, the fear that outsiders will not understand (or cannot relate) was by far the most commonly cited barrier restricting one's disclosure to outsiders. To the extent that this may be an inaccurate perception, this finding is particularly interesting. Individuals appear to perceive that their problems are unique even though (as discussed above) participants report consistently similar problems regardless of the nature of their organization. Participants all reported problems with time management, concern over the commitments made to the organization and fear of being ostracized, regardless of the type of organization they reported on. As such, it appears that though individuals report dealing with a CROS because "nobody will understand," this is quite likely not the case. The ubiquity of this perception leads us to believe that the presence of a CROS may be more widespread within organizations than we were able to capture with this sample.

The findings presented herein represent an exploration of a newly identified variable of interest for organizational scholars. Given the exploratory nature of this study, a few limitations should be noted. First, in the interest of evaluating a wide-cross section of participants, we did not limit the type of organization the participant was allowed to base their responses on. Theoretically, this should not have been a limitation; however, given the wide variety of

organizations represented, it is likely that the nature of the interpersonal relationship in each organization also varied considerably. For instance, although both a fraternity brother and a worker in a for-profit business may report time management issues, the contextual nature of those issues would most likely be quite different. Therefore, a certain level of control over the types of organizations surveyed would have made these data more interpretable.

Unfortunately, many of our inferential statistics yielded both nonsignificant results and effect sizes below acceptable levels. The fact that the CROS measure is new and has not been validated outside of this study may contribute to these results. This possibility needs to be investigated in future iterations of this research program in order to find a more valid measurement of this phenomenon. Finally, since we did not control for the amount of stress that individuals were experiencing, our relatively large sample ( $N = 406$ ) likely suffered from a threshold effect. Furthermore, given that our sample consisted of many young college students, there is a real possibility that they did not yet have the wide variety of experiences that seasoned organizational members have. In the future, we should reexamine these research questions within the context of professional organizations or among individuals who already report high levels of organizational stress.

Finally, while space limitations preclude a more thorough discussion of the specific barriers to communication identified by participants, we would be remiss not to mention that many of the unique responses in the categories marked “other,” provided us with information that we feel will be useful in our reconceptualization of the CROS measures in future studies. Taken together, we feel this set of responses not only supports the existence of CROS as a variable of interest, but also provides us with new directions for refinement of our measures for use in future research.

In the future, researchers should continue to test the validity of the CROS measure proposed in the present investigation in an effort to refine these items. Additionally, we feel strongly that when an individual appraises a stressor as being communicatively-restricted, he or she may experience the negative side effects of stress, because of a lack of social support. While this contention remains unconfirmed in the present study, we feel that this proposition should be tested. The identification of a communicatively-restricted organizational stressor is an important contribution to the on-going study of social support in organizations and beyond. Although our findings are tentative, they provide a heuristic by which scholars can better understand the nature of organizational stress.

## Footnote

<sup>1</sup> Z-scores for inside dimension ranges for low = lowest to  $-.29$ , medium =  $-.28$  to  $.29$ , high =  $.30$  to highest. Z-scores for outside dimension ranges for low = lowest to  $-.14$ , medium =  $-.15$  to  $.43$ , high =  $.44$  to highest.

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Table 1

*Distribution of Types of Organizations Reported by Participants*

			Valid	
	Frequency	Percent	Percent	Cumulative
For-profit company	92	22.7	22.7	22.7
Nonprofit company	35	8.6	8.6	31.3
Government agency	1	.2	.2	31.5
Fraternity/Sorority	63	15.5	15.5	47.0
Athletic Team/club	106	26.1	26.1	73.2
Service organization	36	8.9	8.9	82.0
Competitive club/team	21	5.2	5.2	87.2
Religious group	14	3.4	3.4	90.6
Military/Armed Forces	3	.7	.7	91.4
Other	35	8.6	8.6	100.0
Total	406			

Table 2

*Factor Loadings for Exploratory Factor Analysis with Direct Oblimin Rotation of CROS Items*

	Factor	
	Inside	Outside
3. I feel that if I wanted to I could talk to members of my organization about this issue	<b>.80</b>	.10
7. This is an issue that I feel I cannot talk to members of my organization about*	<b>.80</b>	.10
9. I feel that members of my organization get what I am talking about when I discuss this issue with them	<b>.80</b>	-.07
1. I talk to other members of my organization about this issue.	<b>.69</b>	.05
5. I am satisfied with the support I receive from members of my organization when I talk to them about this issue	<b>.64</b>	-.07
4. I feel that if I wanted to I could talk to people outside of my organization about this issue	-.00	<b>.83</b>
8. This is an issue that I feel I cannot talk to people outside of my organization about*	.18	<b>.75</b>
6. I am satisfied with the support I receive from people outside of my organization when I talk to them about this issue	.01	<b>.71</b>
10. I feel that people outside of my organization get what I am talking about when I discuss this issue with them	-.11	<b>.68</b>
2. I talk to people not associated with my organization about this issue	.02	<b>.66</b>

*Note.* The number indicates the original placement in the measure. Items marked with as asterisk were reflected.