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The effect of gender on the perception/evaluation of business memoranda

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The effect of gender on the perception/evaluation of

business memoranda

by

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A Thesis Submitted to the

Graduate Faculty in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Major: English

Iowa State University
Ames, Iowa

1991

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INTRODUCTION

When a male and female engage in conversation, do they speak differently? Does the male speak better? Do males and females write differently? Does a male write better? Linguists have been searching for the answers to these questions for several years, but in recent years the search has intensified. But what about you, the reader of this document--what do you think? Read the following memoranda and determine your perception of the gender of each writer.

Memorandum One: "This year I am the company United Way Campaign Chairperson. I have a choice between two speakers for the campaign meeting--Dr. Helen Wright and Ms. Joan Fulham--and would like your opinion on the matter.

I understand that you were involved in a similar fund-raising drive in Calgary. Based on your experience with fund-raising, which speaker would you expect to be more effective? I'm leaning towards Fulham. Any recommendations?"

Memorandum Two: "Perhaps you already know that I am the company United Way Campaign Chairperson this year This is likely a busy time for you, since you've just arrived here, but I have a choice to make between two speakers for the campaign meeting--Dr. Helen Wright

and Ms. Joan Fulham--and would really appreciate your opinion. You were involved in a similar fund-raising drive in Calgary, weren't you?

Based on your experience with fund-raising, could you possibly suggest which speaker would be more effective? I'd probably like to choose Ms. Fulham. Won't you please give me your recommendation?" (Colwill & Sztaba, 1986, p. 64).

If you decided the first memo was written by a man and the second by a woman, your conclusions coincide with much of the research on male and female verbal communications (Colwill & Sztaba, 1986, p. 64). That research asserts that men and women use language differently. From that research, Colwill and Sztaba have concluded that women use:

- tag questions more than men to indicate the uncertainty of their opinions (e.g., "You were involved in a similar fund-raising drive in Calgary, weren't you?").

- qualifiers more than men to lower the aggressiveness of their statements (e.g., "I'd probably like to choose Ms. Fulham.").

- disclaimers more than men to self-deprecate their statements (e.g., "Perhaps you already know that ...").

- more polite forms than men to soften their
requests (e.g., "please").

Differences Between Male and Female Use of Language

As early as 1922, Otto Jesperson postulated that differences existed between males' and females' use of language. Basing his conclusions on experience and observation, he posited that women preferred language which was refined, euphemistic, and exaggerated. He also claimed they had a smaller vocabulary than men, used more adverbs, didn't finish exclamatory sentences, and were simply not as intelligent as men. Men, on the other hand, used language which was full of slang and was forceful. Jesperson contended that men were the creators of language because of their desire for a forceful language.

Since Jesperson's time, linguists have continued research to prove the purported inferiority of female language (Spender, 1980); the last 30 years in particular have produced a plethora of studies to determine the flaws in female language, but in 1975 Robin Lakoff opened a linguistic "can of worms" when she published Language and Woman's Place. As a result of her introspective and observational research, Lakoff claims the language of women not only reflects their subordinate status in a male-dominated society but that it also subjugates them to that

lower status. Lakoff postulates that because of their societal status, women's language is uncertain and polite, illustrating their lack of self-confidence and power in society. Further, Lakoff claims women's low self-esteem and powerlessness causes their speech to contain the following linguistic features:

- Expletives. Lakoff asserts men use stronger expletives, such as "Oh, shit," whereas women would use "oh, dear," illustrating their lack of powerlessness in the society which expects them to be polite (pp. 4-5).

- Very correct grammar. Lakoff believes women's usage of very correct grammar reflects society's expectation of them to be ladylike--"boys talk rough, girls don't" (p. 55).

- Polite Forms. Furthering the preceding idea of society's expectations of women to be ladylike, Lakoff claims women use "please" and "thank you" more than men (p. 55).

- Color Discrimination. Lakoff states that women tend to be more specific in defining colors than men; for example, a man might say "pink," but a woman would say "mauve." She explains that women

do this to compensate for the lack of

responsibility they are given on crucial matters

(pp. 8-9).

- Empty Adjectives. Lakoff asserts that certain

   adjectives would rarely be used by men (and if they

   were, the masculinity of the user would be

   questioned), such as "divine," "charming," "cute,"

   etc. (pp. 12-14).

- Intensive "so." Lakoff contends women use the

   intensive "so" more than men to weasel out of

   indicating strong, forceful emotions. The use of

   this intensifier allows them to indicate a strong

   feeling without being aggressive (pp. 54-55).

- Hedges. Lakoff states that women also indicate

   their uncertainty about statements with such hedges

   as: "I think," "kind of," "sort of," "you know"

   (pp. 53-54).

- Tag questions. Finally, Lakoff believes that women

   further indicate their lack of confidence by the

   use of tag questions and rising intonations on

   declarative statements to seek confirmation from

   the listener (pp. 15-19).

The bottom line of Lakoff's argument is that "woman is

damned if she does, and damned if she doesn't." If a woman

uses the language society expects her to use, she is looked

upon as a nice girl who knows her place in society but does not need to be taken seriously. On the other hand, if she uses the language of the gender which holds the power (i.e., males), she is considered a "bitch."

Empirical Evidence

Without further ado, other researchers got into the act to prove, disprove, or enlarge upon Lakoff's ideas. Empirically speaking, however, much of the research which followed has done little to supply significant evidence to support Lakoff's claims because much of the research has been based on unsystematic observations and personal experiences as was Lakoff's and Jesperson's. Such research does not provide significant evidence to support the claim that females and males use language differently (Berryman-Fink & Wilcox, 1983; Haas, 1979; Spender, 1980; Spender, 1989; Thorne & Henley, 1975).

To determine empirical evidence which significantly supports the argument of differences in male and female language, Adelaide Haas (1979) conducted a qualitative study of previous research which had examined the form, topic, content, and use of spoken language by males and females. For the purpose of this study, I will review her findings on form, content, and use; I will also discuss the results of other research not included in her study.

In spite of the claim that men use stronger expletives than women, Haas found no significant evidence to support that claim.

Haas did find, however, limited evidence to support the claim that women use more polite forms than men. Hartman (cited in Haas) found 16 women in Maine born around 1900 who used more polite forms than their male counterparts. But among 626 Amsterdam ticket buyers, Brouwer's (1982) study revealed little significant difference in the politeness of male and female buyers. However, both the male and female buyers tended to be more polite to the male ticket sellers, illustrating the superior status of men in society. Regardless of whether females actually do or do not use polite forms more than men do, society expects women to use them more than men (Kemper, 1984).

Even though evidence to support women's use of polite forms is limited, Haas (1979) found concrete evidence to support the attribute of politeness in women's language. Haas explains that evidence to be phonological, indicating women to use less slang than men. Trudgill (cited in Haas) found that men use the "in" ending, whereas women tend to use the more grammatically correct "ing" ending. Furthermore, women were also found to use the "er" ending

as opposed to "uh" used by men (Fisher; Levine & Crockett; Wolfrom; cited in Haas).

Another claim often made about women's language is that they talk more than men (Kramer, 1974a) (Note: Lakoff did not discuss this subject in her study). Haas found mixed messages on the subject, including some empirical evidence to support the stereotype. Schultz, Briere, and Sandler (1984) also found evidence to support this claim. In describing a stimulus picture, females significantly used more words than male speakers. On the contrary, in a similar study conducted by Wood (cited in Eakins & Eakins), men used more words than women to describe the stimulus pictures. Haas (1979) also found evidence to show men to be more verbose than women (Swacker; Argle et al.; and Bernard; cited in Haas). Furthermore, Eakins and Eakins (1978) found faculty men to talk more than faculty females at university meetings. Dale Spender (1989) also found men to talk consistently more than women during a variety of academic conversations she taped with the participants' permission.

In reviewing the research which studied the content of women's speech, Haas conceded sufficient evidence exists to conclude women's speech tends to be expressive, evaluative, and positive, whereas men's language tends to be more

concrete and hostile (Hartman; Wood; Geiser, Gottschalk & Walkins; cited in Haas). Schultz, Briere, and Sandler (1984) affirm Haas' conclusion because the subjects of their study tended to focus on differing aspects of the picture--females related to females, clothing, color and communication, but the males related to themselves.

The primary claim asserted by researchers about women's language is that they lack confidence and are tentative and uncertain in their speaking, whereas males are assertive and forceful, even aggressive (Berryman-Fink, 1983; Farrell, 1979; Lakoff, 1975; McEdwards, 1985; Miller, 1981). More importantly, that male stereotype is perceived by society to be the "right" way to use language (Kramer, 1974b; Spender, 1980).

Again, Haas discovered a mixed bag of evidence relating to this aspect of language, but she finally concluded that a small amount of evidence does suggest that males may be assertive and women tentative. Hartman (cited in Haas) found the older women in her study to be more tentative than their male peers by their greater use of qualifiers. Hirschman (cited in Haas), on the other hand, found no difference in the number of qualifiers used by male and female undergraduate students, but Swacker (cited in Haas) found female undergraduates to use approximation of numbers and males to use specific numbers.

Crosby and Nyquist (1977) provide further empirical support for Haas' conclusion. Labeling Lakoff's attributes for female speech "female register," they conducted three studies to test who uses the female register. In their first study, conducted among 16 female and 16 male undergraduates, they found the female register (i.e., empty adjectives, tag questions, hedges, and "so") used more by female subjects than male subjects.

The second study included 107 males and 90 females who asked for information at an information booth in an urban municipal center. The results showed the female register (i.e., hedges, politeness, and directness) used less in a male to male context, again illustrating the dominance of the male.

And in their final study, conducted between police personnel and their clients, Crosby and Nyquist found the female register (i.e., tag questions, hedges, and politeness) used more by females than males. I think, however, one must consider the effect of the environment when reviewing the results of this study.

Baumann (cited in Haas), however, did not find any greater use of tag questions or qualifiers by women, nor did Dubois and Crouch (1975). Dubois and Crouch disagree with Lakoff that the use of tag questions only indicates a speaker's lack of certainty. They claim that tag questions

can also be used to suppress opposition or to ask for information. In an informal collection of tapes from an academic workshop, they found men to use more tags than women; 33 tags were spoken by men and none by women, perhaps indicating that tag questions can be used as a means of empowerment as well as showing uncertainty as Lakoff claims.

The evidence thus far is contradictory on this question of assertiveness by men and women in the use of language. But the patterns of interaction between the two groups in mixed conversations lend support to the argument that men are dominant, aggressive, and controlling.

In a mock jury deliberation conducted by Strodtbeck and Mann (cited in Eakins and Eakins), men acted: They asked questions; they initiated speech acts; and they showed antagonism towards others. Conversely, women reacted: They stroked the conversation by agreeing with others, understanding what others said, and concurring with others (Eakins & Eakins, 1978, p. 33).

This dominance and aggressiveness of males in conversation is further supported by several studies which show men to interrupt mixed conversations more than women do (Kester, cited in Kramer, 1974a). In their study of university meetings, Eakins and Eakins (1978) found faculty

men to interrupt more than faculty women. And in their study of undergraduate students, West and Zimmerman (1983) found a resounding 79% of the interruptions in their study to be male-initiated.

In contrast to the assertion of differences between male and female language, the 736 and 382 participants (i.e., two studies) in Montgomery and Norton's (1981) survey revealed more similarities between male and female language than differences. In perceiving their own communication styles, the participants--both male and female--believed their speech contained these attributes: impressive, contentious, open, dramatic, dominant, relaxed, friendly, attentive, and image-making. The subjects perceived only two differences between male and female speech: Males saw themselves as being more precise, and females saw themselves as being more animated.

Stereotypes

Montgomery and Norton's study was one of the few studies I found which indicated similarities between male and female language. As I stated earlier, much of the research which has claimed differences between men's and women's language is based on unsystematic observation, introspection, and experience; and the evidence which exists is too limited and/or contradictory to draw any

final and firm conclusions about concrete differences
between male and female language (Borisoff & Merrill, 1985;
Kemper, 1984; Kramer, 1974a; Kramer, 1974b; Siegler &
Siegler, 1976).

Although firm conclusions cannot be drawn, the
following speaking patterns of males' and females' use of
language seem to emerge from the existing empirical
evidence:

- Women's language seems to be more correct than
  men's, especially in using less slang.
- Women's language seems to be more expressive and
  interpretive, whereas men's language is more
  precise and instrumental.
- Men's language seems to be assertive, whereas
  women's language strokes conversations, especially
  mixed conversations.

Dale Spender (1980) contends that linguistic research
has been carried out with the premise that "something is
wrong with woman" (p. 7), setting out to find the flaws,
the defects, the inferiority of women's language. The
perceived male language (i.e., forceful, assertive, strong)
is accepted as the "norm"; therefore, anything which
doesn't measure up to the norm is a "deviation." But
Spender asks, what makes the so-called male language the
norm? She answers: our patriarchal society. Because of

this belief in the "male register" as the standard, few research results which have shown similarities between male and female language have been reported because obviously "something must have gone wrong with the tests" (Kramer, 1974b; Thorne & Henley, 1975; Spender, 1980). Therefore, Spender (1980) contends, linguistic research has been conducted on the assumption that women's language is inferior and, as a result, has accomplished nothing more than to perpetrate the subordinate status of women in society by perpetrating the stereotypes of the inferiority of their language.

And the stereotypes definitely exist, regardless of the lack of significant evidence to support them. Further, as Spender claims, those stereotypes do reflect the subordinate status of women in society (Borisoff & Merrill, 1985; Kemper, 1984; Kramer, 1974a; Kramer, 1974b; McEdwards, 1985, Siegler & Siegler, 1976). Berryman-Fink and Wilcox (1983) summarize those stereotypes:

The growing literature on sex-based linguistic distinctions suggests that the sexes vary in topics of discourse; that females are more socially oriented, or expressive, while males are more task oriented, or instrumental, when communicating; that females are more likely than males to use correct linguistic

forms; and that females use more questions than males use. Female speech may be characterized by politeness and uncertainty. It has been suggested that females use more intensifying adjectives and adverbs, while males use more slang terms. Many studies propose a sex difference in amount of discourse. Additionally, sex differences are posited in the area of paralinguistic characteristics, including supposed differential use of pitch and intonation. Examination of this research shows many of these conclusions to be unsupported or tentative at best. Empirically documented sex-typical language distinctions are limited in number (p. 665).

To counter these stereotypes about their language, women are often encouraged to let go of the "female register" and "speak more like a man" (Berryman-Fink, 1983; Miller, 1981; and Lakoff, 1975).

Newcombe and Arnkoff (1979) found some evidence to support that recommendation in their research of linguistic features. Subjects perceived speech which contained tag questions, qualifiers, and compound requests to be non-assertive regardless of the sex of the speaker. On the other hand, in Bradley's (1981) study, subjects perceived a good argument to contain strong evidence to support it and few qualifiers regardless of sex of the speaker. However,

women who used qualifiers and tag questions were perceived as less knowledgeable and intelligent than men who used qualifiers and tag questions. Furthermore, Bradley (1981) and Wiley and Eskilson (1985) discovered that a woman, even though she presented a well-constructed argument, was less liked than the man who did the same. So now women are back to square one--"damned if they do, and damned if they don't."

Rasmussen and Moely (1986) further affirmed Bradley's findings. The sujects of their study perceived strong expletives and direct nonpolite speech as masculine; they perceived hedges, "women's" adjectives, and polite forms as feminine. Furthermore, a male who used "female" speech was perceived as being homosexual, and a female who used "male" speech was considered to be conceited.

Bradley's, Wiley and Eskilson's, and Rasmussen and Moely's studies indicate that society's stereotypes of male and female language affect a receiver's perception of a message. And as I studied this subject of male and female use of language, I began to question if these stereotypes of female and male language affect the perception of women's communication in the business world.

Hypothesis

The purpose of my research was to determine if "writing like a man" would be successful in writing managerial documents, or if the gender of a writer would affect the perception and evaluation of the document by the receiver regardless of the writing. In his now classic 1968 study, Philip Goldberg conducted research among 40 undergraduate female students. Each subject received a booklet of six essays discussing these topics: law and city planning (subjects associated with men), elementary school teaching and dietetics (subjects associated with women), and linguistics and art history (neutral topics). Goldberg used two different booklets in his study; in one booklet an essay's author carried a male name and in the other a female's name. Each booklet contained three articles written by women and three articles written by men. The subjects evaluated each essay for the effectiveness of the writing and the competence of the writer. Overall, the subjects consistently rated the essays written by males as more effective than those written by females (regardless of topic) and the male writers as more competent than the female writers.

My concern, of course, was with written business communication where little research has been completed to trace gender difference. Smeltzer and Werbel (1986)

conducted a study among MBA students who had varied work backgrounds and had completed a business communication course. The study revealed no significant stylistic differences between men and women. Contending that Smeltzer and Werbel's study was contaminated by the type of students used, Sterkel (1988) conducted a similar study among undergraduates with no formal business communication training; the results were the same--no significant stylistic differences between male and female writers.

Although Tebeaux (1990) found gender differences in her informal study, she emphasizes that these differences were related to the writer's response to the writing context rather than stylistic differences:

> "Women with little people-intensive job experience often wrote...statements [which] were less blunt and exhibited more sensitivity to the needs of readers...than responses of men with little such experience" (p. 29).

But what about the perception of female and male business communication? It is a given that excellent communication skills are accepted as a means of climbing the corporate ladder (Hildebrandt, 1982), and Bennet and Olney (1986) found in their survey of 100 Fortune 500 corporate vice-presidents, 86% of the respondents stated

memorandum writing as the most important written
communication skill to be included in business
communication courses (p. 19). The perception of a
female's written documents within the corporation may be
important to her career success or failure. In simulated
studies Rosen and Jerdee (1975) and Colwill and Sztaba
(1986) found the assertive, "masculine" style of writing to
be better received than the indirect, "feminine" style.
Furthermore, the "masculine" style was perceived to be more
effective. Morrow and Lowenberg's (1983) study also
confirms the direct, forceful style to receive a higher
rating from evaluators.

In my research I wanted to see if society's
stereotypes of males' and females' use of language have any
effect on a reader's perception of business memoranda. In
essence I sought an answer to this question: Will the
gender of the writer of a business memorandum
affect the perception/evaluation of the document by the
reader?

METHOD

To gather data for answering my question, I chose to conduct a survey among business managers. A random sample of the population was selected, the survey instrument devised and distributed, and statistical analyses selected and performed.

Sample

The subjects were 86 managers from the midwestern site of an international manufacturing/sales company, randomly selected from 172 managers, fulfilling various functions within the company. In this context, I defined a manager to be a person responsible for supervising other personnel, excluding factory personnel.

Procedure

Reader reaction to an interoffice memorandum dependent upon the gender of the writer was the focus of this study.

The survey instrument (see Appendices A and B) included an interoffice memorandum with an attached questionnaire for the subjects to evaluate the effectiveness of the memo's writer in fulfilling the purpose of the memo, the attitude of the writer toward the audience, the language of the memo, the organization of the memo, and the overall quality of the memo.

The memorandum contained the generic content of a smoking policy so that subjects could relate to the writing context of the memo. For the organization and style of the memo, I selected a high-impact, bottom-line mode (Fielden & Dulek, 1984; Suchan & Colucci, 1989) because that mode assimilates the "masculine register" of being direct, forceful, and assertive. The high-impact, bottom-line mode contains these organizational and stylistic characteristics:

- The bottom line (the purpose of the [document]) stated in the first paragraph.
- A contract sentence (stating what major points the [document] will cover) immediately following the bottom line.
- Short paragraphs, bold type headings that mirror the language in the contract sentence, and lists.
- Simple sentences in subject-verb-object word order to encourage easy information chunking and thus promote quick semantic closure.
- Subjects and verbs as close to each other as possible.
- Active verbs.

- Concrete, easy-to-understand language.

- First and second person personal pronouns.

    (Suchan & Colucci, 1989, pp. 464-465)

Before I sent the survey instrument out, I asked four Iowa State University graduate faculty members whose emphases include business communication to test it. I carefully considered their critical comments as I made final changes on the survey instrument.

In order to test the effect of the gender of the writer on the perception/evaluation of the memorandum by the reader, the gender of the writer was manipulated so that forty-three of the subjects received the memo from John Morrow and forty-three received the identical memo from Jane Morrow. That division was further carried out so that half of each management level received from John and half received from Jane.

Statistical Analysis

Frequency data were collected to determine the characteristics of the sample population and to compare the results from Group 1 (readers of John's memo) and Group 2 (readers of Jane's memo) in each of the nine factors of the survey.

Chi-square tests were performed on each factor to test whether the evaluation of each factor was independent of the gender of the writer.

Finally, a one-way analysis of variance was conducted on factors 4, 5, and 8 to compare the means between the answers from each group to determine if any significance existed.

RESULTS

Seventy-four questionnaires (87%) were returned to me of the 86 I sent out.

Characteristics of the Sample

As indicated in Table 1, the business managers surveyed were mostly male (90.5%).

The highest management level at this company accounted for the smallest number of respondents from a management level (14%) with the remaining number of respondents being evenly distributed over the other four levels of higher management: 23%, 20%, 22%, and 22%, respectively.

Those managers whose functions involve relations with outside people (i.e., sales, marketing, public relations, distribution) had the highest number of personnel from a function (24%) with manufacturing and engineering having the next highest representation (23%). Accounting and credit collection made up 14% of the respondents with 12% coming from development personnel and 10% coming from systems and data processing. The lowest number of respondents came from personnel, safety, and medical (8%) and purchasing (8%).

TABLE 1
Characteristics of the Respondents

CHARACTERISTIC/GROUPING		NUMBER	RELATIVE PERCENT	ADJUSTED PERCENT
SEX				
Male		67	90.5	90.5
Female		7	9.5	9.5
	TOTAL	74	100.0	100.0
LEVEL OF MANAGEMENT				
Level A		10	13.5	13.5
Level B		17	23.0	23.0
Level C		15	20.3	20.3
Level D		16	21.6	21.6
Level E		16	21.6	21.6
	TOTAL	74	100.0	100.0
FUNCTION WITHIN THE COMPANY[a]				
1		6	8.1	8.1
2		17	23.0	23.0
3		10	13.5	13.5
4		18	24.3	24.3
5		8	10.8	10.8
6		6	8.1	8.1
7		9	12.2	12.2
	TOTAL	74	100.0	100.0

[a] Functions within company are as follows:

1--Personnel, Safety, and Medical
2--Manufacturing and Engineering
3--Accounting and Manager/Credit Collection
4--Sales/Marketing, Public Relations, and
   Distribution
5--Systems and Data Processing
6--Purchasing
7--Research and Development, and Process Technology

Frequency and Significance of Answers

Table 2 shows the frequencies of the answers for each group and the results of the chi-square tests. Twenty-two of the 37 respondents (60%) reacting to Jane's memo evaluated her memo to be effective in achieving its purpose. In contrast, 30 of the 37 (81%) respondents reacting to John's memo said he was not effective. This difference is significant as indicated by the chi-square test.

Sixteen respondents considered Jane's memo to be effective because of the information included, whereas 16 respondents stated that John's memo was not effective because of the organization of the information.

Chi-square results indicated a significant difference between the two groups of respondents in their evaluation of the writer's attitude toward the reader. Seventeen respondents (47%) stated that John had an aggressive attitude toward his readers but only five respondents (14%) said Jane was aggressive. Moreover, 22 respondents said Jane was confident/assertive, but only 13 respondents thought John was.

In discerning what the attitude of the writer toward the reader should be in this writing context, answers were evenly distributed; no one said the writer should be

aggressive, 28 said the writer should be assertive, 22 said the writer should be confident, and 21 said the writer should be neutral.

Thirty-eight [17 (John), 21 (Jane)] respondents claimed the writer's word choice made the memo easy to read and understandable, but 20 [13 (John), 7 (Jane)] stated the word choice made the memo choppy.

Forty-nine [26 (John), 23 (Jane)] respondents felt the memo should begin with an indirect organization in contrast to 10 who stated it should begin directly (i.e., high-impact, bottom-line).

In rating the over-all quality of the memo, 26 of the respondents (74%) evaluating John's memo rated it as poor/semi-poor, but 23 of those evaluating Jane's memo (64%) rated the memo as fair/good, with the chi-square test revealing the difference as significant.

Twenty-nine [15 (John), 14 (Jane)] respondents chose to comment on aspects of the memo not discussed in the questionnaire. Seven of those reading John's memo reiterated the necessity to organize such a memo indirectly. Only three of the respondents reading Jane's memo again discussed indirect organization.

TABLE 2
Readers of John's Memo Versus Readers of Jane's Memo

QUESTION	JOHN N	JOHN PERCENT	JANE N	JANE PERCENT	TOTAL N	TOTAL PERCENT
EFFECTIVE MEMO?						
Yes	7	18.9	22	59.5	29	39.2
No	30	81.1	15	40.5	45	60.8
TOTAL	37	100.0	37	100.0	74	100.0

Chi-square=11.1**   Significance=0.01

WHY NOT EFFECTIVE?						
Organization	16	53.3	8	57.1	24	54.5
Content	5	16.7	4	28.6	9	20.5
Tone	8	26.7	2	14.3	10	22.7
Style	1	3.3	x	xxxx	1	2.3
TOTAL	30	68.2	14	31.8	44ᵃ	100.0

Chi-square=1.80   Significance=0.05

WHY EFFECTIVE?						
Organization	3	42.9	5	20.8	8	25.8
Content	2	28.6	16	66.7	18	58.1
Tone	x	xxxx	1	4.2	1	3.2
Style	2	28.6	2	8.3	4	8.3
TOTAL	7	22.6	24	77.4	31ᵃ	100.0

Chi-square=4.38   Significance=0.05

ᵃ Respondents should have answered Question 2 or 3, depending on their answer to Question 1. Since the total number of answers for Questions 2 and 3 equals 75, one respondent answered both questions.

ᵇ Not all respondents answered this question.

**Significant at 0.01 level.

TABLE 2 (cont.)

QUESTION PERCENT	N	JOHN PERCENT	N	JANE PERCENT	N	TOTAL
WRITER'S ATTITUDE						
Neutral	6	16.7	9	25.0	15	20.8
Confident/ Assertive	13	36.1	22	61.1	35	48.6
Aggressive	17	47.2	5	13.9	22	30.6
	36	50.0	36	50.0	72[b]	100.0

Chi-square=9.46**   Significance=0.01

EXPECTED ATTITUDE						
Neutral	11	31.4	10	27.8	21	29.6
Confident	9	25.7	13	36.1	22	31.0
Assertive	15	42.9	13	36.1	28	39.4
	35	49.3	36	50.7	71[b]	100.0

Chi-square-0.90   Significance=0.05

WORD CHOICE						
Choppy	13	35.1	7	18.9	20	27.0
Readable	17	45.9	21	56.8	38	51.4
Confusing	3	8.1	2	5.4	5	6.8
Too formal	4	10.8	7	18.9	11	14.9
	37	50.0	37	50.0	74	100.0

Chi-square=3.24   Significance=0.05

TABLE 2 (cont.)

QUESTION	JOHN		JANE		TOTAL	
	N	PERCENT	N	PERCENT	N	PERCENT
INTRODUCTION SHOULD BE						
Indirect	26	76.5	23	63.9	49	70.0
Direct	3	8.8	7	19.4	10	14.3
Passive	5	14.7	6	16.7	11	15.7
	34	48.6	36	51.4	70[b]	100.0

Chi-square=1.82   Significance=0.05

OVER-ALL QUALITY						
Poor/semi-poor	26	74.3	13	36.1	39	54.9
Fair/good	9	25.7	23	63.9	32	45.1
	35	49.3	36	50.7	71[b]	100.0

Chi-square=8.96**   Significance=0.01

COMMENT						
Indirect Organization	7	46.7	3	21.4	10	34.5
Direct Organization	2	13.3	2	14.3	4	13.8
Content	2	13.3	2	14.3	4	13.8
Style	x	xxxx	4	28.6	4	13.8
Other	4	26.7	3	21.4	7	24.1
	15	51.7	14	48.3	29[b]	100.0

Chi-square=5.72   Significance=0.05

Table 3 compares the means of the ratings between the two groups for factors 4, 5, and 8. In factors 4 and 8 the variance between the mean scores was significant. Group 1 (John) rated the attitude of the writer higher on the assertive/aggressive side. And Group 2 (Jane) rated the over-all quality of the memo higher than Group 1.

TABLE 3
Ratings of Three Factors by Two Sample Groups

FACTOR	N	MEAN	SD	F RATIOS	T VALUES
WRITER'S ATTITUDE					
Group 1	36[a]	2.30	.74	6.59	-2.56*
Group 2	36[a]	1.88	.62		
1=neutral 2=confident/ assertive 3=aggressive					
EXPECTED ATTITUDE					
Group 1	35[a]	2.11	.86	.02	-0.16
Group 2	36[a]	2.08	.81		
1=neutral 2=confident/ assertive 3=aggressive					
OVER-ALL QUALITY					
Group 1	35[a]	2.26	.44	11.90	3.46**
Group 2	36[a]	2.63	.48		
2=poor/ semi-poor 3=good/fair					

[a]Not all respondents answered this question.

*Indicates Significance at the 0.05 level.

**Indicates Significance at the 0.01 level.

DISCUSSION

This study had one limitation which may have affected the results of the study: the office environment of the company where the survey was conducted.

I designed the study so that the survey instrument was a document which contained generic content the readers could relate to--in this instance, a cover memo for a new no-smoking policy to affect all personnel, both factory and office, limiting their smoking to break times and to designated areas.

However, the actual "smoke-free" policy which had recently gone into effect at the company may have biased some of the respondents' answers to the questionnaire accompanying the memo.

In late 1989 upper management set a goal of a smoke-free office environment. January, 1990, to June, 1990, was a transitional period, allowing smokers to become accustomed to a no-smoking policy. During that time, smoking was allowed only in designated areas and the company paid for a variety of programs to aid smokers to quit smoking.

On June 1, 1990, the "smoke-free" policy went into effect in the office area--no smoking is allowed anywhere in any office building. However, factory personnel may

smoke on the factory floor at any time though they may not smoke when they enter an office area.

I sent out the survey in August, 1990--two months after the smoke-free policy had gone into effect. The mental/emotional environment could easily have biased some of the subjects' answers.

Because the subjects for this study were not selected at random from the total population of business managers, the findings can only be generalized to the managers at this particular survey site. Therefore, my discussion will be limited to speculations about the results and recommendations for further research.

Interpretations

As Artie Johnson would have said on "Laugh-In," the results of this survey are "very interesting." After reviewing the literature on the subject of male and female language, I expected the readers to rate John's memo higher than Jane's and to label Jane's memo as aggressive because of the female using sex role inappropriate language. Neither of my expectations was fulfilled; instead the opposite occurred: Jane's memo received a higher over-all rating and John was labeled aggressive. Now I am faced with the question, why?

First of all, the relationships between oral and written communication have not been empirically supported (Smeltzer & Werbel, 1986; Tebeaux, 1990), making it difficult to transfer conclusions about oral communication to written communication. Furthermore, the stereotypes about women's language may affect oral communication perception more than they affect the perception of written communication (Smeltzer & Werbel, 1986).

In that same light, little research has been done on reader reaction to gender in business correspondence (Baker, in press; Wheeless & Berryman-Fink, 1985). In spite of the evidence that women are often rated lower than men in various business contexts, for example, job applications, promotions, etc. (Bartol, 1978; Rosen & Jerdee, 1974; Wiley & Eskilson, 1985), we have little evidence from which to infer actual perception of women's business communication.

In this particular study, the "talking platypus phenomenon" may have been in effect, explaining the higher rating for the female writer.

Since there are only nine females in higher management in the company where the survey was conducted, personnel probably do not often receive such an authoritative memorandum from a female. Nieva and Gutek (1980) found that female leadership performance, if unexpected, will be

given a higher rating than an equivalent performance by a male.

Abramson, Goldberg, Greenberg, and Abramson (1977) labeled this the "talking platypus phenomenon." A remark by Samuel Johnson about women preachers in the 18th century explains the phenomenon: "Sir [sic] a woman preaching is like a dog walking on its hind legs. It is not done well, but you are surprised to find it done at all" (cited in Nieva and Gutek, 1980, p. 269).

A final explanation for the results of this study also lies in the light of expectations: Men are expected to do a good job; when they do a poor job (and the readers of John's memo rated his memo as poor/semi-poor), are men judged more harshly than women?

Note in the following lists how the sex role stereotype expectations of males line up with the criteria expected of an effective manager.

Sex Role Stereotypes of Males	Criteria/Effective Managers
intelligent	well-informed
dominant	vigorous
unemotional	emotionally stable
enjoys arguing	dominant
generally initiates action	leadership ability
strong-willed	desires responsibility

appears self-assured	not uncertain
aggressive	aggressive
decisive	objective
straightforward	direct
(O'Donnell, 1985, p. 65)	(Schein, 1973, p. 98)

Schein conducted a similar study three times--in 1973, 1975, and in 1989. In 1973 the results indicated that male managers expected middle managers to possess characteristics similar to the sex role stereotype expectations of men. In 1975 women managers indicated the same perception. Again in 1989 men still held the same stereotypical perceptions, but women no longer sex typed managerial positions.

Perhaps, then, sex role stereotypes also work in reverse. Because women are expected to lack the necessary criteria to be successful managers, there is little surprise if they fail in a managerial responsibility. However, men are expected to meet the necessary criteria. If they fail in completing a managerial responsibility (i.e., writing a business memorandum), perhaps they are judged more harshly for their failure than women are.

Unexpected Findings

True, I was surprised that Jane's readers evaluated her memo higher than John's readers evaluated his, but I

was even more surprised by the vehement rejection of the
high-impact, bottom-line organization of the memo by both
groups of readers. In three factors of the survey (one-
third of the whole survey) the respondents indicated their
rejection of the direct organization. Why? Remember that
the respondents were informed the memo was a cover
document for delivering the policy. True, the topic of
smoking or, in this case, no smoking, is a sensitive issue;
but Gerald Witty, maintenance engineer for the Iowa
Veterans Home, explains that in such a situation,
management would send out prior communication about the
impending policy and this cover memo would be just a
formality for actual delivery of the policy. One of the
respondents of the survey commented similarly.

But this topic may have been sufficiently sensitive
for the survey respondents because of company environment
to bias their opinions as to the most effective
organization of the memo.

A "recipe" orientation toward writing business
communication could also have influenced the respondents'
answers: that is, the "bad news" mode which calls for
indirect organization as does the "persuasive" mode, but
the "good news" mode calls for direct organization. For
several years these prescriptive "recipes" have been the

common means of instructing business communication students in how to organize business letters and memorandums.

In spite of the research which composition experts have completed during the last decade to support the theory of writing as a rhetorical process, business communication instructors have not readily incorporated the writing process into their classrooms (Selzer, 1983). Perhaps that is because few authors of business communication textbooks base their textbooks on the theory of writing as a process. Of the twenty or so complementary textbooks I have received in the last eight years, only one text is founded on that theory--Paul Anderson's Business Communication (1989). The rest continue to present modal organization.

Though I do not know the years of experience of the respondents in order to be able to determine the approximate time they received college instruction, I assume the majority of those who studied business communication received "recipe" instruction. Furthermore, if any of the respondents have attended writing workshops, they have also probably received such instruction.

That "recipe" attitude toward the organization of memoranda would explain the respondents' opposition to the direct organization of this text. Instead of studying the context of the writing situation, the respondents

unconsciously identified the news as "bad news" with an element of persuasion (although it could be "good news" for non-smokers) which calls for indirect organization.

Fielden and Dulek (1984) offer further explanation why the respondents may have been reluctant to accept direct organization:

- Social upbringing trains us to be tactful, to "beat around the bush."
- Education trains us to be long-winded--the longer a paper, the better the grade!
- Large organizations often cause people to justify their actions and opinions with lengthy explanations (pp. 28-29).

Suchan and Colucci's (1989) study affirms the latter cause for organizational, circuitous writing. In their study the readers of a circuitous memo "perceived the writer as more dynamic and forceful than the writer of the high-impact memo" (p. 474). Explanation? "The bureaucratic [circuitous] style enables you to cover your stern, and that's smart, shrewd writing if you want to survive in the navy" (p. 474).

In this information age with bits and pieces of information bombarding business personnel through electronic mail, fax machines, computer communication, etc., I should think organizations would seek effective

communication skills which would increase the efficiency and productivity of their personnel. And research indicates that the direct organization of a document decreases reading time and increases comprehension (Fielden & Dulek, 1984; Pinsker, 1986; Suchan & Colucci, 1989). Saving ten minutes a day per person in reading time translates into the saving of several hours and dollars for an organization in one year.

Effective business communication skills are imperative for success in today's business world. Bennett and Olney (1986) and Storms (1983) found that oral communication skills are the most important with memorandum writing a close second.

Moreover, the business graduate needs effective writing skills immediately upon graduation. Storms found that respondents with work experience of five years or less spent an average of 28.4 percent of their time at work writing (p. 14).

Respondents to Bennett and Olny's and Storm's studies also indicated they needed to know how to organize information clearly and to state clearly the purpose of a document. Yet the respondents to my survey and Suchan and Colucci's survey indicated a disapproval for clear, direct statement of purpose.

Tebeaux (1990) claims business communication instructors need to quit worrying about differences between male and female writers and get on with the task of providing effective writing tools to business communication students which they can carry to and apply in the workday world. Suchan and Colucci (1989) elaborate on Tebeaux' claim: The tools which we provide business communication students need to be relevant to the organization's procedures and habits (p. 475).

In order for business communication instructors to know what those relevant tools are, further empirical research needs to be conducted to determine how organizations define communication effectiveness and the means by which they expect that effectiveness to be achieved.

It is time for business communication instructors to stop teaching "from the book." In order to prepare our students for the "real world," we need to go directly to the "horse's mouth" to find out how the organizations want our graduates to communicate in written business communication.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The composition of this thesis has completed my
program of study for a Master's Degree in English at Iowa
State University. Many "gurus" in composition research say
that all writing is collaborative, and this thesis
certainly was. I cannot possibly list all those who have
aided me in some way to complete this thesis, but I would
like to list a few: My husband, Jerry, who has encouraged
me, tolerated me, and read for me; my children, Cory and
Tara, who have also encouraged me, tolerated me, and made
sacrifices so I could complete my degree; my parents who
have sacrificed family time because I was "busy"; Rhonda
Watton, who facilitated the survey for me and her
secretary, Gayle Lowenberg; the managers who completed the
survey; Harold Baker of the ISU Statistical Laboratory, who
figured the random sampling for the survey; Harold Lee of
the Research Institute for Studies in Education at ISU, who
spent hours with me, figuring the statistical analyses to
use and then explaining the meaning of the analyses to me;
Dr. Chari Thralls, Dr. John Hagge, Dr. David Roberts, and
Dr. Doug Catron, who tested the survey instrument; and,
finally, I would like to thank my Program of Studies
committee, Dr. Margaret Graham, Dr. David Roberts, and Dr.
David Roochnick.

APPENDIX A: SURVEY INSTRUMENT FROM JOHN MORROW

To: Survey Participant   From: R. R. Watton

                                              cc: S. Witty

Date: August 15, 1990

Subject: Survey of Your Opinion of the Qualities
of an Effective Managerial Document

I have asked Sharon Witty to conduct this survey at Fisher Controls in Marshalltown. Having taught Business Communication at Marshalltown Community College for five years, Sharon is now a graduate student in Business Communication/Technical Writing at Iowa State University and will use the results of this survey in her thesis.

Enclosed you will find a survey packet that includes a memorandum and an attached questionnaire. Please use the questionnaire to evaluate the effectiveness of the memo. The questionnaire should take 10 to 15 minutes to complete.

This survey will enable Sharon to determine correlation between some of the latest research on effective managerial writing and what business managers think is an effective managerial document. Your professional experience in business writing is essential to this survey.

Your name and opinions will be kept confidential. Once the completed questionnaires have been coded for research use, all means of personal identification will be destroyed.

The results of this study will be available in October.

I appreciate your cooperation in completing this questionnaire. If you have any questions about this survey, telephone me (3879) or Sharon (752-0306). When you have completed the questionnaire, please return it by August 26, 1990, in the enclosed envelope.

Rhonda

Rhonda R. Watton

RRW/gjl-RRW1

Enclosures

FISHER

53   **Memorandum**

To: All Fisher Employees   From: John Morrow

                                        cc:

Date: September 1, 1990

Subject: Employee Smoking Policy

Attached is the new Employee Smoking Policy which will be put into effect on November 1, 1990. Please read the policy and become familiar with the new regulations.

The policy is now being distributed to all departments and employees and refers to designated smoking areas. The following portion of the Employee Smoking Policy is significant:

> "All Fisher employees, without exception and regardless of work shift, will not be permitted to smoke in work areas. Employees will be permitted to smoke only during authorized break times and meal times, and only in designated smoking areas."

The various designated smoking areas are listed on the policy statement.

This policy has been developed through the efforts of an ad hoc committee whose members recognize that the implementation of this policy will be a significant change for some of our employees. However, you should be aware of the purpose which led the ad hoc committee to develop this policy: to create a quality work environment for each employee.

Your cooperation in implementing this policy will be appreciated.

SCENARIO

For the purpose of this survey, <u>assume</u> that Fisher Controls in Marshalltown, Iowa, has decided to implement the smoking policy referred to in the attached memo. The Employee Wellness Coordinator, John Morrow, assigned an ad hoc committee of employees from various departments to develop the policy. The policy is now ready to be sent to each employee.

John has asked you to look at the memo which is to accompany the policy and to critique it for its effectiveness.

CRITIQUE

1. John's purpose for writing this memo is to inform employees of the new smoking policy and to prepare them to enact the new regulations. Do you think John has written an effective memo to achieve his purpose?
    _____yes   _____no

2. If no, why not? (Choose the one <u>best</u> answer).
    _____a. Because of the order in which John has presented the information.
    _____b. Because of the information John has chosen to include in his memo.
    _____c. Because of John's attitude toward the reader.
    _____f. Because of John's word choice(s).

3. If you think that John has written an effective memo, why? (Choose the one <u>best</u> answer).
    _____a. Because of the order in which John has presented the information.
    _____b. Because of the information John has chosen to include in his memo.
    _____c. Because of John's attitude toward the reader.
    _____d. Because of John's word choice(s).

4. What do you feel is John's attitude toward his reader? (Choose the one <u>best</u> answer).
    _____a. aggressive   _____c. neutral
    _____b. assertive   _____d. confident

5. What do you think John's attitude toward his reader should be? (Choose the one <u>best</u> answer).
    _____a. aggressive   _____c. neutral
    _____b. assertive   _____d. confident

6. Which of the following phrases describes your opinion of John's word choices (Choose the one <u>best</u> answer)?
    _____a. His word choices cause the memo to be choppy.
    _____b. His word choices enable the reader to easily read and understand the memo.
    _____c. His word choices cause the reader to become confused.
    _____d. His word choices are too formal.

7. Some business communication experts say that the opening
    section is the most important section of a managerial
    document.

    Which one of the following three paragraphs do you think is
    the best way for John to begin his memo?

    _____a. The health of its employees is important to Fisher
             Controls. Today we realize that smoke from
             cigarettes affects all who are in the vicinity of
             the smoker. Therefore, an ad hoc committee of seven
             members from various departments met in July to
             develop proposals for an employee smoking policy.
             Through the efforts of this committee, the new
             Employee Smoking Policy will be put into effect on
             November 1, 1990.

    _____b. Attached is the new Employee Smoking Policy which
             will be put into effect on November 1, 1990. Please
             read the policy and become familiar with the new
             regulations.

    _____c. Today's medical profession has stated that cigarette
             smoke is harmful to all persons in the vicinity of
             the smoker. Because of possible danger to the
             health of employees, it was decided to study the
             smoking situation at Fisher Controls. An ad hoc
             committee of seven persons from various departments
             was assigned in July to conduct the study and to
             develop proposals for a smoking policy.

8. On a scale of 1 to 4 how would you rate the over-all quality
    of John's memo for this writing situation (circle one)?

    poor   good
    1   2   3   4

9. Please make any comments about the memo which you feel are
    relevant to its effectiveness but have not been discussed in
    this questionnaire.

Please return this questionnaire by August 26, 1990, in the
enclosed envelope. Thank you.

APPENDIX B: SURVEY INSTRUMENT FROM JANE MORROW

To: Survey Participant   From: R. R. Watton

                                            cc: S. Witty

Date: **August 15, 1990**

Subject: Survey of Your Opinion of the Qualities
of an Effective Managerial Document

I have asked Sharon Witty to conduct this survey at Fisher Controls in Marshalltown. Having taught Business Communication at Marshalltown Community College for five years, Sharon is now a graduate student in Business Communication/Technical Writing at Iowa State University and will use the results of this survey in her thesis.

Enclosed you will find a survey packet that includes a memorandum and an attached questionnaire. Please use the questionnaire to evaluate the effectiveness of the memo. The questionnaire should take 10 to 15 minutes to complete.

This survey will enable Sharon to determine correlation between some of the latest research on effective managerial writing and what business managers think is an effective managerial document. Your professional experience in business writing is essential to this survey.

Your name and opinions will be kept confidential. Once the completed questionnaires have been coded for research use, all means of personal identification will be destroyed.

The results of this study will be available in October.

I appreciate your cooperation in completing this questionnaire. If you have any questions about this survey, telephone me (3879) or Sharon (752-0306). When you have completed the questionnaire, please return it by August 26, 1990, in the enclosed envelope.

Rhonda R. Watton

RRW/gjl-RRW1

Enclosures

FISHER   58   **Memorandum**

To: All Fisher Employees   From: Jane Morrow

                                         cc:

Date: September 1, 1990

Subject: Employee Smoking Policy

Attached is the new Employee Smoking Policy which will be put into effect on November 1, 1990. Please read the policy and become familiar with the new regulations.

The policy is now being distributed to all departments and employees and refers to designated smoking areas. The following portion of the Employee Smoking Policy is significant:

> "All Fisher employees, without exception and regardless of work shift, will not be permitted to smoke in work areas. Employees will be permitted to smoke only during authorized break times and meal times, and only in designated smoking areas."

The various designated smoking areas are listed on the policy statement.

This policy has been developed through the efforts of an ad hoc committee whose members recognize that the implementation of this policy will be a significant change for some of our employees. However, you should be aware of the purpose which led the ad hoc committee to develop this policy: to create a quality work environment for each employee.

Your cooperation in implementing this policy will be appreciated.

SCENARIO

For the purpose of this survey, <u>assume</u> that Fisher Controls in Marshalltown, Iowa, has decided to implement the smoking policy referred to in the attached memo. The Employee Wellness Coordinator, Jane Morrow, assigned an ad hoc committee of employees from various departments to develop the policy. The policy is now ready to be sent to each employee.

Jane has asked you to look at the memo which is to accompany the policy and to critique it for its effectiveness.

CRITIQUE

1. Jane's purpose for writing this memo is to inform employees of the new smoking policy and to prepare them to enact the new regulations. Do you think Jane has written an effective memo to achieve her purpose?
    _____yes   _____no

2. If no, why not? (Choose the one <u>best</u> answer).
    _____a. Because of the order in which Jane has presented the information.
    _____b. Because of the information Jane has chosen to include in her memo.
    _____c. Because of Jane's attitude toward the reader.
    _____f. Because of Jane's word choice(s).

3. If you think that Jane has written an effective memo, why? (Choose the one <u>best</u> answer).
    _____a. Because of the order in which Jane has presented the information.
    _____b. Because of the information Jane has chosen to include in her memo.
    _____c. Because of Jane's attitude toward the reader.
    _____d. Because of Jane's word choice(s).

4. What do you feel is Jane's attitude toward her reader? (Choose the one <u>best</u> answer).
    _____a. aggressive   _____c. neutral
    _____b. assertive   _____d. confident

5. What do you think Jane's attitude toward her reader should be? (Choose the one <u>best</u> answer).
    _____a. aggressive   _____c. neutral
    _____b. assertive   _____d. confident

6. Which of the following phrases describes your opinion of Jane's word choices (Choose the one <u>best</u> answer)?
    _____a. Her word choices cause the memo to be choppy.
    _____b. Her word choices enable the reader to easily read and understand the memo.
    _____c. Her word choices cause the reader to become confused.
    _____d. Her word choices are too formal.

7.   Some business communication experts say that the opening
     section is the most important section of a managerial
     document.

     Which one of the following three paragraphs do you think is
     the best way for Jane to begin her memo?

     _____a.   The health of its employees is important to Fisher
                 Controls. Today we realize that smoke from
                 cigarettes affects all who are in the vicinity of
                 the smoker. Therefore, an ad hoc committee of seven
                 members from various departments met in July to
                 develop proposals for an employee smoking policy.
                 Through the efforts of this committee, the new
                 Employee Smoking Policy will be put into effect on
                 November 1, 1990.

     _____b.   Attached is the new Employee Smoking Policy which
                 will be put into effect on November 1, 1990. Please
                 read the policy and become familiar with the new
                 regulations.

     _____c.   Today's medical profession has stated that cigarette
                 smoke is harmful to all persons in the vicinity of
                 the smoker. Because of possible danger to the
                 health of employees, it was decided to study the
                 smoking situation at Fisher Controls. An ad hoc
                 committee of seven persons from various departments
                 was assigned in July to conduct the study and to
                 develop proposals for a smoking policy.

8.   On a scale of 1 to 4 how would you rate the over-all quality
     of Jane's memo for this writing situation (circle one)?

     poor   good
     1   2   3   4

9.   Please make any comments about the memo which you feel are
     relevant to its effectiveness but have not been discussed in
     this questionnaire.

Please return this questionnaire by August 26, 1990, in the
enclosed envelope. Thank you.