EXPERIENCING SELF-HANDICAPPING BEHAVIOR AT WORK

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ABSTRACT

Self-Handicapping is an attempt to externalize a potential failure by offering an excuse, reducing effort, or creating obstacles. While extensive in psychology and education literature, the concept remains absent from business literature. The present study seeks to illustrate what self-handicapping looks like in business. We asked 92 subjects to identify what self-handicapping behaviors they have witnessed at their workplace. We used factor analysis to characterize groups of self-handicapping behavior with an overall category of self-handicapping. At the conclusion of the paper, we posit several further research questions that would follow the present study's aims.

INTRODUCTION

Self-handicapping has been defined as the process whereby "people withdraw effort, create obstacles to success, or make excuses so they can maintain a public or self-image of competence". Furthermore, it is used as a priori rationale for potential failure (Decker & Mitchell, 2016b). Interest in this process has grown considerably in recent years with increased attention to the impact of self-handicapping on leadership ineffectiveness, the setting of unrealistic goals, avoiding accountability, and reducing effort among other consequences (Akin, 2014; Chadwick & Raver, 2015; Decker & Mitchell, 2016b; Leary & Shepperd, 1986; Park & Brown, 2013; Schwinger & Stiensmeier-Pelster, 2011; Thau, Aquino, & Poortvliet, 2007). Yet, most of this increased interest has been confined to psychology, exercise science, and education. Surprisingly, there has been little research reported about self-handicapping in the professional business literature – especially about identifying its forms and overcoming it (Crant & Bateman, 1993; Ishida, 2012; McElroy & Crant, 2008; Siegel & Brockner, 2005, and Flanagan, 2015).

This paper is intended as a partial corrective. In it we report the results of a research study of the witnessing of self-handicapping in the work place among currently employed individuals. Our principal focus is the determination of the areas or types of work place self-handicapping that are commonly observed and experienced. Expressed less formally, our attention is devoted to "what does self-handicapping look like in business?" However, our objective extends beyond merely determining such commonly observed behavior to beginning a conversation about how to mitigate if not eliminate it.

Following a rather detailed literature review, we discuss our methods of developing a set of reliable and valid measures of two variants of self-handicapping – "claimed" and "behavioral." We then report the results of applying these measures in a working population, results in the form

of observed, different behavioral dimensions. Finally, we discuss the implications of our research results for mitigating or eliminating self-handicapping in business work places.

Literature Review

Forms of self-handicapping

In their recent book, Decker and Mitchell (2016) conducted an extensive review from which they identified a variety of forms of self-handicapping behavior in research conducted chiefly in psychology, exercise science and education. These forms included the following –

> **Avoiding Accountability** - avoiding conflict and confrontation, making excuses or blaming others, constantly playing "Devil's Advocate", poor presentation of self in public or social media, not holding others accountable.
> **Tunnel Vision** - focusing on the small picture (i.e., continuously developing "tools" to solve problems in order to avoid big picture thinking), attending to people only until you get your way, being linear – tackling only one problem at a time, and not effectively prioritizing or juggling projects.
> **Lack of Awareness** - little or no self-assessment of one's traits, strengths, or leader behaviors; little or no consistent direction or vision for oneself or others; or not understanding one's personal impact – what is left in your wake, and not burning bridges.
> **Poor Analysis and Decision Making** - not asking the right questions, frame blindness in decision making, not knowing what you don't know, and not questioning yourself or your organization. Making decisions for instant gratification, impulse, selfishness, or to please others.
> **Poor Communication Culture** - an inability to create transparency and trust, not being consistent and open, lacking listening skills, being defensive or unable to take constructive feedback, not allowing vulnerability or expression of doubt in meetings, and ignoring the wisdom of the crowd.
> **Poor Engagement** –viewing everything as a transaction, rather than as a partnership, not adding value to relationships, poor networking, talking about others behind their back, and aligning with only a few individuals (pack mentality).
> **Poor Talent Development** - hiring the wrong people, not being on the lookout for talent that can be grown in your organization, avoiding coaching, mentoring, and sponsoring deserving employees, not paying attention to the fit of people in the team, and allowing coaching and mentoring from bad leaders.
> **Micro-managing -** leading through fear, coercion and intimidation, constantly looking for fault and who to punish, being unable to cope with uncertainty or the unexpected, choosing situations where no unexpected challenge or event will take place, not understanding interpersonal boundaries.
> **Not Driving for Results** - anything that keeps one from focusing on outcomes – confusing effort with results or confusing internal results for customer outcomes, avoiding challenge and risk, spending time thinking about how things should be instead of taking action, and not using "baby steps."

In addition to identifying these several forms of self-handicapping, Decker and Mitchell (2016) offered the important caveat that these forms do not necessarily stand alone. Rather, they suggest that considerable overlap among these forms often exists (p. 7).

Other researchers have long observed how much people in organizations care about how they are seen and perceived by others (Burnstein and Schul, 1982). Appearing competent is important in selection interviews, in interacting with peers and superiors, in managing subordinates and in the choice of one's career path. Appearing competent is characterized as "impression management" (Goffman, 1959; Jones & Pittman, 1982). Such impression management behavior that employees use to shape how they are seen by others is itself central to self-handicapping. Indeed, as Decker and Mitchell (2016) argued, much self-handicapping behavior is the use of such "defensive impression management" as offering excuses, providing justifications, and utilizing apologies.

Still other researchers have distinguished two self-handicapping varieties – claimed and behavioral. The former has been described as using excuses to explain potential failure while the latter has been seen as behavior that takes the form of reducing effort or creating obstacles as an explanation for failing. Either of these varieties can be internal or external to the self-handicapper. For example, tiredness is likely to be internal while a "lack of support" is probably external (Leary & Sheppard, 1986). Further, in our observations of businesses we have noted the claimed variety frequently taking the forms of such excuses as feeling anxious, a lack of time, an overly difficult task, and the absence of resources. On the other hand, we have also seen in business the behavioral variety in the setting of unrealistic goals, in the evasion of accountability, and even in the avoidance of often-need employee confrontations.

Consequences of self-handicapping

Varieties and forms of self-handicapping aside, previous research has suggested various important, adverse consequences resulting from such behavior. According to Hoffman (2007), self-handicapping results in poor, ineffective leadership as a result of uncertainty among those practicing it and their subsequent reliance on "face-saving" strategies rather than the pursuit of innovative, productive problem solutions. Higgins & Berglas (1990) and Snyder (1990) further contend that when face-saving excuses are used by leaders, those same leaders typically reduce their own effort and learning. In a similar vein, Decker & Mitchell (ManageMagazine #2, 2016) have argued that self-handicapping may lead organizational leaders to avoid speaking up, to be more biased in their decision-making, and even to alter how they deploy human resources in their organizations.

Further, Harter, Schmidt, & Keyes (2003) reported that employees who witness their leaders exhibiting self-handicapping behavior were likely to become less engaged and more likely to demonstrate a diminished feeling of well-being. As a consequence, these authors also maintain, employee turnover, customer satisfaction, productivity, and profitably are likely to suffer.

Other researchers have reportedly found that self-handicapping often influences the impressions of others either by (1) lowering expectations (before a task) (Burns, 2005), or by (2) changing attributions about the individual (after a task) (Luginbuhl & Palmer, 1991; Park & Brown, 2014). Additionally, after a task, self-handicapping may also lead to discounting and externalizing the blame ordinarily associated with failure (Luginbuhl & Palmer, 1991; Ryska, 2002).

Still other research has demonstrated that self-handicapping is frequently hidden, subtle, and difficult to establish, characteristics which often lead to it being denied by individuals and avoided in group discussions (Noonan, 2007). Moreover, business leaders are often uncomfortable

dealing with or discussing human issues (Decker & Mitchell, 2016) and, thus, often avoid the very things that are likely their core problems in mission accomplishment – resolving "people matters."

Self-handicapping interventions

Such consequences aside, previous research also has suggested several possible interventions to deal with self-handicapping behavior and its adverse consequences. Such research has pointed to the leader, the situation, certain forms of individual behavior, and to self-deception as possible pathways to mitigation or complete elimination (Decker and Mitchell, 2016). One such suggested pathway is that of changing how individuals think about themselves and how those individuals react to the impressions of others (Siegel & Brockner, 2005). Other suggestions include increasing self-esteem, addressing performance orientation, reducing fear of failure, facilitating cognitive behavioral therapy, increasing positive self-talk, decreasing hyper-competitive environments, promoting group support, and the fostering of group cohesion (Decker & Mitchell, 2016c; Martin, Marsh, Williamson, & Debus, 2003).

Still other research has focused on preventing self-handicapping, especially through mastery goal orientation (Schwinger & Stiensmeier-Pelster, 2011). Individuals with mastery goal orientation focus on learning and developing competencies with the result that a challenge does not create anxiety. Goal orientation increases the capacity of individuals to withstand obstacles and adjust to change; it fosters a resilience to increased workload. Mastery goals facilitate learning when tasks are confusing or when failures are prevalent (Schwinger & Stiensmeier-Pelster, 2011). All of the processes and results involved in mastery goals are not yet known, but they may prove to be a promising avenue by which to reduce self-handicapping and its consequences.

METHODS

We began our primary research into "what self-handicapping looks like in business" by developing a set of measures based on the forms of self-handicapping behavior identified by Decker and Mitchell (2016) and Jones and Pittman (1982), on research into the consequences of self-handicapping, and on the writings of others concerning interventions to prevent or remediate self-handicapping as cited in the above literature review. Our principal objective was a set of conceptually-grounded survey questions or measures that met the highest business research standards for construct validity, content validity, and reliability (Kerlinger, 1986). A secondary objective was cross-cultural "measurement equivalence or invariance": the development of measures free from cultural biases that permit interpretation of the same concept of self-handicapping in different nations ("2009 Second International Workshop on Knowledge Discovery and Data Mining," 2009; Davidov, Meuleman, Cieciuch, Schmidt, & Billiet, 2014; Xue, 2009).

We pursued these objectives by following exactly the measurement development procedures of MacKenzie, Podsakoff, and Fetter (1991) as well as those of Hinkin (1995). At base we used what Hinkin (1995) termed an "inductive approach" in which a group of subjects provided descriptions of their feelings about some behavior. As described by Hinkin (1995, page 6), the responses of these subjects are then categorized by content analysis based on key words or a sorting process (e.g., card sorting). From the categorized responses, measurement items are then derived for a subsequent factor analysis.

We began by writing a series of items in simple, short sentences keeping the content of each consistent across the concepts discussed above (see our literature review). The sentences were written for a 9th grade reading level with each addressing only a single idea. Since the subjects at this research stage were intendedly "naïve," we provided concept definitions and then asked them to match the sentences to one of the corresponding definitions. Prior to the administration of the items and definitions, we adopted an "acceptable agreement index," a minimum of 75% of subjects had to correctly classify an item for us to accept it. As pointed out by Schriesheim and others (1993), the use of this index does not guarantee construct validity, but it does provide "construct adequacy" – at least a reasonable measure of each construct.

The subjects utilized in matching sentences to definitions were students, an appropriate group we felt since the task did not require a full understanding of self-handicapping (on the importance of this point see Anderson & Gerbing (1991); Schriesheim and others (1993). The matching of sentences to definitions was done in three different classes of students at the same university; a total of 87 students participated. Once we were satisfied with the "acceptable agreement index" results obtained, we incorporated the sentences as question statements into a single survey instrument. A total of 40 survey questions were obtained by this method and comprised the survey.

The methods and procedures we employed, including subject recruitment methods, the survey questions themselves along with our study's, design, consent procedures, and methods for insuring confidentiality were all approved by the Institutional Review Boards (IRBs) of three separate universities (one in the United States, two in Japan).

Subjects recruited for the subsequent full, self-handicapping study were all volunteer, English-fluent students with work experience. The survey itself was administered on-line and took each subject on average approximately 20 minutes to complete. Each question was scored as 5-item Likert type scale that was encoded from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree") with the numeric value 3 representing "neither agree nor disagree." (The complete questionnaire is shown below.)

FINDINGS

We obtained completed surveys from a total of 92 subjects that met the selection criteria we established and that were approved by the IRBs. Unfortunately, we were only able to recruit a total of five (5) subjects who self-reported a current residence in a country other than the United States. This limited number postponed for the present the pursuit of our secondary objective of devising "equivalent cross-cultural measures." As of now, we are continuing to recruit additional subjects in other countries; thus, our secondary objective is still in process.
We decided to eliminate the five (5) subjects currently residing in another country so as not to permit cultural differences possibly to influence self-handicapping scale construction. This left us with a total of 87 subjects, all from the United States. (*None* of these 87 subjects was involved in the sentence to construct matching described above in the Methods section. And *none* was a part of the calculation of "acceptable agreement" index calculations. Different subjects were used measurement development and subsequent analyses.)

Our next step in the analysis was to calculate univariate statistics, including means, standard deviations, and missing values, for the responses of subjects to each of the 40 questions. The results of these calculations are shown for each of the 40 questions in table 1 immediately below.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Subject Responses

Item #	Question	Mean	Std. Dev.	Missing responses
1	A lot of managers don't usually know what's really going on with staff and customers.	3.32	1.24	0
2	Once my manager gets his way, it seems like I am dead to him.	2.77	1.30	0
3	People around here seem to spend a lot of time making excuses, blaming others, and avoiding confrontation.	3.32	1.38	0
4	Managers here make sure they solve one problem before they move on to the next one.	3.24	1.21	3
5	I wish my managers would leave me alone and do their own job.	2.89	1.32	0
6	Managers here tend to staff their departments with yes-men or folks that don't speak up.	3.03	1.34	0
7	There are a lot of issues here that are under the table and no one talks about them openly.	3.24	1.38	1
8	Managers her often talk about what should happen - but rarely do anything about it.	3.33	1.49	0
9	Our managers seem to cope with uncertain or unexpected problems and crises poorly.	2.93	1.28	0
10	Very few employees think the most important thing in today's world is to do what you do better and better every day.	3.25	1.19	0
11	Some managers here have a hard time reading the room and picking up the unspoken.	3.32	1.67	0
12	My manager does not make me trust him/her very much.	2.98	1.38	0
13	Most everyone here can easily find someone to blame when something fails but find it difficult to spell out their expectations up front.	3.38	1.24	0
14	My manager often misses the big picture because he/she gets so engrossed in the details.	3.06	1.26	0
15	Lots of managers here are control freaks.	3.18	1.41	0
16	Managers here have a tendency to hire the wrong people.	3.05	1.26	1
17	Managers here would rather make a presentation than sit down with us and find a good solution.	2.92	1.31	0
18	My team can get easily side-tracked while completing an important task.	2.87	1.11	0
19	Teams or committees here seem to avoid risk at all costs in decisions.	2.92	1.23	0
20	People here avoid tasks that maximize opportunities for increasing their competence.	2.69	1.09	1
21	Most of us really don't know much about all the other parts of this organization.	3.03	1.24	0
22	Our managers seem unwilling to share personal stories to better connect with staff.	2.54	1.26	0
23	Managers sometimes avoid the tough conversations until it is too late.	3.09	1.42	0
24	People here do not seem to have an appreciation that they are playing on a larger team than their own department.	3.17	1.43	0
25	Managers here are more worried about maintaining a good image for the department than solving customer's problems.	3.10	1.39	1
26	Our employees are not systematically evaluated on their potential to move into leadership roles.	3.36	1.36	1
27	Managers here rarely encourage us to express our fears or doubts.	3.08	1.42	3
28	Employees often daydream about how things should be instead of taking action.	3.12	1.23	1
29	Management does not know how to create boundaries for a decision so the team is all over the place in deciding.	2.99	1.28	1
30	Employees here tend to procrastinate and do assignments at the last minute	3.09	1.30	0
31	We rarely question ourselves regarding what we don't know.	2.93	1.17	0
32	There is a lot of talking bad about others behind their backs around here.	3.43	1.40	1
33	Managers here don't always do a good job of representing the organization in social situations in the community.	2.76	1.31	0
34	When people discuss problems with their boss they rarely keep in mind that he/she has bigger problems.	3.14	1.15	0
35	Some managers seem to really lose it or throw fits when uncertain or unexpected problems and crises occur.	3.02	1.43	0
36	Managers here are rarely on the lookout for developing talent in their area.	3.21	1.35	1
37	My manager lacks listening skills - can be defensive, or sometimes can't to take constructive feedback.	3.00	1.49	0
38	Employees here rarely seem to challenge themselves to grow professionally.	3.09	1.16	0
39	Teams here seem to know when the law of diminishing returns says to stop researching and make the decision.	3.13	.998	0
40	Our managers mostly act as a judge, rewarder, or punisher.	3.14	1.35	0

As can be seen from the table, all of the survey questions evoked variability (standard deviations) in the responses of subjects. That is, none of the questions resulted in constant

responses across subjects. Moreover, there were relatively few missing responses to the questions. Only 11 of the 40 questions involved subjects not responding and of that number only two questions (question 4 and question 27) resulted in more than a single subject failing to respond. After examining these univariate results, we followed Hinton (1995, page 6) in concluding that the measurement items we developed could be subjected to factor analytic methods.

However, so as not to "lose" subjects to missing responses in applying a factor analytic model, we opted for the long-established method of recoded missing values to the mean of their respective variables (see UCLA Institute for Digital Research and Education ("How can I recode missing values into different categories? | Stata FAQ," n.d.); SAS Basics ("Accounting for Missing Data," n.d.); Todd L. Grant, (n.D.)Replacing Missing Values in SPSS with the Series Mean (Todd Grande, n.d.); Missing Data & How to Deal (Humphries, n.d.); Brandon Rohrer, *Azure Al Gallery* ("Methods for handling missing values," n.d.). In addition to not losing subjects (cases), this method has the advantages of not influencing variances in variables and its underlying assumption is a simple one.

In writing about this such recoding, Rohrer [Ibid.] wrote:

> *Real world data is usually missing values….Replace missing values with the mean. [In doing so] we assume that missing values are distributed similarly to the values that are present. The formal name for this assumption is Missing Completely at Random (MCAR). In this case, substituting values that represent the existing distribution, such as the mean, is a reasonable approach.*

After recoding, we next conducted an exploratory factor analysis. We did so because our aim was to explore the relationships among the survey indicators and we did not have an *a priori* fixed number of factors in mind. We did have a general idea about what we thought we would find as guided by the research of Decker and Mitchell 2016), Jones and Pittman (1982) and of others whose work we cited in our review of the literature. However, we did not have a specific set of hypotheses about which of our measured indicators would cohere with which specific construct. Moreover, we were open to the possibility of finding constructs additional to the ones hypothesized by Decker and Mitchell, Jones and Pittman and others. We did not conduct a confirmatory factor analysis which assumes that investigators have a firm *a priori* idea about the number of factors he/she will find, and about which indicators will most likely load on to each of the factors. The differences between exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis are rather widely recognized (see, for example, Rahn M. (n.d.), Surh (n.d.), and Thompson (2004).)

In conducting our exploratory factor analysis we considered several different factor extraction methods, including principal components, principal axis, and maximum likelihood factoring, as well as different rotation methods, varimax, direct oblimin, and promax among the latter ("IBM Knowledge Center - Factor Analysis Extraction," 2018; Kim & Mueller, 1978; Rummel, 1970). We finally settled on the use of principal components extraction and varimax rotation. We chose this method because we were interested in identifying the factors that would account for the maximum variance in the observations of our subjects as well as in understanding the independent (orthogonal) dimensions of self-handicapping seen by our subjects in the business workplace.

The results, including the rotated factor loadings, the percent of variance explained by each of the rotated factors, and the number of factors with eigenvalues of 1.0 or greater are shown in Table 2 below. (On the importance of only examining factors with eigenvalues equal to or greater

than unity, see (Noble, 1969), Chapter 9; Rummel, 1970, pp. 95-100; Kim & Mueller, 1978 and Girden & Kabacoff (Girden & Kabacoff, 2011); ("Why eigenvalues are greater than 1 in factor analysis?," 2018)). At base, factors with eignenvalues less than 1.00 are not considered to be stable, a point suggested by Girden (2011). Girden (Ibid.) further points out that factors with eigenvalues less than unity account for less variability than does a single variable and, thus, the factor analysis results in a factor with less than one variable in it.

Table 2: Rotated Factor Loadings and Variance Explained by Each Factor*

	Factor							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Survey Questions [1. - A lot of our managers often don't know what's really going on with staff and customers.]	.331	.168	.055	.044	.104	.766	.160	.024
Survey Questions [2. - Once my manager gets his way, it seems like he/she sees me as useless to him/her.]	.476	.209	.071	-.117	.415	.214	.514	.058
Survey Questions [3. - People around here seem to spend a lot of time making excuses or blaming others.]	.283	.473	.343	.025	.434	.137	.099	.072
Survey Questions [4. - Managers here often focus intently on solving one problem and ignore other problems needing solutions]	.366	.450	.149	-.141	.455	.346	-.206	-.033
Survey Questions [5. - I wish my managers would leave me alone and do their own job.]	.445	-.011	.095	.411	.340	.352	.174	.212
Survey Questions [6. - Managers here tend to staff their departments with people who don't speak up when things are wrong.]	.562	.195	.230	.259	.211	.287	.072	.182
Survey Questions [7. - There are a lot of issues here that are no one talks about openly.]	.549	.358	.353	.270	.087	.285	.111	.174

Survey Questions [8. - Managers here often talk about what should happen - but then don't do anything about it.]	.532	.273	.288	.164	.227	.421	.067	.140
Survey Questions [9. - Our managers often cope poorly with uncertain or unexpected problems.]	.669	.089	.350	-.001	.285	.271	.109	.056
Survey Questions [10. - Very few employees think it is most important to do things better and better every day.]	.158	.025	.733	.137	.193	.178	.005	-.117
Survey Questions [11. - Some managers here have a hard time picking up unspoken problems among team members or an audience.]	.408	.364	.422	.138	.012	.368	.176	.318
Survey Questions [12. - My manager does not cause me to trust him/her very much.]	.706	.112	-.013	.057	.143	.092	.295	.144
Survey Questions [13. - Most everyone here can easily find someone to blame when something fails.]	.302	.227	.578	.172	.369	-.076	.253	.143
Survey Questions [14. - My manager often misses the big picture because he/she gets so caught up in the details.]	.637	.172	.294	.110	.370	.097	.011	.177
Survey Questions [15. - Lots of managers here are "control freaks."]	.711	.202	.101	.151	.090	.210	.228	-.154
Survey Questions [16. - Managers here often hire the wrong people for the job.]	.221	.620	.262	.299	.216	.328	-.005	.021

Survey Questions [17. - Managers here would rather make a presentation or write a memo than sit down with us in a small group and find a good solution]	.489	.326	.147	-.110	.456	.111	.248	.126
Survey Questions [18. - My team can get easily side-tracked while completing an important task.]	.043	.384	-.019	.566	.475	-.205	.019	-.023
Survey Questions [19. - Teams or committees here seem to avoid risk at all costs in making decisions.]	.312	.557	.217	.092	.283	.032	.372	.045
Survey Questions [20. - People here avoid tasks that afford opportunities for increasing their competence.]	.202	.168	.175	.305	.672	.107	.094	-.110
Survey Questions [21. - Most of us really don't know much about all the other parts of this organization.]	.319	.033	.314	.201	.059	.168	.517	.062
Survey Questions [22. - Our managers seem unwilling to share personal stories of themselves.]	.142	.504	.151	.136	.101	.121	.420	-.425
Survey Questions [23. - Managers sometimes avoid difficult conversations - like reprimanding an errant employee - until it is too late.]	.493	.642	-.025	.173	.176	.154	.003	.094
Survey Questions [24. - People here do not seem to appreciate that they are playing on a larger team than their own department.]	.266	.777	.192	.176	.076	.024	.118	.106

Survey Questions [25. - Managers here are more worried about maintaining a good image for the department than solving customer's problems.]	.589	.191	.390	.199	-.001	.357	.100	-.166
Survey Questions [26. - Our employees are not systematically evaluated on their potential for leadership positions.]	.659	.336	.142	.237	-.150	.271	.010	.189
Survey Questions [27. - Managers here rarely encourage us to express our doubts about things.]	.838	.080	.099	.117	.147	.089	-.003	-.067
Survey Questions [28. - Employees often daydream about how things should be instead of taking action]	.494	.087	.297	.524	.248	-.108	-.123	.052
Survey Questions [29. - Management does not know how to create boundaries for a decision so a team keeps making the problem bigger and bigger.]	.598	.309	.331	.251	.164	-.037	-.233	.126
Survey Questions [30. - Employees here tend to procrastinate and do assignments at the last minute]	.209	.094	.139	.751	.087	.073	.049	.030
Survey Questions [31. - We rarely question ourselves regarding what we don't know.]	.142	.109	.612	.313	-.044	-.020	.300	.066
Survey Questions [32. - There is a lot of talking about others behind their backs around here.]	.197	.425	.618	.087	.092	.068	-.002	.040

Survey Questions [33. - Managers here don't always do a good job of representing the organization in social situations in the community.]	.519	.312	.320	.286	.079	-.004	-.099	.122
Survey Questions [34. - When people discuss problems with their boss they rarely keep in mind that he/she has bigger problems.]	.516	.275	.373	.027	.050	-.308	.297	-.054
Survey Questions [35. - Some managers seem to lose personal control or "throw fits" when uncertain or unexpected problems occur.]	.716	.208	.283	.116	.162	.068	.111	-.024
Survey Questions [36. - Managers here are rarely on the lookout for developing talent in their area.]	.639	.305	.205	.289	.086	.059	.246	.023
Survey Questions [37. - My manager can't take constructive feedback.]	.719	.255	.017	.124	.135	.124	.234	-.180
Survey Questions [38. - Employees here rarely seem to challenge themselves to grow professionally.]	.129	.158	.286	.559	-.077	.166	.133	-.044
Survey Questions [39. - Teams here seem to know when to stop researching and make the decision.]	.040	.106	.020	.029	.009	.061	.049	.864
Survey Questions [40. - Our managers mostly act as a judge and jury.]	.562	.236	.234	.174	-.022	.274	.343	.260
Percent of Total Variance Explained	**22.86**	**10.47**	**9.18**	**6.94**	**6.24**	**5.61**	**4.61**	**3.87**

*Note: Only factors with eigenvalues of 1.0 or greater are reported.

As can be seen in the above table, our factor analysis of responses to the forty survey questions resulted in a total of eight (8) factors with eigenvalues greater than 1.0. Together, these eight (8) factors accounted for a total of about 70% of the total variance in responses to the full set

of questions included on our survey instrument. Further, approximately 43% of the total variance in survey responses was accounted for by just the first three factors.

But what do the factors in Table 2 and their respective loadings reveal about observed forms of self-handicapping in the business work place? The interpretation of factors and their respective loadings is quite often an invitation to disagreement. Indeed, two individuals can readily perceive factors and loadings quite differently as a consequence of different prior "world views," language nuances, judgments about what is a "big" or "small" number and even the meaning of terms like "team" in different work settings. We studied the results in the table ourselves over a considerable time period and, at times, found ourselves in some discord. Only subsequently, did we come to a consensus.

Accordingly, all we can do is to present our own interpretation of the meaning of each factor and the form of self-handicapping observed by our subjects that each represents. However, we invite our reader to share her/his interpretation and judgments as to meaning in order for all of us to develop a deeper and more complete understanding of what self-handicapping looks like in business.

Thus, following the forms identified (above) by Decker and Mitchell, we came to these views about each factor shown in Table 2 –-

Factor 1, we believe, is akin to what Decker and Mitchell refer to as "micromanaging" which does entail controlling behavior;

Factor 2 we think refers to "poor talent development";

Factor 3 appears to be about management avoidance of accountability but also about team avoidance of accountability;

Factor 4 seems to us to be about "poor engagement," including tunnel vision as a component of such engagement in as identified by Decker and Mitchell;

Factor 5. We think this factor is not a form of self-handicapping at all; rather it is really a remedy for it. It is what we would identify as "goal orientation";

Factor 6 appears rather clearly to be a "lack of awareness";

Factor 7 we identified as "poor communication culture" in the words of Decker and Mitchell;

Factor 8 seems to be about poor analysis and decision making.

Interestingly, of the forms of self-handicapping identified by Decker and Mitchell, we found no evidence in our data of "not driving for results" as a separate, independent construct. This is a point to which we will return in the discussion below.

DISCUSSION

In sum, our principal focus in this paper has been the determination of the areas or types of work place self-handicapping that are commonly observed and experienced. Expressed less

formally, our attention has been devoted to identifying "what self-handicapping looks like in business." We found that our research subjects observed a considerable amount of varied self-handicapping in their work environments. We also found considerable support for the forms of self-handicapping discussed by Decker and Mitchell in their recent book, including micromanaging, poor talent development, the avoidance of accountability, poor engagement, a lack of awareness, poor communication culture, and poor analysis and decision making. Moreover, we found these forms to be independent of each other (or orthogonal in the language of factor analysis.)

On the other hand, we found no evidence in our data for what Decker and Mitchell term "not driving for results" as an independent construct. As will be recalled, not driving for results refers to anything that keeps one from focusing on outcomes; confusing effort with results or confusing internal results for customer outcomes, avoiding challenge and risk, spending time thinking about how things should be instead of taking action, and not using "baby steps."

We are inclined to believe that finding no evidence in our data for this latter construct may well derive from important changes taking place in the environment of business organizations. That is, we have observed businesses both large and small more frequently adopting and utilizing dashboards, MBO, customer complaint facilitation, and continuous quality improvement – to name only a few performance management structures and processes – to drive results. Such structures and processes in business work environments may well mitigate if not eliminate individual managers' and other employees' opportunities to utilize "not driving to results" as a form of self-handicapping behavior. At the very least, we think this is a hypothesis that deserves attention in future research.

A second area for future research lies in our secondary research purpose: cross-cultural "measurement equivalence or invariance" or the development of measures free from cultural biases that permit interpretation of the same concepts of self-handicapping in different nations (Davidov et al., 2014; Xue, 2009). With the increasing globalization of business, growing world-wide market interpenetration, greater understanding of management, and the widespread adoption of Western business practices (Cavusgil, Knight, & Riesenberger, 2017), self-handicapping and remedies for it are unlikely to be culturally circumscribed, but will become more universal. Indeed, the need for unbiased, cross-cultural measures now seems all the more pressing. To date we have been unable to gather data on sufficient numbers of research subjects in other nation states. But our efforts to do so are continuing and we urge our professional colleagues to do the same.

A third and final area for future research concerns the remedies for self-handicapping in the business work place. What "remedies" or "interventions" exist for businesses to reduce various forms of self-handicapping, particularly the three forms that explained the most variance in the responses of our research subjects – micromanaging, poor talent development and avoidance of accountability? We have found that a balanced approach between behavior and mindset has the greatest potential to remedy self-handicapping. Behaviorally, practicing deliberate actions, self-efficacy-building baby steps, and listening to others will begin the process of unlearning self-handicapping behaviors and move toward better leadership. Regarding mindset, as outlined in the introduction, having a mastery mindset prevents self-handicapping behavior. People with mastery mindsets are focused on learning and increasing competence to the point where failure is treated like part of the learning process and ultimately beneficial. Because of this, they have no incentive to avoid learning or to enhance their impressions on others, as these items do not further their goal orientation.

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