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## **Citizenship or Careerism? Perceptions and Impressions of Goodness**

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### **Abstract** (Article Summary)

*Trends in organisation and in organisational activity, which have resulted in increasing dependence on the discretionary efforts, initiatives and judgements of employees, have left management with the problem of how to ensure that such discretion is exercised appropriately in the service of the organisation. The Human Resource Management approach, relying as it does on strategic integration and underpinned by a value-driven approach seemed to be an ideal mechanism, particularly when designed as encouragement to commitment via social identification and a shared sense of meaning.*

*If culture is the enacted manifestation of organisational identity, management aspiration is that the 'good' employee is one who will learn the cultural reality and enact it appropriately. Expectations of 'good' employees are that they will exhibit not only the appropriate competence, but will also possess the necessary commitment, via identification and emotional engagement, so that they can be trusted to regulate themselves, take decisions that are in the best interests of the organisation and even go that extra mile for the company and the customer. This paper gives attention to such expectations and explores their implications.*

### **Full Text** (4,691 words)

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The arguments here suggest that employees have and exercise more discretion about their commitment than managerial discourses might care to admit, particularly when wider discourses encourage the individual to be entrepreneurial about their conduct and when market conditions cannot guarantee that employee trust and commitment can be reciprocated. Under such conditions, image work and impression management tactics are to be expected with their consequent effect on relationships and performance, and complete success in the management of commitment in line with organisational expectations more likely to remain an aspiration than a reality.

With more discretionary effort needed from employees (Jacques, 1996), trends in organisation and in organisational activity have focussed managerial attention away from merely utilising labour power and towards capitalising on the whole person (Flecker and Hofbauer, 1998). As a result of changing skill and attitudinal requirements (Warhurst and Thompson, 1998) and greater reliance on workers' initiative, discretion, responsibility and judgement, there has been a shift in interest from managing 'abilities for achievement' to managing 'willingness to achievement' (Flecker and Hofbauer, 1998)

manifested through motivation, engagement and identification with the company.

Commitment, as opposed to mere instrumental compliance, has come to be viewed as essential to competitive advantage (Ulrich, 1998, Walton, 1985). Commitment figures prominently in the Human Resource Management literature (Beer et al, 1984, Walton 1985, Sissons, 1993, Storey, 1995 Legge, 1995, Guest, 1998), HRM policies designed to promote mutuality were expected to give rise to commitment (Walton, 1985). Policies included employee participation and involvement (Sissons, 1993), providing opportunities for personal growth (Ulrich, 1998), changes in management style (Beer et al, 1984) and the management of culture change (Legge, 1995). Underpinned by a values-driven approach (Legge, 1995, Guest, 1998,) these mechanisms were designed as encouragement to social identification and a shared sense of meaning.

A typical example is 'The New Agenda' (Gratton, 2000). Building the soul of the organisation is to be achieved by building a psychological contract on the basis of commitment, trust and flexibility (Gratton, 2000, Herriot et al, 1998). The route is through emotional involvement and providing opportunities to be the self (Gratton, 2000). This approach is found to result in employees who are proud to be members of the organisation and care about its fate, in which identification and involvement prompt desirable behaviours such as innovation and entrepreneurship, team behaviour and customer orientation (Gratton, 2000). One of the principles on which the New Agenda is premised appears to be that when a person identifies him or herself with an organisation, personal goals become consistent with organisational goals.

HRM rhetoric communicates an image of people trusting each other, sharing risks and rewards, being provided with opportunities for self-actualisation and united by strong feelings of identification (Vaughan, 1994). Of course commitment has to be reciprocated (Guest, 1998) as does trust (Warhurst and Thompson, 1998). Commitment is expected to be genuine (Walton, 1985). Reciprocity extends to both to demand and benefit. From a managerial perspective, committed employees are more likely to be trusted to act in the interests of the firm. Not only that but committed employees are also self managing and, hence more cost effective (Parker, 1997) and less likely to resist managerial goals (Rose, 1990). From the employee perspective opportunities for autonomy and empowerment are linked to the achievement of personal growth and the feel-good factor resulting from reflected organisational success.

Within the rhetoric of HRM, commitment is portrayed as generating constructive proactivity, of 'going one step further', on the part of employees (Legge, 1995). Since commitment focussed on non-rational aspects of the organisation management interest therefore turned to the shared beliefs and values that comprise culture as a means of generating identification and attachment (Legge 1995). Through managing the knowledge, values and sentiments of the workforce a rapprochement of the self-actualisation of the worker and the competitive advantage of the company is sought (Rose 1990, Flecker and Hofbauer, 1998). Alvesson and Willmott (2002) echoing Deetz recognise that the modern business of management is often about managing the 'insides' – the hopes, fears and aspirations of workers, rather than their behaviours directly.

If culture is the enacted manifestation of organisational identity (Barker, 1998), management aspiration is that the 'good' employee will learn the cultural reality (Gergen, 1999) and enact it appropriately. Expectations of 'good' employees are that they will exhibit not only the appropriate competence, but will also possess the necessary commitment, via identification and emotional engagement, so that they can be trusted to regulate themselves, take decisions that are in the best interests of the organisation and even go that extra mile for the company and the customer. Managing identity is to be achieved through a shift from crude external controls (e.g. supervision, bureaucracy and technology) to more subtle unobtrusive internal controls -culture, empowerment and teamwork (Barker, 1998).

The rational perspective evident in much of the managerial literature surrounding commitment carries with it an underlying presumption of management's ability to predict, and therefore control human behaviour. Critiques of Human Resource Management emphasise the 'rhetoric versus reality' argument. The rhetoric of HRM was seen to be happening alongside changes in organisations, which imposed a heavy cost on employees (Vaughan, 1994, Warhurst and Thompson, 1998). Research suggested little evidence that culture change programmes had an impact on commitment (Guest 1998) with studies demonstrating only a weak link between attitudinal commitment, labour turnover and job performance (Legge 1995). The realism of the image of the 'empowered' and 'autonomous' employee has been questioned. Not only that but management attempts to control such a private, personal realm appear to provoke strong resistance from employees (Taylor, 1998).

A social constructivist view allows not only for some critical arguments surrounding changes in the exercise of managerial power but also permits speculation that might serve to shed further light on the possible organisational and individual consequences of the pursuit of a trajectory which views deviance as a threat to the social (i.e. managerial) definitions of reality (Berger and Luckmann, 1966) and ascribes bad action to an inherent fault in the individual's internal functioning (Gergen, 1999).

Within a social constructivist perspective, the self is seen as a social and cultural production (Mead, 1934) and cannot be understood apart from the particular social context in which it is shaped (Berger and Luckmann, 1966). Replacing the idea of personality in social construction (Burr, 1995), identity is presented as a general, if individualised framework for understanding oneself that is formed and sustained via social interaction (Goffman 1959, Erikson 1964 and Gergen 1985 in Albert, 1998). Individuals learn to assign themselves socially constructed labels through personal and symbolic interactions with others (Albert, 1998). The actor identifies with the socially objectivated typifications of the conduct in action but re-establishes distance when he reflects on his conduct afterwards. Activities and conduct in everyday life depend on typifications (Gergen, 1999). People are said to control their own behaviours according to the prevailing standards of normality with social life played out in the social roles they acquire, invent or are forced into (Gergen, 1999).

To be given an identity implies being given or assigned a specific place in the world (Berger and Luckmann, 1966). Discourse involves the use of rhetorical devices to provide a framework for understanding experiences and behaviour and make sense of people's lives. Discourse operates to construct an object in a particular way, a way which serves the interests of those in power. Identity becomes more fixed in discourse because people can be described in terms of the subject positions they occupy. Within the discourse of management, employees have emerged as constructions, subjects with sentiments, motivations and traits, all of which are assumed to be subject to analysis and control (Jacques, 1996). The constitution of persons as subjects in this manner allows for little control on the part of the individual.

The managerial discourse of membership and citizenship, while directed towards workers' attachments to the company through normative integration does not appear to recognise the possibility of potential conflict. A post-structuralist analysis does understand power relations between management and employees as subject to the threat of conflict, resistance and disorder (O'Doherty and Willmott, 2001). Discourses are always potentially being contested by others. Power is always relative and the potential for resistance arises because no form of power is absolute. An approach which sees reality as socially constructed will view paradox and contradiction as natural. Alvesson and Willmott (2002) have recently presented a conceptual framework for the analysis of identity regulation and the different responses to it, focussing on the interplay between regulatory interventions, identity work and self-identity. Within this framework, employees are not passive receptacles or carriers of managerial discourses, but instead, more or less actively and critically, interpret and enact them.

From a social constructivist perspective social identity is therefore complex, reflexive and dynamic. This would suggest that we are all in the business of claiming and resisting the identities on offer within the prevailing discourse (Burr, 1995). When considering identification there is a need to consider other aspects of individual's lives (Flecker and Hofbauer, 1998) and to explore the broader circumstances in which actions are enmeshed (Gergen, 1999). Alvesson and Willmott (2002) argue that the struggle to forge and sustain a sense of self-identity is shaped by multiple images and ideals of ways of being and they present a number of case studies illustrating a variety of employee responses to managerial attempts at identity construction. They argue the need to consider other influences beyond managerial discourse and to consider the individual's reflexive capacity to accomplish life projects out of various sources of influence and inspiration and conclude that managerial discourses are only partially or temporarily implicated in the formation of identity (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002).

## **COMMITMENT AND SOME OF ITS COMPLEXITIES**

Mutuality, commitment, identification and internalisation are terms used, sometimes interchangeably, to describe the process and outcomes by which individuals come to act and behave in the interests of the firm. Before taking the argument any further it might be useful at this point to explore some of the complexities of commitment and its associates.

Organisational commitment has been described as

*the psychological bond that a member forms with his/her employing organisation' and is characterised by behavioural, emotional and cognitive consistency on the part of the member (Pratt, 1994 in Pratt, 1998:176.).*

If commitment is associated with 'affective attachment and identification' (Legge, 1995) then identification is a large part of, even integral to the commitment process. Identification has been defined as 'oneness' with the organisation (Ashforth and Mael 1989 in Albert, 1998) so that to identify with an organisation is to treat that organisation 'as if it were in some sense an extension of the self' (Albert, 1998:4). Identification is motivated by attraction and involves adopting some of the values and beliefs of others (Berger and Luckmann, 1966). Internalisation also involves adopting the beliefs and values of others but is motivated by a need to be right rather than liked. With Internalisation others' beliefs and values are embraced more deeply than with identification and therefore changes within the individual are more permanent and fundamental. Internalisation occurs with identification. Identification and internalisation, both responses to social influence, are seen to differ in degree, permanence and motivation (Pratt, 1998).

Tajfel's idea that the self-concept is composed of personal identity and social identity (which involves some degree of internalisation) (Tajfel 1981, in Pratt, 1998) helps to clarify the concept of organisational identification. Organisational identification has been defined as a cognitive connection that occurs when a person's self concept contains the same attitudes as those perceived in organisational identity (Dutton et al 1994, in Pratt, 1998). Organisational identification is when a person's beliefs about his or her organisation become self-referential and self-defining and is related to the social aspect of one's self-concept. Pratt suggests that organisational identification arises when one comes to integrate beliefs about one's organisation into one's identity (1998:173). Alvesson and Willmott concur that when an organisation becomes a significant source of identification for individuals, corporate identity then informs self-identity work (2002). When an organisation's members are strongly identified with the organisation's objectives, goals and values they are more likely to behave (i.e. make work-related decisions) that are functional for the organisation (Tomkins and Cheney, 1983 in Barker, 1998).

*Identification with a group helps to shape people's willingness to use a given social category to define themselves, so when people identify strongly with a given organisation they more readily interpret the world and their own place within it in a manner consistent with that organisation's values, ideology and culture (Haslam et al, 2000).*

Identity work is work involved in reconciling the social self with the personal self (Harre, 1983 in Watson and Harris 1999). If we accept that the identities people try to create are a function of their personalities and values, the identities they desire or the role constraints inherent in the situation (Leary 1992 in Rosenfeld et al, 1995), then it follows that some

people have more or different kinds of identity work than others. Some people will conform more to the social stereotypes with which they are presented and others less (Craib, 1998). Alternatively, the realities of the social self might threaten the personal self (Watson and Harris 1999).

Emotions reflect identity (Mann, 1997) and indicate the importance of identity to us. Drawing on Kelman's (1958) notion of different levels of investment in a role Albert concludes that identity is closely tied to the study of affect and emotion (Albert, 1998). According to Kelman the lowest level of identification could be simply acting like (without cognitive or affective identification with the organisation). The next level is cognitive identification, which involves thinking of oneself as a member. The highest level would involve emotions – so that strong organisational identification would encompass behavioural, cognitive and emotional investment (Kelman, 1958 in Albert 1998). This would suggest that strong motivational and psychological involvement is not possible without strong and positive emotional connection to work and the work context (Ashforth and Humphrey, 1995). The more a person wants to wrap his or her identity in a job the more he/she will embrace any necessary emotional labour (Ashforth and Humphrey, 1993, Kunda, 1992 in Fineman 1996), emotional labour being the work involved in displaying the 'appropriate' feelings in organisations.

Affective commitment has been described as 'the employee's emotional attachment to, identification with and involvement in the organisation' (Meyer and Allan 1991 in Pratt, 1998) and affective identification 'the degree to which an individual values having a specific organisational identity' (Harquail, 1998:225). Both identification and internalisation have been differentiated from compliance, which is said to occur when the dictates of the group or individual are followed because of valued rewards. These ideas are close to the notions of attitudinal and behavioural commitment (Legge 1995). Compliance is also closer to the notion of calculative commitment which is commitment focussed on economic rewards (Pratt, 1998).

Within managerial discourses, because overt disobedience risks incurring sanctions, resistance can often be subtle. Taylor's (1998) work illustrates how employees' internalisation of attempted normative and discursive controls must not be assumed even when worker behaviour may indicate 'consent'. Barker (1998) suggests that we fake identification in order to protect our sense of individual autonomy (but considers this to be impossible at times of threat). Taylor clearly differentiates between employees who adopt a normative stance and those who adopt a pragmatic one. Roberts also points to the dramaturgical nature of resistance. Whereas in the past only the appearance of working hard was needed, now the appearance of being personally committed also needs to be manufactured (Roberts, 1984). One form of resistance is resistance by distance. Disidentification or active distancing may also result during times of change or confusion when psychological contracts may be broken.

By carefully controlling their expressive behaviours, organisational participants can project identities for themselves and convey an image of who it is they wish to be taken for in a particular encounter (Mangham, 1986). Goffman's dramaturgical perspective suggested

that greater care in presenting the correct image was needed where the consequences were likely to be important for the performance and the stress was on routines from which occupational reputation derives (Goffmann, 1959). Ambivalence is one result of the incomplete internalisation of cultural roles and behaviour (Casey, 1995). The prevailing self-strategy, which is emerging, is the capitulated self, which Casey subdivides into the pragmatic and the reluctant. The pragmatic knows how to play the game, how to present an appropriate image and when to retreat. The reluctant is aware of having traded off the self. The pragmatic is emerging as the prevailing self-strategy (Casey, 1995). The pragmatic strategy echoes Goffman (1959) in 'playing the game' by managing to give off the correct image or impression. For example, success-oriented individuals, in their upward movement, are more effectively moulded by the needs and structures of the organisation (Casey, 1995).

## **ORGANISATIONAL CITIZENSHIP**

The concept of citizenship has been described as an attempt to tie work-life and life-world together more closely by offering a source of meaning to the individual, is a feature of the patterns of the commitment-built organisation (Flecker and Hofbauer, 1998). The feelings of pride and respect that flow from defining oneself as a member of an organisation appear to be translated into greater loyalty to the organisation, enhanced compliance with organisational rules and increased incidence of extra-role behaviour (Tyler, 1999, in Haslam et al, 2000). (Haslam et al, 2000). The latter can be described as organisational citizenship behaviours (OCBs). OCBs are discretionary behaviours not directly or explicitly recognised by the formal reward system and which promote the effective functioning of the organisation (Kats and Kahn 1986 in Rosenfeld et al, 1995).

Organisational citizenship behaviours are believed to occur when calculative commitment gives way to affective commitment (Ashforth and Humphrey, 1995). When the individual-organisational relationship becomes suffused with affect over time, a narrow contractual perspective (economic exchange) gives way to a sense of trust, concern for others and more open-ended and diffuse commitment (social exchange) (Ashforth, 1993 and Organ, 1990 in Ashforth and Humphrey, 1995). Organisational citizenship behaviours are believed to facilitate organisational performance and to contribute to organisational and group effectiveness because

- 1) they increase performance so that fewer resources are needed  
they improve co-ordination within work groups, reducing frustration and improving effectiveness
- 2) they enhance image, giving the impression of the organisation as an attractive place to work.

If organisational citizenship behaviours are an outcome of social identity salience, career advancement behaviours are associated with the salience of personal identity (Haslam et al, 1999). There is a link between Organisational Citizenship Behaviours and images presented and, therefore an overlap between the behaviours of citizenship and impression management (Bolino, 1999). The key difference between citizenship behaviours for self-promotion and 'genuine' citizenship behaviours is motivation - the motivation to look like or

to be. The difference is between authenticity and conscious artifice.

Goffman's dramaturgical perspective suggests that cultural values establish a framework of appearances that must be maintained, whether or not there is a feeling behind the appearance, and will also dictate how the participants are to feel about many matters (Goffman 1959). The question of what happens to the personal self when people put up a front has been addressed in the stress management and in the emotional labour literature. The question of organisational consequences can be explored through consideration of impression management.

## **IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT**

The type of impressions people choose to construct depends on their self-concept, the type of identity they would like to have, the values they assume the audience has and the setting (Rosenfeld et al, 1995). Individuals learn to play a part and to discriminate between what is desirable and what is not and to act accordingly (Höpfl, 2000). If we accept that the organisational audience plays an important role in shaping the impression management process, then it follows that image can be enhanced when it matches the values and preferences of the target (Bolino, 1999). Alternatively, when certain images are central to who we are we are more likely to try to manage an impression consistent with our self-image (Leary, 1997). As more and more rides on the outcomes of successful impression management the tendency to present images that would have the desired effect on the audience increases (Rosenfeld et al, 1995).

It is being argued here that there is no simple match between the emotions the organisation members feel and the emotions they learn to express (Gordon 1981 in Rafaeli and Sutton, 1989). Impression management involves behaviours which can help to define who and what we are (Rosenfeld et. al, 1995) and seems to refer especially to the secret part of emotion management (Wouters, 1991). Expressive behaviours can be an instrumental act (Rafaeli and Sutton, 1995) and emotions can be seen to fulfil a strategic function in interpersonal relations (Fineman, 1996). Emotions expressed to influence the behaviour of target persons can be seen as 'control moves' (Rafaeli and Sutton 1987 in Rafaeli and Sutton, 1995). Emotional labour is a form of impression management to the extent that the labourer 'deliberately attempts to direct his/her behaviour towards others in order to foster certain social perceptions of him/herself in a certain interpersonal climate' (Ashforth and Humphrey, 1993, in Mann, 1997).

The dramaturgical perspective focuses on differences and contradictions between emotions and displays of emotions in the presentation of self (Wouters, 1991). The dramaturgical perspective assumes the possibility of an instrumental stance towards the capacity to play upon a range of feelings (Hochschild, 1983). For example, higher levels of self-monitoring are associated with close adherence to display rules (Synder 1974 in Rafaeli and Sutton, 1989). If one of the principles that organise social life is 'advantage seeking' in the social arena (Goffman, 1959 in Hochschild 1983) then certainly nowadays workers are encouraged to handle themselves to their own best advantage (Kanter, 1990 in Du Gay 1996). Feelings are seen as objects people have learned to govern and control (Hochschild

1983). People are assumed to be capable of managing their emotions in line with self-interest. The spread of the dramaturgical perspective indicates a spreading of the ability to observe oneself and awareness that managing of emotions is inescapable (Wouters 1991).

Impression management is dysfunctional when it inhibits, distorts, fails or destroys (Rosenfeld, et. al, 1995). Organisational citizenship behaviours motivated by self-interest will produce dysfunctional outcomes for the organisation (Bolino, 1999). Impression management out of self interest is likely to have deleterious effects on relationships because actors performing impression management are not giving their full attention to the task (Goffman, 1959) and will be outperformed by 'honest' actors who put in more 'real effort'. Furthermore, impression management is successful only to the extent that it is perceived as authentic. There are no benefits if insincerity is evident (Jones 1964 in Bolino, 1999) and can even disimprove communication (Mann, 1997). At an organisational level good customer service and good management cannot be achieved by dramaturgical simplicities (Höpfl, 2000).

## **MANAGING IDENTIFICATION**

Organisations wishing to accrue their human, social and emotional capital need to ask themselves what mix of task characteristics promotes personal involvement (Ashforth and Humphrey, 1995), trust and goodwill. Performances are expressive of relationships and all interactions symbolise the state of play between the actors (Mangham and Overington, 1987). Unsurprisingly, ambiguous and uncertain environments are supposed to increase the frequency of impression management behaviours (Bolino, 1999). The answer is to reduce ambiguity and uncertainty. The way forward for the organisation towards building mutual trust is possible if there is sufficient tacit knowledge and integrity (Herriot et al, 1998). Höpfl (2000) argues for retaining the locus of control within the individual.

Human Relations approaches assume an uncomplicated relationship between organisational aspiration and individual response, provided, of course, that the appropriate strategies, policies and practices are in place and activated. Under the New Agenda public and private goals are expected to merge. The feelings and behaviours elicited and enacted are expected to arise from the individual feeling a part of the organisation. The HRM literature stresses that it is a strategy, its distinctive feature is strategic integration (Guest, 1998) with an instrumental objective of control. Roberts has written interestingly of the impact of human relations techniques where the employees on whom these techniques were used reacted to the purely instrumental control motives at the heart of these techniques leading to resistance which was not overt but dramaturgical (1984). The instrumental stance implicit in the management techniques designed to promote integration had effectively ignored the employees' subjectivity and they reacted accordingly.

Although a reduction in ambiguity and uncertainty, and recognition of intersubjectivity might be achievable, external uncertainty is likely to be more difficult to mediate. Social capital represents the fund of trust and goodwill in any social group and is fundamental to organisational success but is under threat as a result of the decoupling of economic success

and employment (Herriot et. al, 1998). The key problems facing senior managers and HR directors are

- 1 employees' feelings of mistrust and insecurity, and their effects on the employment relationship and
- 2 the speed of organisational change which requires employees to make continuous transitions (Herriot *et al*, 1998).

In order to understand and explain identity there is a need to explore the broader circumstances in which actions are enmeshed (Gergen, 1999). The concepts we operate with are tied in with the societies in which we operate and commitments to the real and the good can be traced to the social process (Gergen, 1999). Not only do we have contemporary managerial discourse stressing the importance of individuals acquiring and exhibiting more proactive and 'entrepreneurial' traits and virtues (Hall and Du Gay, 1996) we also have public discourses on the self-developing entrepreneurial personality which is called for in contemporary society. If individuals are challenged and incited to develop 'entrepreneurial' attitudes and behaviour they will be more inventive and strategic on their own behalf as well (Flecker and Hofbauer, 1998).

Human relations writers and practitioners cannot dissociate themselves from the economic reality that has given rise to decisions in managers that have affected employees adversely (Vaughan, 1994), and it is naïve to assume that employees are not conscious of the economic nature of the employment relationship. From the individual's perspective, they are being asked to trust in conditions where long-term reciprocity can no longer be guaranteed, however good the intentions. At the end of the day employment is still a contractual relationship (Rose, 1990).

The commodification of human relations affects the dynamics of the self with the market and the individual asked to pursue selfish interests (Parker, 2000). The individualistic view is now synonymous with business life. Individualism encourages instrumentalism (Roberts, 1984) and this is deeply embedded in our culture. Impression management is not just about having an enhanced ability to control target persons but is an important aspect of marketing the self (Rosenfeld et al, 1995). There is an assumption of genuine commitment in order for commitment focussed strategies to work (Walton, 1985). However, there is no guarantee of this when so little of the identification process is under organisational control, when wider discourses encourage the individual to be entrepreneurial about their conduct and where market conditions cannot guarantee that employee trust and commitment can be reciprocated. Under such conditions impression management has to be defined as 'the new competence' (Wexler in Rosenfeld et al 1995) and complete success in the management of commitment in line with organisational expectations more likely to remain an aspiration than a reality in the longer term.

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Publication title: Tamara : Journal of Critical Postmodern Organization Science. Las Cruces: 2003; Vol. 2, Iss. 3; pg. 17-27, 11 pgs

Source Type: Periodical

ISSN/ISBN: 15325555

Text Word Count 4,691