

## Typology of the eight domains of discretion in organizations

By: [Arran Cazan](#)

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### **Abstract:**

Discretion (an individual's latitude of action) is a fundamental element of work, with extensive individual and organizational consequences. Research has demonstrated the importance of discretion, but there is not yet a mature theory of discretion in organizations. Towards that end, this paper derives a multidimensional typology of discretion in organizations, integrating previous empirical results and archival interview data. It is found that discretion comprises eight distinct domains. This eight-part typology casts new light on previous findings and contributes towards a mature theory of discretion. This article discusses the circumplex structure of the eight domains and their potential utility in characterizing fundamental aspects of work.

**Keywords:** autonomy | choice | discretion | typology

### **Article:**

## **INTRODUCTION**

Discretion, defined as latitude of action or control over how one does one's work, is a central aspect of organizational behaviour, and one with extensive and varied consequences (e.g. Dickson, 1985; Littler et al., 2003; Logan and Ganster, 2007). Control has been identified as a universal human need; all people desire some feelings of control (Deci and Ryan, 2000). Moreover, discretion is inevitable in organizations because it arises in every ambiguous situation (Hambrick and Finkelstein, 1987), and these situations are fundamental determinants of organizational structure (March and Simon, 1958). Discretion influences a vast range of outcomes, including capital investment (Dimov and Gedajlovic, 2010), compensation (Finkelstein and Boyd, 1998), trust (Perrone et al., 2003), satisfaction (Dwyer and Ganster, 1991), motivation (Spector, 1986), physical health (Karasek, 1990), and performance (Caza, forthcoming; Kuvaas, 2008). In fact, one review suggested that discretion was one of the most studied work characteristics in traditional organization studies (Morgeson and Humphrey, 2006).

There is also extensive discussion of discretion in related managerial, organizational, and behavioural disciplines (e.g. Hawkins, 1995; Hodder et al., 2006; Polanyi, 1969; Vaughn and Otenyo, 2007; Vinzant and Crothers, 1998).

However, despite its obvious importance, there is as yet no theory of discretion per se in organizations. One reason for this lack of a coherent theory is that most studies have used discretion as a means to understand some other phenomenon, such as executive dominance (Haleblian and Finkelstein, 1993) or role-breadth (Morgeson et al., 2005), rather than studying discretion itself. In addition, those studies that were primarily concerned with discretion have remained isolated from one another. This has produced a number of models about particular aspects of discretion, but no overarching theory to integrate them. For example, previous research had examined the consequences of 'general control' (Dwyer and Ganster, 1991) and of 'decision authority' (Karasek et al., 1985), but it was not recognized until later that these two constructs had significant overlap (Smith et al., 1997). As a result, one is left to wonder how the findings about general control relate to those of decision authority, and vice versa. In the absence of a comprehensive model to integrate individual studies, there are no clear answers to such questions.

The example of general control and decision authority suggests that the current understanding of discretion in organizations is what Sonpar and Golden-Biddle (2008) refer to as 'adolescent'. Adolescent theories are those which have not yet been fully developed and tested. Bacharach (1989) provided criteria for evaluating the maturity of organizational theories, among the most important of which was clearly defining the central construct. Unless discretion is precisely defined, with sufficient specificity for effective predictions and measures, further theoretical development will be limited (Hambrick and Abrahamson, 1995; McAllister et al., 2007; Smith et al., 1997). Therefore, this paper synthesizes previous findings to develop a complete typology of the domains of discretion in organizations.

Delineating the domain structure of discretion in organizations helps to move the theory past adolescence towards maturity. In Bacharach's (1989) terms, it increases the clarity and robustness of this central construct. Greater clarity improves the interpretation of previous findings and can contribute to better predictions in future work. For example, despite a strong theoretical rationale (Hambrick and Finkelstein, 1987), investigations have repeatedly failed to find the predicted relationship between demand instability and executive discretion (Finkelstein and Boyd, 1998; Hambrick and Abrahamson, 1995). However, as discussed later in this paper, this is likely an artefact of imprecision in defining discretion, rather than a failure of theory. This is revealed by using the typology of discretion developed here to reconsider the previous studies' findings, and suggests that the apparent predictive failure could have been prevented if the researchers had incorporated the multidimensional nature of discretion in their design.

The typology developed here also contributes directly towards the development of a mature theory of discretion in organizations. While a typology does not constitute a theory in itself (Sutton and Staw, 1995), it is an essential first step towards one (Bacharach, 1989). Precisely defining the domains of discretion has important implications. Specifically, it was found that there are eight distinct domains of discretion in organizations, and that these eight have a circumplex structure of mutual support and antagonism. Moreover, the typology can be used to

develop discretion profiles that facilitate a fundamental analysis of different types of work. These and other theoretical implications arising from the typology are consistent with previous emphasis on the importance of construct clarity (Bacharach, 1989; Sonpar and Golden-Biddle, 2008).

This paper begins by defining the general construct of discretion. Existing empirical measures and archival interview data are then used to derive the eight-domain typology. Theoretical implications are then explored, showing the typology's power to contribute to the empirical study of discretion and the development of a mature theory.

## **DISCRETION IN ORGANIZATIONS**

In this paper, the term discretion is used in the tradition of Hambrick and Finkelstein's (1987) development of work by March and Simon (1958) and Thompson (1967). Discretion refers to an individual's latitude of action in doing their work. It reflects the range of options available to an individual when taking consequential action. As such, discretion is distinct from choice and from action. Which available option an individual chooses and the effects of that choice are consequent to discretion, not part of it. Discretion is defined by the available possibilities from which an action choice can be made.

As a concrete example, consider a manager who is required to increase sales by 20 per cent in one year. The manager presumably has little choice about the target level of sales, which is a goal given by organizational superiors. However, in the absence of other stipulations, the manager is free to choose the method for increasing sales (e.g. a sales promotion, increased productivity, working longer hours). In this example, the manager has discretion over the method of achieving the goal, but not in the selection of the goal itself.

This hypothetical case raises an important issue: the domains of discretion. Implicit in the example above is a distinction between discretion over methods and discretion over goals. More generally, the example implies that there are distinct domains in which one may have varying levels of discretion. This assumption of domain variance is consistent with the foundational analyses of discretion in organizations, which explicitly recognized that an individual may have more or less discretion in different aspects of their work (Hambrick and Finkelstein, 1987; March and Simon, 1958; Thompson, 1967).

The goal of this paper is to delineate the domains in which discretion may vary. Previous work has identified many potential domains, but no effort has been made to synthesize these results. This contrasts with mature theories, where there is general agreement about the relevant domains, such as in transformational leadership (Bass and Avolio, 1997) or personality (John and Srivastava, 2001). In practical terms, uncertainty about the dimensions of discretion means that the construct has not yet been precisely defined. Since construct clarity is the essential foundation for theory (Bacharach, 1989), the current ambiguity is an impediment to theoretical progress. Without a clear domain structure for discretion, it is difficult to compare studies or generalize findings; researchers claiming to study the same phenomenon may be using incompatible understandings. At present, there seems to be a consensus that discretion varies by domain, but no agreement on what those domains are (Hambrick and Abrahamson,

1995; McAllister et al., 2007; Smith et al., 1997). In response, this paper synthesizes the many domains of discretion that have previously been identified into a single, multidimensional typology.

The focus here is entirely on discretion in organizations, and more specifically on empirical evidence concerning discretion's domains. Related constructs are not addressed. For example, while the antecedents and consequences of discretion are obviously important considerations, they are beyond the scope of this paper. As described above, even the most proximal of such relationships cannot be examined in any consistent, theoretically sound fashion without a clear definition of the constructs involved. Hence, the first step must be to define the multidimensional nature of discretion itself. This paper contributes towards such a definition.

## **METHODS**

The approach used here to derive the domain structure of discretion combined aspects of traditional literature review, qualitative meta-synthesis, and thematic content analysis (Heaton, 2004; Sandelowski and Barroso, 2006; Sonpar and Golden-Biddle, 2008). Classical meta-analysis and other quantitative approaches were not feasible, given the array of operationalizations, most of which have never been measured simultaneously. Analysis proceeded in six stages, as described below.

### **(1) Identifying Potential Domains**

This involved a two-part search. One part was a forward citation search in the ISI Web of Science database on the three foundational examinations of discretion in organizations: March and Simon (1958), Thompson (1967), and Hambrick and Finkelstein (1987). The second part was a keyword query of the ABI-INFORM, Business Source Premier, and JSTOR databases, using the following search terms and their variants: discretion, control, autonomy, choice, and empowerment.

The search excluded related, but distinct terms, such as delegation or proactivity. While there are likely strong links between delegation and discretion, there are also ways to delegate a task that provide the delegate with little discretion. Moreover, the emphasis in delegation is on the delegator, whereas the focus here is on how individuals understand their own discretion. Similarly, proactivity and discretion are doubtless related, but since proactivity is defined in part as action that produces change (Parker and Collins, 2008), it requires the exercise of discretion and is better understood as a consequence of discretion, rather than a part of it.

The two-part search identified a long list of potential works. This preliminary list was reduced by eliminating non-peer reviewed works, and then further refined by examining the text to remove those not significantly concerned with discretion. For example, many works cited Thompson (1967) for his analysis of varieties of interdependence, and did not substantially address the matter of discretion.

The reduced list of articles was examined for empirical evidence of discretion domains. In this paper, 'domain' refers to an analytic category with two features: it describes an area of work

where discretion can be perceived and exercised; and the particular aspects of work encompassed by a domain are meaningfully distinguishable from other aspects. A domain represents a useful level of aggregation (see Bagozzi and Edwards, 1998). For example, Wall et al. (1995) identified two domains of discretion: timing control and method control. Their respondents' answers indicated that the workers saw the timing of work and the methods of work as distinct aspects of their job. However, the pattern of responses also indicated that the workers did not distinguish so clearly among more granular behaviours. For example, their discretion about when to start a piece of work and when to finish it were so closely related as to be practically indistinguishable. As such, Wall et al. (1995) derived two domains from ratings of ten specific work behaviours.

Domains proposed on purely theoretical grounds, without empirical corroboration, were excluded. The choice to focus on only empirical evidence was made to create a more conservative standard for inclusion. While theoretically derived domains are potentially important sources of insight, they also contain the risk of excessive abstraction. For example, theory suggested that there should be five distinct dimensions of organizational citizenship behaviour (OCB; Organ, 1988), but subsequent data showed that individuals rarely make such fine distinctions, and tend to blur some of the theory-based boundaries among dimensions (Podsakoff and MacKenzie, 1994). This has led OCB researchers to propose, based on empirical evidence, that a three-dimensional structure is more appropriate (Allen et al., 2004; Coleman and Borman, 2000). In light of this, the analysis in this paper favoured those dimensions that had empirical support.

Consistent with this, measures that failed to receive empirical support were excluded (e.g. Barnett and Brennan's (1995) operationalization of 'decision authority' failed to achieve traditional reliability standards and those authors were unable to distinguish the construct in a subsequent factor analysis). Different operationalizations purporting to measure the same construct were included, however. For example, three different measures of organizational citizenship's dimension of altruism were found and included, each with similar, though not identical, items. Studies where discretion was assumed (e.g. Hambrick et al., 1993), experimentally manipulated (e.g. Shalley, 1991), or measured only by implication (e.g. Bradley et al., 2011) were excluded. In the end, 46 measures of discretion domains were identified in the literature (see Appendix 1).

## (2) Synthesizing Domains

Very different measures have been used to operationalize discretion, and in some cases, similar items have been used in scales purporting to measure different domains. Discretion has been treated as a single, all-encompassing work characteristic or with anywhere from 2 to 15 different domains. However, when examined together, the literature clearly did not represent 46 distinct domains; some integration was required. This integration was achieved by treating each previous domain as one case in a template analysis.

Template analysis is a qualitative research technique for creating a structured ordering of thematic codes (King, 1998). The template analysis reported in this paper involved an iterative grouping exercise that is best illustrated by example, as follows. Barnett and Brennan's (1995) study identified a single relevant domain of discretion: 'schedule control' (the criteria for

relevance are discussed after this example). As the domain label and the items measuring it suggest, schedule control concerns having discretion over the timing of work. Scheduling discretion was thus tentatively adopted as a potential domain of discretion (i.e. a preliminary thematic code). The next 'case' was then considered, being Breugh's (1985) 'work scheduling autonomy'. The items in this scale were consistent with the preliminary domain of scheduling discretion; there was clear similarity between the two scales, though they were not identical. Therefore, Breugh's (1985) scale was treated as a variation of the scheduling domain, which provided additional information about the domain by showing that work sequencing was included within it.

This process continued iteratively through each of the 46 domains and measures. In some cases, new domains were added. For example, Breugh (1985) showed that 'work criteria autonomy' was a distinct domain from that of scheduling, so this domain was tentatively adopted as a second thematic code. In this way, each measure served to expand or refine the emerging typology. This iterative aspect of template analysis uses the grounded theory technique of constant comparison, allowing each new case to inform and modify the interpretation of all cases (Glaser and Strauss, 1967).

As noted above, only relevant items were used in the template analysis. Domains and individual items that focused on aspects of control, as distinct from discretion, were excluded. For example, Dwyer and Ganster (1991) measured control, in the broadest sense. In addition to items about discretion (e.g. choosing among tasks), their scale also included items outside discretion (e.g. ability to predict things at work). Such items were excluded from the template analysis. These included issues of interdependence (Sims et al., 1976), the importance of non-routine problem solving (Dobbin and Boychuk, 1999), work variety (Karasek, 1990), required skill level (Landsbergis, 1988), opportunities for learning (Karasek, 1979), task difficulty (Barnett and Brennan, 1995), and the frequency of errors (Farh et al., 1997).

The emerging domain list was iteratively revised as each new case was considered. The result was a preliminary typology of the domains of discretion in organizations. This typology reflected the existing measures of discretion.

### (3) Identifying Discretionary Work Behaviours

The third stage refined the typology using content analysis of archival descriptions of individual work. Fourteen interviews were taken from the book *Gig*, which includes a series of unedited transcripts of interviews with workers, in service of the editors' goal to present the 'unscripted voice of the individual' (Bowe et al., 2000, p. xii). The current paper used these interviews as a non-reactive source of information about how individuals think about their work, and thus as a basis for identifying domains of discretion in organizations.

Because the 14 interviews reflect a convenience sample of volunteers, they cannot be treated as representative. Moreover, individuals may have described how they want others to see their work, rather than how it truly is. For these reasons, it would have been inappropriate to use the interviews in a deductive test of the typology. Instead, the strategy used with the interviews was an application of abductive reasoning (Peirce, 1958). Abduction involves the simultaneous

selection and formulation of explanatory hypotheses, particularly in response to unexpected findings (Weick, 2006). The logic of abduction is to attempt to account for events using a priori models, but to hold these models in some scepticism, recognizing that they may require revision to accommodate new observations (Magnani, 2001).

An abductive approach was appropriate here because the lack of a mature theory precluded strong deduction and made theoretical elaboration a necessity. At the same time however, there were several decades of research examining discretion in organizations, which made it inappropriate to adopt a naive, purely inferential approach. As such, abduction was preferred, allowing simultaneous use of existing knowledge and openness to new findings. In practical terms, this meant that the interviews from *Gig* were used to extend or enrich the results from Stage 2, but not to contradict them. The interviews were used from the perspective of asking 'Has anything been missed?' rather than asking 'What is wrong?' As such, though one cannot assume that these interviews mention every domain of discretion, if they were to mention a domain not included in the typology, adding it would improve the final result.

Stage 3 began with an analysis of the 14 interviews in the book in which the informants explicitly mentioned both personal tasks and management tasks; seven of the informants had organizational superiors, and seven did not (see Appendix 2). The reason for choosing this subset was to cover as broad a range of discretion as possible, including that relevant to the execution of one's individual work, as well as that involved in the most 'macro' levels of management through to the most 'micro' aspects of direct supervision (Hales, 2006). A list of potential domains based on this sample of 14 interviews should be more comprehensive than a similar list resulting from a sample of line workers with no supervisory responsibilities.

Each interview was examined for specific work behaviours in which the informant indicated having some level of discretion. Any time the informant mentioned choice about a specific action, the mention was flagged as an instance of discretionary behaviour. For example, the town manager mentioned deciding upon the content of job descriptions for her staff and the construction foreman described choosing to personally teach all new crew members how to use a *Skilsaw*. Each informant mentioned between 14 and 49 discretionary behaviours, for a total of 386.

#### (4) Enriching the Typology with Work Behaviours

The 386 discretionary behaviours identified in the previous stage were used to refine the domain structure of discretion that emerged from Stage 2. This was done by using the Stage 2 results as a codebook for labelling the behaviours. For example, the food business owner described choosing his workers' hours, and this was coded as an instance of the scheduling discretion domain. This coding process was iterative, but unidirectional. Behaviours that were not part of the typology were presumed to represent gaps in the literature, and appropriate extensions were made, but the absence of a given domain in the interviews was not used as a basis for removing it from the typology. For example, method discretion and scheduling discretion were retained as distinct domains based on previous research (Barnett and Brennan, 1995; Breaugh, 1985; Morgeson and Humphrey, 2006; Wall et al., 1995), even though none of the interview informants specifically

mentioned this distinction. Whenever the interview data enriched the typology, it was added; but the interview data was not sufficiently robust to justify removing any element of the typology.

In the end, two types of changes occurred. The first was to enrich the definition and content of established domains. For example, the existing items that led to the staffing discretion domain in Stage 2 did not explicitly refer to discretion over recruiting techniques; the measures in the literature are primarily concerned with hiring and firing decisions. However, the HR director's interview suggested that discretion over the techniques used in recruiting was an important additional facet of hiring, and thus enriched the typology's definition of the staffing discretion domain. The other change to the typology was the addition of an entirely new domain: buffering discretion. This domain is described in detail in the results section, but it is noteworthy that there was no evidence of this domain in previous empirical work, although many interview behaviours indicated its importance.

#### (5) Second Round of Identifying and Assessing Work Behaviours

One more test of the typology's potential comprehensiveness was conducted, in light of the fact that the first sample of interviews identified an additional domain of discretion. This involved repeating Stages 3 and 4 on additional narratives from *Gig*. An interview was randomly selected, all discretionary behaviours mentioned in it were flagged, and these were coded using the revised typology from Stage 4. After nine additional interviews (see Appendix 2) were entirely accommodated by the typology, saturation was assumed (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Within the limitations of the *Gig* data, it appeared that no further insight would be provided. As such, the typology was deemed complete, being reflective of relevant previous research and at least some individuals' working experience.

#### (6) Inter-Rater Corroboration

To assess the internal coherence of the typology, a naive coder was used to label a subset of the discretionary work behaviours, using the typology from Stage 5. The resulting inter-rater reliability scores were only modest, and below traditional rules of thumb for acceptability. The cases of discrepancy were discussed, and revisions were made to the typology; this involved returning to parts of Stages 2 and 4. A second coder was then given the revised typology and a random subset of discretionary work behaviours. The coding results in this case showed acceptable reliability (Kw 0.9; Cohen, 1968).

## RESULTS

The final product of the analysis was a two-level domain structure for discretion, composed of eight primary domains, two of which have sub-domains. This typology encompasses all of the 46 dimensions previously identified in the literature, as well as the discretionary behaviours mentioned in the archival interviews. Table I presents the typology, which is summarized below.



**Table I.** Typology of eight discretion domains in organizations

Discretion domain	Sample behaviour	Sample scale items
(1) Effort	Casting business owner opting to work 18 hours per day, including weekends	‘Does not take extra breaks’ ‘Believes in giving an honest day's work for an honest day's pay’
(2) Goal	Insurance CEO choosing to prioritize shareholder return over personal or colleagues’ desires	‘I have some control over what I am supposed to accomplish’ ‘My job allows me to modify the normal way we are evaluated so that I can emphasize some aspects of my job and play down others’
(3a) Technical: Method	Air Force general selecting the means by which to execute his assigned missions	‘How much control do you have over the variety of methods you use in completing your work?’ ‘The job allows me to decide on my own how to go about my work’
(3b) Technical: Scheduling	Film producer arranging ‘catch up’ sessions to get production back on schedule	‘How much control do you have over how quickly or slowly you have to work?’ ‘Set your own work deadlines’
(3c) Technical: Materials	Web content CEO arranging licensing contracts to be able to use particular characters and images	‘Help to manage the budget for your team’ ‘How much control do you have over the amount of resources (tools, material) you get?’
(4) Staffing	Telemarketing supervisor's choice of what to emphasize in reviewing applications	‘Get involved in the selection of new team members’ ‘Recruiting new agents’
(5a) Support: General	Basketball coach electing to listen to, and help with, athlete's social (non-work) issues	‘Gives of his or her time to help other agents who have work-related problems’ ‘Helps new employees settle into the job’
(5b) Support: Supervisory	Food business owner's efforts to offer holiday schedules that are sensitive to workers' personal needs	‘Monitor your team's overall performance’ ‘Get involved in the discipline of other team members’
(6) Interpersonal style	Construction foreman's decision to ‘be friendly, without making friends’ when interacting with staff	‘Tries to avoid creating problems for co-workers’ ‘[Not] Consuming a lot of time complaining about trivial matters’
(7) Civic virtue	Basketball coach choosing to attend functions and events, when not required, to support the school and team	‘Attends functions that are not required but help the company image’ ‘Eager to tell outsiders good news about the company and clarify their misunderstandings’
(8) Buffering	Political fund manager's choices about taking responsibility with head office when his staff do not meet their goals  Insurance CEO ‘taking the heat’ for failures in his organization	[no mention]

The eight domains of discretion are applicable to all kinds of work. As such, the scope of what is in a domain can vary greatly. For example, although the domains of a travelling sales representative's discretion are the same as the domains of a chief executive's discretion, the specific choices and possible actions in each domain will be drastically different for these individuals. Method discretion for a sales representative may consist of choosing a particular approach for a given customer, whereas the chief executive's method discretion may involve

decisions about which countries to operate in. The executive's discretion may also have implications for the subsequent discretion of subordinates, in a way that the sales representative's does not. Nonetheless, both individuals will perceive some level of discretion in each of the following eight domains, which appear to be comprehensive of how individuals perceive their work.

### (1) Effort Discretion

The level of attention and energy that one devotes to one's work is perhaps the most straightforward domain of discretion in organizations. One has a choice about how assiduously a task is pursued. Discretionary effort has received the most attention in the OCB literature, where it has been labelled as conscientiousness (Podsakoff et al., 1990) and generalized compliance (Smith et al., 1983), though others have addressed it as well (Dwyer and Ganster, 1991; Park et al., 2006). This domain concerns individuals' discretion about completing the tasks that are expected of them and how much genuine effort they exert in doing so. For example, in the interview data, all but one of the informants mentioned the long, hard hours that they often chose to work.

### (2) Goal Discretion

Another important domain of discretion is in determining what one will do, in the sense of choosing the ends being pursued. Individuals' goal discretion reflects the extent to which they can decide about what they are trying to achieve. This includes both the desired output and the criteria used to evaluate it. Goal discretion appeared regularly in the existing scales; however, because most of this research had been conducted with lower-level staff, the discretion was often framed as influence, rather than outright choice (Breugh, 1985; Langfred, 2000; Tetrick and LaRocco, 1987). Interview informants' examples included the film producer's editorial latitude to decide what constitutes a good movie and the web content CEO's choice of which projects to develop.

### (3) Technical Discretion

Technical discretion involves choice about the behaviours directly involved in completing one's work. That is, once the goal is determined (goal discretion), the matter of how to reach the goal is a question of technical discretion. Therefore, the Air Force general's choices in developing plans to accomplish his assigned missions and the food business owner's latitude to determine his staff's work hours were examples of technical discretion. Although the interviewees tended to speak of technical discretion as a single domain, previous empirical results suggested that there are three closely related, but nonetheless distinct, sub-domains of technical discretion, concerning choice about method, scheduling, and materials (Breugh, 1985; Morgeson and Humphrey, 2006; Wall et al., 1995).

**(3a) Method discretion.** This sub-domain of technical discretion refers to latitude in determining how work is actually done, the practices used in executing tasks. It includes a range of issues, such as choosing among methods (Dwyer and Ganster, 1991) and planning work (Morgeson and Humphrey, 2006). The construction foreman's choice about task assignment,

such as giving the ‘crummiest jobs’ to the newest members of the work crew is one example (Bowe et al., 2000, p. 33).

**(3b) Scheduling discretion.** Being able to determine the scheduling of work (Moorman and Blakely, 1995), the pace of work (Tetrick and LaRocco, 1987), and the order of activities (Morgeson and Humphrey, 2006) represents a distinct component of technical discretion. Thus, the food business owner's latitude to determine the hours his employees work is distinct from how he may ask them to pursue tasks during those hours. The first is scheduling discretion; the latter is method discretion.

**(3c) Materials discretion.** This sub-domain concerns discretion about the materials with which work is conducted. It encompasses control over necessary work inputs, including information (Dwyer and Ganster, 1991), tools (Frese et al., 1996; Semmer, 1984), and budgets (Parker et al., 2006), as well as the ability to modify the local working environment (Dwyer and Ganster, 1991). Examples include the basketball coach's control over alumni spending in support of his team, and the film producer's choice about which story rights to purchase for future filming.

#### (4) Staffing Discretion

This domain is similar to the materials component of technical discretion, except that it concerns the human resources available, rather than the material ones. This domain includes discretion in all aspects of hiring and firing staff (Parker et al., 2006; Podsakoff and MacKenzie, 1994). Again, because of the relatively low hierarchical level at which most previous measurement of discretion has occurred, the mentions of staffing discretion in existing measures focus on participation more than final decision. This was not true in the interviews, however, where frequent mentions concerned choices about recruiting techniques (e.g. the HR director's decision to waive standard hiring practices such as reference checking) and decisions to terminate (e.g. the cleaning business owner's decisions to fire those who did not respond quickly enough to his requests).

#### (5) Support Discretion

Support discretion concerns the choice one has about actions to assist and influence how others do their work. This domain has two sub-components, one of support behaviours that any organizational member could engage in (general support) and another of discretionary actions that are primarily associated with supervisory functions (supervisory support).

**(5a) General support discretion.** Individuals can exercise discretion about helping others in their work, including whether, when, and how to provide assistance (Farh et al., 1997; Podsakoff et al., 1990). In addition to direct help with tasks, this domain also includes broader issues that can support others' efforts, such as providing motivation or encouragement (Podsakoff and MacKenzie, 1994). Training is also included as a component of this domain, as it is intended to support the trainee's subsequent performance. Therefore, both the political fund manager's opting to brainstorm with others to help them identify plans of action and the town manager's decision to give ‘a lot of atta boys’ to relief workers are examples of general support discretion (Bowe et al., 2000, p. 592).

**(5b) Supervisory support.** While any organizational member can potentially help any other, there are generally special expectations and support functions that are a part of the superior–subordinate relationship. These are actions taken to aid the subordinate's subsequent work, but ones that tend to be less common in peer-to-peer interactions. These include discretion about monitoring performance (Parker et al., 2006), such as determining the content of staff reviews. They also include supervisors' potential power to punish and reward subordinates (Parker et al., 2006), an area where interview informants reported greatly varying degrees of discretion. The telemarketing supervisor reported little discretion over rewards, as he was given guidelines about what behaviours to censure and how, whereas the casting business owner mentioned the range of outlandish behaviour she chose to tolerate without taking disciplinary action.

#### (6) Interpersonal Style Discretion

Beyond task related choices, individuals also have discretion about their behaviour in interpersonal contact with others. This domain of discretion encompasses diverse aspects of a person's relationally-oriented behaviour. This appeared in existing scales under the labels of sportsmanship, courtesy, and interpersonal harmony (Farh et al., 1997; Podsakoff et al., 1990). However, the logic for placing an item in one of these scales rather than another was not always clear in previous work, and evidence suggests that individuals sometimes fail to make fine distinctions between these theoretically-derived variants (MacKenzie et al., 1991; Podsakoff and MacKenzie, 1994; Podsakoff et al., 1997). Therefore, this analysis combined them under the label of interpersonal style discretion because the freedom exercised revolves around matters of interaction. Examples included the telemarketing supervisor's choices about whether to congratulate when one of his subordinates made a sale and the cleaning business owner choosing to be culturally sensitive when dealing with his staff.

#### (7) Civic Virtue Discretion

The name for this domain was retained from the OCB measure that defined it, because the construct has shown repeated empirical success and the label evocatively conveys the content of the domain (MacKenzie et al., 1991; Podsakoff and MacKenzie, 1994; Podsakoff et al., 1990). It consists of selfless actions taken to benefit the organization. In existing scales, this included matters as simple as attending non-mandatory meetings (Podsakoff et al., 1990) and volunteering (Smircich, 1983), to more active advocacy, such as defending the organization's reputation (Farh et al., 1997) or encouraging friends to use its products (Moorman and Blakely, 1995). The interviews raised a similar range of discretionary behaviours, including the Air Force general's decisions about structuring his family life in support of his work and the HR director's choosing to spend a night in the emergency room with an injured worker.

#### (8) Buffering Discretion

The final domain of discretion to emerge was broad and complex, but did not lend itself to obvious sub-division. Although the manager's role as a figurehead and environmental-mediator is prominent in treatments of managerial work (Mintzberg, 1971; Stewart, 1982; Wilkinson and van Zwanenberg, 1994), most research on the domains of discretion has neglected this matter.

However, this domain was plainly evident in the interviews. The Air Force general discussed his choices about when and how to represent his unit at meetings in Washington. The town manager described how she sometimes chose to serve as the scapegoat for the council when unpopular decisions were taken. The web content CEO mentioned choosing to act as a buffer and liaison between her staff and clients. Many of the buffering behaviours in the interviews were primarily concerned with choices about how to interact with the external environment as a part of one's work. Almost all of these behaviours combined elements of being a figurehead (i.e. symbolically representing a larger whole), a communicator, and a protector of those within the unit or organization.

## **DISCUSSION**

The most common empirical definition of discretion has been as a single domain encompassing all aspects of an individual's work (e.g. Finkelstein and Boyd, 1998; Hackman and Lawler, 1971; Karasek, 1979; Morgeson et al., 2005; Spreitzer, 1995). This approach has had success, with researchers detecting anticipated relationships among various antecedents and consequences of discretion. However, there has been criticism of this approach, and evidence suggests that the sub-domains of discretion have unique relationships with some antecedents and consequences, and therefore should be distinguished (Fried, 1991). Making distinctions among one's discretion in different domains of work is also consistent with theoretical treatments of the construct, which treat discretion in organizations as a multi-dimensional phenomenon (Hambrick and Finkelstein, 1987; March and Simon, 1958; Thompson, 1967).

Related to this, others have noted that research on discretion has devoted more attention to substantive validity than to construct validity (Podsakoff et al., 2000; Wilson and Caza, 2008). This means that more is known about the consequences of discretion than is known about the nature of discretion itself (Schwab, 1980). This creates a potentially unstable foundation for theorizing (Bacharach, 1989). As such, the crucial first step in developing a mature theory of discretion in organizations is to clearly define its nature.

While prior research identified a number of potential domains of discretion, these dimensions had not been previously integrated. Therefore, this paper used existing empirical measures of discretion in organizations and a sample of archival interview data to develop an integrative typology. The results suggest that individuals think of their work in terms of eight distinct domains in which they may have varying levels of discretion. These domains concern their discretion over effort, goal, technical, staffing, support, interpersonal style, civic virtue, and buffering issues. Each domain represents a distinct sphere for the exercise of discretion in organizations.

The typology goes beyond previous efforts in being multidimensional and broadly applicable. Rather than focusing on a specific hierarchical level (e.g. Hambrick and Finkelstein, 1987; van Mierlo et al., 2007) or type of discretion (e.g. Langfred, 2000; Schnake and Dumler, 2003), the typology developed here encompasses findings from multiple levels and types so as to apply to them all. As such, the typology extends and complements previous efforts by not only clarifying past and future empirical findings, but also by advancing the theory of discretion in organizations towards maturity. Both of these contributions are discussed below.

## Contributions to Empirical Study

**Clarifying previous findings.** By providing an integrated view of the domains in which discretion varies, the typology described here provides new insight into previous findings. For example, in contrast to earlier OCB models involving five (e.g. Organ, 1988; Podsakoff et al., 1990) or more (e.g. Farh et al., 1997) factors, there is a recent trend towards using only three: conscientious initiative, organizational support, and personal support (Allen et al., 2004; Becton and Field, 2009; Coleman and Borman, 2000). While the labels are somewhat different, two of these three factors correspond to domains in the typology: conscientious initiative describes a domain like that of effort discretion, and organizational support is comparable to the typology's domain of civic virtue discretion. In contrast, the third OCB factor, personal support, is described as follows (Becton and Field, 2009, p. 1658):

Helping others by offering suggestions, teaching them useful knowledge or skills, directly performing some of their tasks, and providing emotional support for their personal problems. Cooperating with others by accepting suggestions, informing them of events they should know about, putting team objectives ahead of personal interests. Showing consideration, courtesy, and tact in relation to others as well as motivating and showing confidence in them.

From the perspective of the typology developed here, this description blurs the boundaries between the support and interpersonal style domains of discretion, apparently conflating the two.

Failing to distinguish between these two domains is problematic. For example, a cross-cultural study using the definition above predicted that American and Chinese workers would report different levels of personal support (Becton and Field, 2009). Since China is a more collectivistic culture, the researchers predicted that Chinese workers would be less competitive and thus more supportive with peers. However, their data did not support this prediction.

Given the insight granted by the typology developed here, this failure may not be surprising. The authors' operationalization of personal support combined elements of the support discretion and interpersonal style discretion domains and treated them as one factor (Becton and Field, 2009). This is theoretically imprecise. While America's individualism may well make workers less helpful towards peers, it is not clear why it should also make them less social or interpersonally polite. There is no obvious reason why collectivism should influence interpersonal style choices, relative to local norms. Collectivism is a matter of self versus other priorities, not social style or acumen (Hofstede, 1980). As a result, the study mixed two distinct domains together, each with unique relationships to the relevant outcome, and this mixing could explain the failure of their hypothesis. Consistent with this interpretation, the original work from which the three-factor OCB structure derives (Coleman and Borman, 2000) makes a distinction between two sub-factors of personal support: helping others (i.e. support discretion), and how one treats others (i.e. interpersonal style discretion). Thus, in light of the typology derived here, it seems unsurprising that the personal support hypothesis was not supported.

Similarly, consider the failure of Hambrick and Finkelstein's (1987) model to predict some of the antecedents of executive discretion. Specifically, despite repeated efforts, researchers have been unable to show the predicted relationship between demand instability and executive discretion (Finkelstein and Boyd, 1998; Hambrick and Abrahamson, 1995). Examining these findings with the typology of discretion's domains reveals that the observed non-relation may be an artefact of measurement, rather than a failure of theory. The hypothesized effect of demand instability is two-fold: it will reduce the clarity of means–ends linkages and it will increase the complexity of conducting routine operations, creating greater demands on attention and information processing capacity (Finkelstein and Boyd, 1998; Hambrick and Abrahamson, 1995).

The first effect of unclear means–ends linkages suggests that technical and staffing discretion will be increased by demand instability; executives could justify a range of different production capacities, staffing levels, and pricing schedules to reach their stated ends. In contrast, if increased complexity and cognitive load had any effect on discretion, it would be to reduce effort discretion, because overwhelmed executives will have fewer resources to devote to their work, and thus be less able to pursue certain options. Given this, it is not surprising that demand instability showed no consistent link with measures of discretion that failed to distinguish between domains. If one assumes that demand instability increases technical and staffing discretion, while having either a negative or a null effect on effort, goal, support, style, civic virtue, and buffering discretion, one would expect a null relationship with a discretion measure that combines these domains. The typology thus allows a reinterpretation of the findings, and suggests that the theoretical prediction may well be accurate; it has yet to be tested precisely.

As both of these examples show, having a comprehensive typology of the domains of discretion in organizations provides new insight into previous findings. Prior work can be re-examined with greater theoretical precision, and new conclusions drawn. This underscores other discussion of the importance of clearly defining a construct (Bacharach, 1989; Hambrick and Abrahamson, 1995; McAllister et al., 2007; Smith et al., 1997). The typology will allow more to be learned from research that has already been conducted.

**Improving future investigations.** The typology of discretion also can facilitate improved research efforts in the future. A clear understanding of the domain structure of discretion will enhance the accuracy with which hypotheses are developed. For example, the typology suggests that the three-factor model of OCB may be more effective with four factors, allowing for the distinction between the support and interpersonal style elements that are currently combined in that model's personal support factor. Re-examination along the lines of Becton and Field (2009) could be made more precise in predicting that cultural collectivism will influence discretionary support behaviour, but not discretionary choices about interpersonal style. Likewise, investigations of executive discretion may be more fruitful if they recognize that discretion varies independently in the different domains. For example, demand instability may not increase effort discretion, but it likely will enhance technical discretion.

A detailed understanding of discretion's domains contributes to precision, and thus to better empirical study. Evidence consistent with this reasoning has begun to emerge in recent investigations of Karasek's (1979) job demands–control (JDC) model. The basic predictions of the JDC model are for main effects on strain from the level of demands and the level of control

in a job, plus an interaction between the two, in which greater control (i.e. discretion) buffers the strain of job demands. While decades of research have consistently demonstrated the two main effects, support for the interaction has been weak and inconsistent (van der Doef and Maes, 1999). However, preliminary evidence suggests that the failure to find the proposed interaction results from the fact that demands and control occur in distinct domains (Hausser et al., 2010). That is, unless the control is in the same domain as the relevant job demand, there will be limited buffering effects. This suggests that the buffering interaction of the JDC model does exist, but will only reliably be detected if research designs incorporate the eight domains in which discretion varies. More generally, the typology will allow future research to define discretion with a precision that will enhance the quality of research designs and results.

### Contributions Towards a Mature Theory of Discretion

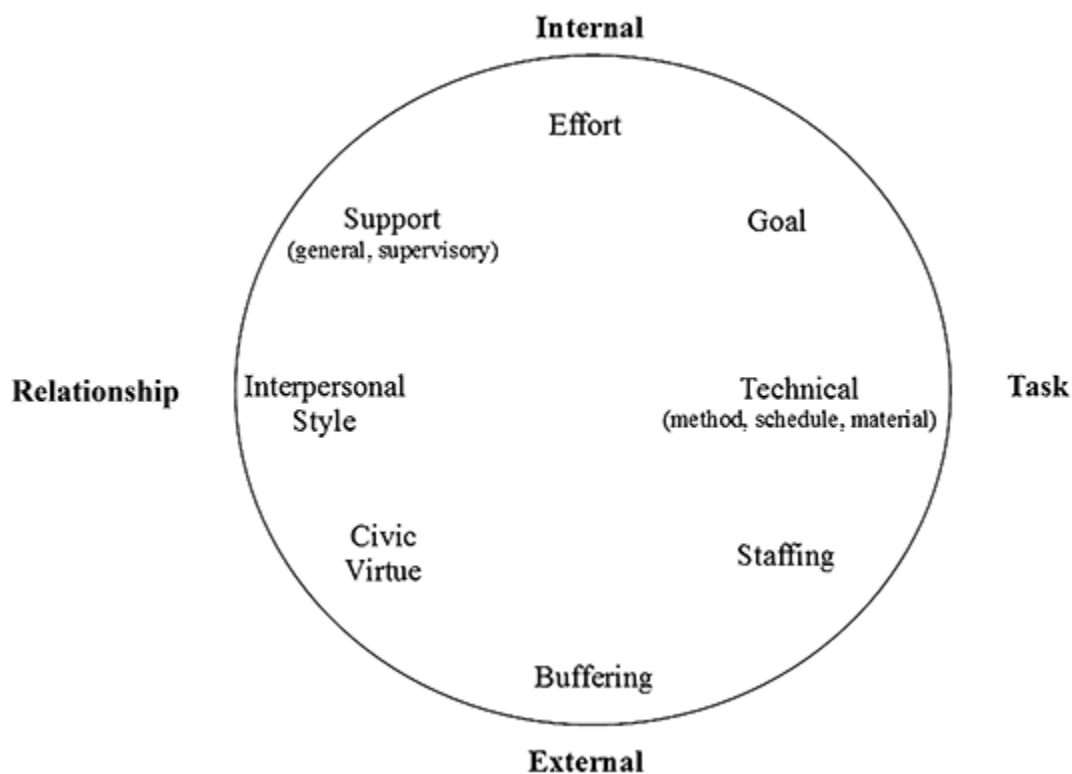
The typology suggests directions for the development of a general theory of discretion in organizations. These directions include explicating the antecedents and consequences of discretion in each domain, as there are likely to be important differences among the factors that influence the recognition and use of discretion in particular domains (e.g. Huang et al., 2010; McCarter and Caza, 2009; Pieterse et al., 2010), as well as how individuals respond to the exercise of discretion in each domain (e.g. Bryant et al., 2010; Haar and Spell, 2009; Yukl and Fu, 1999). For example, one would expect that most organizational actors report relatively high agreement about an individual's level of goal discretion, since decisions about outputs and performance evaluations tend to be governed by rules and established norms (Carpenter and Golden, 1997). In contrast, there may be significant variance in recognition and agreement about one's civic virtue discretion, as this is not often explicitly discussed (Pond et al., 1997).

However, even before investigating these substantive relationships, the typology developed here suggests some fundamental issues to be addressed. Theoretical development along these lines will move the theory of discretion in organizations towards maturity. Three in particular are discussed below: the comprehensiveness of the typology, the relationships among domains, and the development of discretion profiles. For each of these, specific theoretical propositions are offered.

**Comprehensiveness of the typology.** It is asserted here that the eight-domain typology of discretion in organizations is comprehensive. That is, it is proposed that the typology defines all of the domains in which individuals think about their discretion at work, and that it is inclusive of all types and levels of work. However, this claim can only be asserted, not proved, due to limitations in the present paper. One such limitation is the exclusive use of empirical measures of discretion. While this approach offered the advantage of limiting the typology to domains that had been demonstrated as meaningful to organizational members, it also may have limited comprehensiveness. It is possible that there is an important domain of discretion that has simply not been investigated by previous research. As a step towards addressing this issue, the current paper used archival interview data, and this did reveal a domain that had previously been neglected (i.e. buffering discretion). Since the interview data were from a convenience sample of volunteers, their comprehensiveness is suspect. As such, the claim that the typology developed here is comprehensive and universal remains to be confirmed. A crucial next step will be testing the typology's comprehensiveness.



**Circumplex structure of domains.** The second theoretical assertion arising from the typology is that the eight domains of discretion have a circumplex structure of interrelations. A circumplex model derives from the statistical techniques of multidimensional scaling (Kruskal and Wish, 1978), and uses a spatial analogy to represent relationships of varying strength in a circular space that is defined by two underlying dimensions (Denison et al., 1995; Levy, 1976). Circumplex models have been used in a range of behavioural and organizational studies, as a way to parsimoniously represent relatively complex links among multiple domains that are simultaneously distinct and connected (e.g. Lawrence et al., 2009; Olson, 2009; Traupman et al., 2009). It is asserted here that the eight domains of discretion in organizations have a circumplex structure defined by the dimensions of internal versus external focus and task versus relational focus (see Figure 1). Specifically, the eight domains form four pairs of relatively antagonistic opposites, as defined by the two underlying dimensions.



**Figure 1.** Circumplex structure of the domains of discretion in organizations

The internal–external dimension concerns individuals' relative focus on their internal environment (e.g. areas of formal authority and specific job duties) or the external environment (e.g. the organization beyond their department or the industry of their organization; Cameron and Quinn, 2006; Quinn and Rohrbaugh, 1983). This dimension is epitomized by the distinction between the internally focused effort discretion (deciding how much personal energy to expend) and buffering discretion (focusing on the demands of external stakeholders). The task-relational dimension refers to the distinction between focusing primarily on task-related aspects of work versus the social, contextual environment in which work occurs (Fiedler, 1971; Motowidlo and Van Scotter, 1994; Schein, 1980). The extremes of this dimension are shown in technical

discretion, with its focus on the details of how a task is executed, and in interpersonal style discretion, which concerns choices about the approach one adopts in dealing with others.

Although this circumplex model has not been empirically tested, it is consistent with available evidence. For one, it seems logical that some of the eight domains are more closely related than others. For example, the types of civic virtue behaviours that one chooses to engage in are likely to reflect and influence one's choices about interpersonal style and the treatment of others (e.g. the HR director opting to spend the night at the hospital with an injured worker). As well, civic virtue choices about promoting the organization to outsiders are different from buffering, because civic virtue is not formally part of one's work tasks, whereas buffering may be; the two are nonetheless closely related activities. Similarly, the goals that one sets using goal discretion will be tightly linked to issues of technical discretion: goals may imply methods or specific technical options may promote particular goals (Cohen et al., 1972; Hambrick et al., 2004). As such, although the eight domains are conceptually distinct, one would expect larger correlations between some pairs of domains than others.

The corollary is that some domains may be relatively antagonistic, with greater discretion in one domain implying less in another. For example, the interpersonal style and technical domains of discretion reflect the traditional split between task and relationship focus, and evidence has shown that individuals tend to pursue one of these domains at the expense of the other (Fiedler, 1971; Motowidlo and Van Scotter, 1994). As well, one might imagine an inherent tension between effort discretion and buffering discretion: the more one chooses to engage in buffering behaviour, the less choice one may have about personal levels of effort, because satisfying external constituencies will demand one's time and energy. Consistent with this, the archival interview comments tended to frame buffering activities as demanding ones in which there was little choice but to do the difficult work required once one committed to them.

In the data reported here, even stronger evidence of potential antagonism between domains was suggested by goal discretion and civic virtue discretion. Goal discretion was mentioned more often by those informants who did not have an organizational superior (e.g. CEO, business owner). Moreover, when those with superiors did mention goal discretion, it was typically described in terms of issue selling rather than outright choice (Ashford et al., 1998). For example, the Air Force general mentioned judging 'hot spots' of potential trouble (Bowe et al., 2000, p. 570). He described his role as identifying such hot spots to his superior, who would choose the appropriate response. The general was issue selling, in the sense that he directed his superior's attention to particular areas, but final decisions were out of the general's control. As such, the general had some goal discretion, but it was not as great as that of the food business owner, who described freely choosing which products to make and where to market them. Overall, in the sample of interview informants, those with organizational superiors were less likely to mention goal discretion, and when they did, that discretion was usually of an issue-selling variety.

In contrast, informants with organizational superiors mentioned twice as many instances of civic virtue discretion, compared to those without superiors. This pattern of apparent trade-off between civic virtue and goal discretion could imply that as an individual's goal discretion increases, the meaningfulness of civic virtue behaviour wanes. This is easiest to see at the extreme. Recall that

civic virtue behaviours concern selfless actions that benefit the organization (MacKenzie et al., 1991). Imagine the owner of a sole proprietorship: the owner has maximal goal discretion, and that owner's primary task is the success of the business, so any action taken for the good of the organization is likely to be construed as essential work, rather than any sort of selfless civic virtue. It may be that the civic virtue domain becomes increasingly less meaningful with greater goal discretion. Consistent with this, previous research has shown that managers tend to report less OCB than do their subordinates (Becton and Field, 2009), and that managers often do not consider specific behaviours to be instances of OCB, even when subordinates do (Podsakoff et al., 2000).

Other empirical evidence also is consistent with the circumplex structure in Figure 1. For example, the three-factor model of OCB includes the dimensions of personal support, organizational support, and conscientious initiative (Allen et al., 2004; Borman et al., 2001), which correspond to the typology's domains of effort, support, interpersonal style, and civic virtue discretion. Based on the correlations in OCB work, one would expect these four domains to be more highly correlated with each other than with other domains in the typology. Moreover, as discussed earlier, the OCB factor of personal support has two sub-factors, which correspond to the support discretion and interpersonal style discretion domains of the typology (Coleman and Borman, 2000). The fact that the OCB model combines these two domains into one factor suggests that they are even more closely related to each other than to the two remaining factors, such that interpersonal style discretion will be more highly correlated (i.e. spatially closer) to support discretion, than to effort discretion, even though interpersonal style discretion and effort discretion are more closely related to each other than either is to staffing discretion.

Although this evidence is not conclusive, it is suggestive. The eight domains of discretion likely have a circumplex structure of interrelationships, one defined by relative focus on internal versus external and task versus relationship aspects of work. Confirming this through empirical investigation will be an important step in defining the construct's nature and advancing towards a mature theory of discretion in organizations.

**Discretion profiles.** Combining the previous two propositions, of comprehensiveness and of circumplexity, leads to the third: work can be described by specific patterns of discretion in the eight domains. In particular, because of the close relationship between discretion and formal power (Langbein, 2000; Olk and Elvira, 2001; Welbourne and Trevor, 2000), different hierarchical positions are likely to show reliable patterns of discretion. In other words, one's discretion across domains is likely to follow a consistent pattern based on one's hierarchical power; different types of work will have particular clusters of relatively high and low discretion in each domain.

This proposition of discretion profiles is consistent with previous observations (Kotter, 2001). It is implicit in the tendency to focus on particular positions and hierarchical levels in research, such as using only line staff or senior management (e.g. Hambrick and Abrahamson, 1995; Parker and Collins, 2008; Tepper et al., 2001). The logic of treating all staff in one position as comparable to each other, but distinct from other positions, accords with the assumption that each position has a defining pattern of discretion across the eight domains. For

example, the discretion of supervisors is probably more like that of other supervisors than it is like that of senior executives.

Some support is provided by studies that explicitly compare across hierarchical levels. For example, a study of job crafting (i.e. intentionally redefining the scope of one's work; Wrzesniewski and Dutton, 2001) found that the nature of job crafting differed by hierarchical level (Berg et al., 2010). Higher-level employees reported that the primary concerns in their job crafting were addressing their own expectations and priorities, whereas lower-level employees had to contend with others' expectations of what they should do. For example, while higher-level employees described having freedom in specifying the details of general objectives and in choosing the means used to reach them, lower-level employees often were assigned specific tasks and given prescribed ways in which to execute them. Using the terms of the typology developed here, middle managers reported moderate goal discretion and high technical discretion, whereas line employees perceived little discretion in both domains (Berg et al., 2010).

Based on such findings, it is proposed that there are four fundamental patterns of discretion in organizations (see Table II). *Staff discretion* is distinguished by high levels of discretion over effort, support, interpersonal style, and civic virtue, combined with low discretion in the other four domains. Typical staff members have some discretion over their contextual, extra-role behaviour, but relatively little choice in their task duties. In contrast, while *supervisory discretion* provides somewhat more control over technical choices, staffing, and buffering behaviour, those gains come at the expense of less freedom about choosing levels of effort, support, and interpersonal style. For example, the sorts of marginally rude behaviour that a curmudgeonly staff member might get away with would be considered inappropriate and potentially discriminatory from a supervisor. *Managerial discretion* is predicted to provide some discretion in most domains, as managers generally have more freedom in organizations (Whitley, 1989), whereas *executive discretion* provides the greatest choice in operational areas, though with consequently less freedom in effort, civic virtue, and interpersonal style.

**Table II.** Discretion profiles

Domain	Staff discretion	Supervisory discretion	Managerial discretion	Executive discretion
(1) Effort discretion	High	Moderate	Moderate	Low
(2) Goal discretion	Low	Low	Moderate	High
(3) Technical discretion	Low	Moderate	High	High
(4) Staffing discretion	Low	Moderate	High	High
(5) Support discretion	High	Moderate	High	High
(6) Interpersonal style discretion	High	Moderate	Low	Low
(7) Civic virtue discretion	High	High	Moderate	Low
(8) Buffering discretion	Low	Moderate	Moderate	High

An important note about the managerial and executive discretion profiles is that they have relatively high levels of staffing discretion simultaneously with high levels support discretion. In the circumplex model, these two dimensions correspond to the bottom-right and top-left quadrants, respectively, and are therefore predicted to be antagonistic. The circumplex model suggests that increased discretion in one domain would undermine discretion in the other. While this apparent conflict may prove to reflect a deficiency in either the circumplex model or the

discretion profiles, it is more likely indicative of one of the tensions of holding a senior office (Cameron, 1986; Goffee and Jones, 2005). For example, research has shown that the best organizational leaders are required to engage in apparently opposing behaviours; they must overcome the paradox of simultaneously achieving opposites (Denison et al., 1995; Quinn, 1988). In the same way, so-called full range leadership requires individuals to be simultaneously transformational and transactional with followers, despite the inherent antagonism in those two styles (Bass and Avolio, 1997; Toor and Ofori, 2009). Therefore, the apparent contradiction in the managerial and executive profiles is likely a reflection of the paradox involved in leadership (e.g. Jansen et al., 2008).

The discretion profiles offer numerous theoretical opportunities. For one, they could provide a rigorous way to classify and compare different workers and jobs. If two individuals have similar discretion in various domains, then their work situations are similar at a fundamental level. It may make more sense to compare individuals based on their domains of high and low discretion, rather than using more traditional job classifications (e.g. list of duties, number of subordinates, number of levels from the top). For example, if two workers in different industries with different work content and job titles both have patterns of discretion comparable to that of the supervisory discretion profile, they may still be usefully compared on that basis. Their discretion profiles provide a way to describe their work that reveals similarities that might otherwise be missed in the details of their jobs. Discretion profiles might also facilitate better descriptions of research efforts. For example, OCB research, which is currently experiencing internal disagreement about the definition of citizenship (Becton and Field, 2009; McAllister et al., 2007; Snape and Redman, 2010), might usefully be reframed as studying the antecedents and consequences of staff discretion at work. Defined in this way, the OCB project would avoid many problems it is currently facing, such as the differences in OCB perception by hierarchical level (Huang et al., 2010; Podsakoff et al., 2000).

## **CONCLUSION**

Discretion is a fundamental element of life in organizations. It is a universal human need, and an inevitable consequence of interdependent activity. As such, it is not surprising that discretion has been shown to influence most of the key outcomes with which organization studies are concerned. However, despite its ubiquity and importance, there is as yet no mature theory of discretion in organizations. This paper offers a first step towards such a theory, by integrating previous findings to reveal that discretion encompasses eight distinct domains. Delineating this typology can contribute to better interpretation of previous findings, as well as greater precision in future studies. It also highlights the circumplex structure of discretion in organizations, and the fundamental discretion profiles by which work may be described. In these ways, the typology developed here contributes towards a mature theory of discretion. It begins the work of reaching construct clarity, which is the foundation of strong theory and insight.

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## APPENDIX 1: EXISTING MEASURES OF DISCRETION

Source	Construct	Measurement
Barnett and Brennan (1995)	Schedule control (self-report)	Being able to set your own work schedule Having hours that fit your needs Your job being flexible enough that you can respond to non-work situations
Breaugh (1985)	Work scheduling autonomy (self-report)	I have control over the scheduling of my work I have some control over the sequencing of my work activities (when I do what) My job is such that I can decide when to do particular work activities
Breaugh (1985)	Work criteria autonomy (self-report)	My job allows me to modify the normal way we are evaluated so that I can emphasize some aspects of my job and play down others I am able to modify what my job objectives are (what I am supposed to accomplish) I have some control over what I am supposed to accomplish (what my supervisor sees as my job objectives)
Breaugh (1985)	Work method autonomy (self-report)	I am allowed to decide how to go about getting my job done (the methods to use) I am able to choose the way to go about my job (the procedures to utilize) I am free to choose the method(s) to use in carrying out my work
Campion (1988)	Autonomy and participation (self-report)	Note: 2 items in 18-item scale of job's motivational characteristics A: The job allows freedom, independence, or discretion in work scheduling, sequence, methods, procedures, quality control, or other decision making P: The job allows participation in work-related decision making
Carpenter and Golden (1997)	Perceived managerial discretion (self-report)	Degree of discretion over 15 simulation-specific organizational issues
Dickson (1985)	Discretion over client (self-report)	Rating of influence over . . . Making valuation statements to clients Speed of response to requests from clients Type and number of services to offer a client The fee to charge a client Exclusive jurisdiction over client accounts
Dobbin and Boychuk (1999)	Job autonomy (trained coder rating of incumbent description)	Extent of involvement in designing/planning final output and/or importance of non-routine problem-solving in work
Dwyer and Ganster (1991)	General control (self-report)	How much control do you have over the variety of methods you use in completing your work? How much can you choose among a variety of tasks or projects to do? How much control do you personally have over the quality of your work? How much can you generally predict the amount of work you will have to do on any given day? How much control do you personally have over how much work you get done? How much control do you have over how quickly or slowly you have to work? How much control do you have over the scheduling and duration of your rest breaks? How much control do you have over when you come to work and leave?

Source	Construct	Measurement
		<p>How much control do you have over when you take vacations or days off?</p> <p>How much are you able to predict what the results of decisions you make on the job will be?</p> <p>How much are you able to decorate, rearrange, or personalize your work area?</p> <p>How much can you control the physical conditions of your work station (lighting, temperature)?</p> <p>How much control do you have over how you do your work?</p> <p>How much can you control when and how much you interact with others at work?</p> <p>How much influence do you have over the policies and procedures in your work unit?</p> <p>How much control do you have over the sources of information you need to do your job?</p> <p>How much are things that affect you at work predictable, even if you can't directly control them?</p> <p>How much control do you have over the amount of resources (tools, material) you get?</p> <p>How much can you control the number of times you are interrupted while at work?</p> <p>How much control do you have over the amount you earn at your job?</p> <p>How much control do you have over how your work is evaluated?</p> <p>In general, how much overall control do you have over work and work-related matters?</p>
Farh et al. (1997)	Altruism towards colleagues (manager rating of subordinate)	<p>Willing to assist new colleagues to adjust to the work environment</p> <p>Willing to help colleagues solve work-related problems</p> <p>Willing to cover work assignments for colleagues when needed</p> <p>Willing to coordinate and communicate with colleagues</p>
Farh et al. (1997)	Conscientiousness (manager rating of subordinate)	<p>Complies with company rules and procedures even when nobody watches and no evidence can be traced</p> <p>Takes one's job seriously and rarely makes mistakes</p> <p>Does not mind taking on new or challenging assignments</p> <p>Tries hard to self-study to increase the quality of work outputs</p> <p>Often arrives early and starts to work immediately</p>
Farh et al. (1997)	Interpersonal harmony (manager rating of subordinate)	<p>~ Uses illicit tactics to seek personal influence and gain with harmful effect on interpersonal harmony in the organization</p> <p>~ Uses position power to pursue selfish personal gain</p> <p>~ Takes credits, avoids blames, and fights fiercely for personal gain</p> <p>~ Often speaks ill of the supervisor or colleagues behind their backs</p>
Farh et al. (1997)	Identification with the company (manager rating of subordinate)	<p>Willing to stand up to protect the reputation of the company</p> <p>Eager to tell outsiders good news about the company and clarify their misunderstandings</p> <p>Makes constructive suggestions that can improve operation of the company</p> <p>Actively attends company meetings</p>
Farh et al. (1997)	Protecting company resources (manager rating of subordinate)	<p>~ Conducts personal business on company time (e.g., trading stocks, shopping, going to barber shops)</p> <p>~ Uses company resources to do personal business (e.g., company phones, copy machines, computers, and cars)</p> <p>~ Views sick leave as a benefit and makes excuse for taking sick leave</p>
Finkelstein and Boyd (1998)	Managerial discretion (firm-level archival data)	<p>Market growth</p> <p>R&amp;D intensity</p> <p>Advertising intensity</p>

Source	Construct	Measurement
		~ Capital intensity Industry concentration ~ Regulation
Hackman and Lawler (1971)	Autonomy (self-report)	How much are you left on your own to do your own work? The opportunity for independent thought and action The freedom to do pretty much what I want on my job
Hambrick and Abrahamson (1995)	Environmental discretion (expert analysis)	Overall degree to which top managers in each industry have executive discretion, or 'latitude of action'
Karasek (1990)	Decision latitude (self-report)	High skill level required Required to learn new things Non-repetitious work Requires creativity Freedom as to how to work Allows a lot of decisions Assist in one's own decision Have say over what happens
Karasek (1990)	Task control or decision latitude (self-report)	Level of control over: Variety in work Decisions on planning and conduct of daily work Future possibilities for skill development
Karasek et al. (1985); Landsbergis (1988)	Decision latitude (self-report)	My job requires that I learn new things ~ My job involves a lot of repetitive work My job requires me to be creative My job allows me to make a lot of decisions on my own My job requires a high level of skill ~ On my job, I have very little freedom to decide how I work I get to do a variety of different things on my job I have a lot of say about what happens on my job I have an opportunity to develop my own special abilities
Langfred (2000)	Autonomy (self-report)	Control over pace of work Authority in determining tasks to be performed ~ Number of written rules and procedures pertaining to job Authority in determining rules and procedures for own work
Moorman and Blakely (1995)	Loyal boosterism (self-report)	Defends the organization when other employees criticize it Encourages friends and family to utilize organization products Defends the organization when outsiders criticize it Shows pride when representing the organization in public Actively promotes the organization's products and services to potential users
Moorman and Blakely (1995)	Individual initiative (self-report)	For issues that may have serious consequences, expresses opinions honestly even when others may disagree Often motivates others to express their ideas and opinions Encourages others to try new and more effective ways of doing their job Encourages hesitant or quiet co-workers to voice their opinions when they otherwise might not speak up Frequently communicates to co-workers suggestions on how the group can improve
Moorman and Blakely (1995)	Interpersonal helping (self-report)	Goes out of his/her way to help co-workers with work-related problems Voluntarily helps new employees settle into the job



Source	Construct	Measurement
Morgeson et al. (2005)	Job autonomy (self-report)	Frequently adjusts his/her work schedule to accommodate other employees' requests for time off
		Always goes out of the way to make newer employees feel welcome in the work group
		Shows genuine concern and courtesy towards co-workers, even under the most trying business or personal situations
		I have significant autonomy in determining how I do my job I can decide on my own how to go about doing my work
Morgeson et al. (2005)	Work scheduling autonomy (self-report)	I have considerable opportunity for independence and freedom in how I do my job
		The job allows me to make my own decisions about how to schedule my work
		The job allows me to decide on the order in which things are done on the job
Morgeson et al. (2005)	Decision making autonomy (self-report)	The job allows me to plan how I do my work
		The job gives me a chance to use my personal initiative or judgment in carrying out the work
		The job allows me to make a lot of decisions on my own
Morgeson et al. (2005)	Work methods autonomy (self-report)	The job provides me with significant autonomy in making decisions
		The job allows me to make decisions about what methods I use to complete my work
		The job gives me considerable opportunity for independence and freedom in how I do the work
		The job allows me to decide on my own how to go about my work
Morrison and Phelps (1999)	Taking charge (co-worker report)	This person often . . . .
		Tries to adopt improved procedures for doing his or her job
		Tries to change how his or her job is executed in order to be more effective
		Tries to bring about improved procedures for the work unit or department
		Tries to institute new work methods that are more effective for the company
		Tries to change organizational rules or policies that are non-productive or counterproductive
		Makes constructive suggestions for improving how things operate within the organization
		Tries to correct a faulty procedure or practice
		Tries to eliminate redundant or unnecessary procedures
		Tries to implement solutions to pressing organizational problems
Parker et al. (2006)	Job autonomy (self-report)	Tries to introduce new structures, technologies, or approaches to improve efficiency
		Help to decide how much work your team will do
		Help to allocate jobs among team members
		Get involved in the selection of new team members
		Arrange cover for people
		Get involved in improvement teams
		Help to monitor your team's overall performance
		Train other people
		Get involved in the discipline of other team members
		Help to manage the budget for your team
Podsakoff and MacKenzie (1994)	Helping (manager rating of subordinate)	Willingly gives of his or her time to help other agents who have work-related problems
		Is willing to take time out of his or her own busy schedule to help with recruiting or training new agents
		'Touches base' with others before initiating actions that might affect them
		Takes steps to try to prevent problems with other agents and/or other personnel in the agency

Source	Construct	Measurement
Podsakoff and MacKenzie (1994)	Civic virtue (manager rating of subordinate)	Encourages other agents when they are down Acts as a 'peacemaker' when others in the agency have disagreements Is a stabilizing influence in the agency when dissension occurs Attends functions that are not required but help the agency/company image Attends training/information sessions that agents are encouraged but not required to attend Attends and actively participates in agency meetings
Podsakoff and MacKenzie (1994)	Sportsmanship (manager rating of subordinate)	~ Consumes a lot of time complaining about trivial matters ~ Always finds fault with what the agency/company is doing ~ Tends to make 'mountains out of molehills' (makes problems bigger than they are) ~ Always focuses on what is wrong with his or her situation rather than the positive side of it
Podsakoff et al. (1990)	Civic virtue (immediate supervisor report)	Attends meetings that are not mandatory, but are considered important Attends functions that are not required but help the company image Keeps abreast of changes in the organization Reads and keeps up with organization announcements, memos, and so on
Podsakoff et al. (1990)	Sportsmanship (immediate supervisor report)	~ Consumes a lot of time complaining about trivial matters ~ Always focuses on what's wrong, rather than the positive side ~ Tends to make 'mountains out of molehills' ~ Always finds fault with what the organization is doing ~ Is the classic 'squeaky wheel' that always needs greasing
Podsakoff et al. (1990)	Altruism (immediate supervisor report)	Helps others who have been absent Helps others who have heavy workloads Helps orient new people even though it is not required Willingly helps others who have work related problems Is always ready to lend a helping hand to those around him/her
Podsakoff et al. (1990)	Courtesy (immediate supervisor report)	Takes steps to prevent problems with other workers Is mindful of how his/her behaviour affects other people's jobs Does not abuse the rights of others Tries to avoid creating problems for co-workers Considers the impact of his/her actions on co-workers
Podsakoff et al. (1990)	Conscientiousness (immediate supervisor report)	Attendance at work is above the norm Does not take extra breaks Obeys company rules and regulations even when no one is watching Is one of my most conscientious employees Believes in giving an honest day's work for an honest day's pay
Semmer (1984) reported in Frese et al. (1996)	Control at work (self-report)	If you look at your job as a whole: How many decisions does it allow you to make? Can you determine how you do your work? Can you plan and arrange your work on your own (e.g., calculate which material/tools you need)? How much can you participate in decisions of your superior (e.g., the superior asks you for your opinion and asks for suggestions)?
Sims et al. (1976)	Autonomy (self-report)	How much are you left on your own to do your own work? To what extent are you able to do your job independently of others? ~ To what extent do you complete work that has been started by another employee? The freedom to do pretty much what I want on my job The opportunity for independent thought and action

Source	Construct	Measurement
Smith et al. (1983)	Generalized compliance (self-report)	Punctuality ~ Takes undeserved breaks Attendance at work is above the norm Gives advance notice if unable to come to work ~ Great deal of time spent with personal phone conversations Does not take unnecessary time off work Does not take extra breaks Does not spend time in idle conversation
Smith et al. (1983)	Altruism (self-report)	Helps others who have been absent Volunteers for things that are not required Orients new people even though it is not required Helps others who have heavy work loads Assists supervisor with his or her work Makes innovative suggestions to improve department
Spreitzer (1995)	Self-determination (self-report)	I have significant autonomy in determining how I do my job I can decide on my own how to go about doing my work I have considerable opportunity for independence and freedom in how I do my job
Tetrick and LaRocco (1987)	Control (self-report)	Have influence over the things that affect you on the job Have input in deciding what tasks or parts of tasks you will do Have the opportunity to take part in making job-related decisions that affect you Set your own work deadlines Job allows you the opportunity for independent thought and action Control the pace and scheduling of your work
Wall et al. (1995)	Timing control (self-report)	Decide on the order in which you do things Decide when to start a piece of work Decide when to finish a piece of work Set your own pace of work
Wall et al. (1995)	Method control (self-report)	Control how much you produce Vary how you do your work Plan your own work Control the quality of what you produce Decide how to go about getting your job done Choose the methods to use in carrying out your work

*Note:* ~ indicates reverse-scored item.

## APPENDIX 2: SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW INFORMANTS

Each informant's work and title is summarized in the terms used by that informant.

First round (14 mentioning managerial or supervisory tasks)

1. Internet Business Owner: Maggie, co-owner and operator of website providing interactive, live content to clients
2. Cleaning Business Owner: Neal Smither, president and owner of Crime Scene Cleaners
3. Food Business Owner: David Eng, co-owner and operator of Fong On Tofu Factory
4. Casting Business Owner: Lisa Pirriolli, owner of business providing auditions and casts for movies

5. Web Content CEO: Jaime Levy, chief executive officer of Electronic Hollywood
6. Insurance CEO: Robert Devlin, chairman and chief executive officer of American General Corporation
7. Film Producer: Jerry Bruckheimer
8. Town Manager: Jennifer Daily, town manager of Cumberland, IN
9. Air Force General: Patrick Kenneth Gamble, commander of Pacific Air Forces in the United States Air Force
10. Political Fund Manager: Tom, regional finance director for unnamed presidential candidate's campaign
11. HR Director: Sandy Wilkens, director of human resources for unnamed slaughterhouse plant
12. Construction Foreman: Scott Nichols, foreman of residential home construction company
13. Telemarketing Supervisor: Jason Groth, trainer and supervisor at Dial-America Marketing, Inc.
14. Basketball Coach: James R., head varsity basketball coach of unnamed Catholic high school in Pennsylvania

#### Second round (9 randomly selected individuals)

1. Waitress: Jessica Seaver, waitress at Tejas restaurant in Minneapolis, MN
2. Pretzel Vendor: Isabelle Quinones, former employee of firm selling Pennsylvania Mennonite pretzels
3. A&R Executive: 'Bumblebee', anonymous Artists & Repertoire agent at unnamed 'major' record company
4. Film Development Assistant: Jerrold Thomas, assistant to unnamed director of 'huge movies you've heard of and seen'.
5. Commercial Fisherman: Ian Bruce, licensed fisherman in Kodiak, AK
6. Workfare Street Cleaner: Sandra White, welfare-based Work Experience Program employee in New York, NY
7. UPS Driver: William Rosario, full-time driver for United Parcel Service of America in northern New Jersey
8. Clutter Consultant: Michelle Passoff, sole proprietor consultant and professional speaker assisting clients with clutter
9. Saleswoman: Nicole Norton, sales assistant at Hallmark gift shop in Knoxville, TN

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