

The Impact of Management Work Habits on Public Sector Performance: A Study of Local Government Managers

By Jonathan P. West, PhD, and Evan M. Berman, PhD

This study finds that hands-on strategies of working with individual managers are effective in identifying, addressing and overcoming bad management work habits. Up to now, very little has been known about the work habits of public sector managers and their impact on perceptions of organizational performance. Based on a national survey of senior managers in city governments with populations over 50,000, this study finds that while productive work habits are widely present, bad management work habits are also significantly present. The latter most commonly involve managers being overly passive, judgmental, defensive, intimidating, closed-minded or tardy in their performance. Bad (or, unproductive) management work habits significantly 1) offset performance gains from good (or, productive) management work habits, and 2) are a highly significant barrier to cultivating good work habits. Raising awareness of managers' bad habits is an essential step in addressing them. Managers' work habits are significantly associated with perceptions of organizational productivity, and addressing bad management work habits is therefore a significant pathway to higher performance.

An understudied subject in public administration is the nature and extent of managerial work habits. Many, if not most managers, display productive, professional work habits, such as being committed to working efficiently, acting with civility towards others and showing proper commitment to ethics. But it is anecdotally observed that some managers have unproductive work habits, too; they might frequently be tardy, arrogant or closed-minded.¹ Indeed, many organizations have at least a few managers with such exceedingly bad work habits.² Also, most managers, as all people, have behaviors that can benefit from improvement. The consequences of bad management work habits can be significant, such as causing problems in dealing with stakeholders, becoming obstacles in adopting and implementing modern performance management work practices, and otherwise affecting the leadership of organizations.³

The study examines the following questions: What is the nature and extent of work habits among managers? How do management work habits, both good and bad, affect perceptions of organizational performance? What is the impact of bad work habits on the presence of modern, professional work habits? What strategies do senior managers use to address the unproductive work habits of subordinate managers and supervisors, and how effective are these strategies? This study addresses these questions through the perceptions of senior managers about the work habits of managers and supervisors that report to them. It is based on an extensive mail survey among chief administrative officers in cities with populations over 50,000, as well as in-depth interviews among a sample of respondents. The combination of quantitative and qualitative methods enriches understanding of the study topic, management work habits, and of efforts to deal with them.

This research contributes to the literature and our knowledge in several ways. First, while classic authors like Mary Parker Follett, Max Weber and Frederick Winslow Taylor all note the importance of productive supervisory practices, systematic analysis of such practices in contemporary government is lacking. For example, while studies in the 1970s and 1980s, such as Stinson and Mueller⁴ discuss behaviors associated with managerial professionalism (e.g. reading professional journals, attending conferences), these behaviors are insufficiently linked to this study's specific concern about bad work habits and organizational performance. Second, whereas studies of modern performance often discuss specific management strategies,⁵ including implementation strategies⁶ and various conditions affecting adoption and diffusion,⁷ this article studies certain behaviors of the protagonists themselves, managers, and their impact on performance, thus adding to our knowledge of factors affecting performance of modern public organizations. Third, this study contributes to recent discussions of informal approaches for managing workplace relations, such as through psychological contracts.⁸

This study has limitations. First, our study necessarily relies on subjective, perceived assessments of managers' orientations and behaviors, as no objective data exist of managers' orientations and behaviors such as based on administrative records. While research practices such as triangulation are used to further the validity of these perceptions, it is clear that all subjective data are subject to some imperfections; the possibility of some respondent bias and faulty observation by respondents cannot be ruled out. Second, while senior managers are in a good position to assess the work habits of those managers and supervisors that report to them, other stakeholders such as their employees may have different perceptions about these subordinate managers' work habits. Third, while we take a broad look at management work habits, no study can be exhaustive of all possible work habits. This study acknowledges these limitations and imperfections of the data and the study scope.

Framework

In this study, the phrase "work habits" is defined as customary ways individuals behave when engaged in work. Managerial work habits involve customary behaviors, such as

typically showing concern for others, setting high standards or demonstrating initiative. Customary behaviors occur typically, though not necessarily each time. While this definition of 'work habit' follows common usage, work habits are in fact better described as 'habitudes' than as habits. Habitudes are repetitive, typical or usual patterns, whereas habits are defined as deeply ingrained behaviors or practices that are often done without much conscious thought. Work habits include the latter, as well as behaviors that involve a good deal of conscious thought, such as being committed to a strong sense of ethics, and the reasons for that. Despite this, the phrase 'work habit' rather than 'work habitude' has become the prevailing, common usage, and it is thus used here.⁹

Habits serve important functional purposes; they are relatively efficient ways of dealing with work and other aspects of life. By devoting relatively little attention to most habits, people are able to save time, conserve cognitive resources and focus more of their efforts on other matters or situations, such as those that require some immediate or unfamiliar response.¹⁰ The lack of full consciousness about habits is usually justified in so far as they lead to repeatedly satisfactory outcomes, requiring only modest awareness of situational applications. Work habits typically also involve accompanying mindsets, which are characteristic outlooks and ways of interpreting situations. Many authors focus on the mindset (or, attitude)-behavior relationship;¹¹ mindsets affect characteristic behaviors *ex ante* ("when this happens, then always/never do that..."), as well as *ex post facto* ("I justify my actions like this..."). People vary in their consciousness of accompanying mindsets, and managers are sometimes unconscious of them ("I just usually do things this way; I can't tell you why..."). This may occur when they have forgotten initial thoughts associated with well-established and long-existing work habits. Consistent with the above definition of work habits, and emphasizing the empirical orientation of this manuscript, this article focuses on the behavioral manifestations of managerial work habits, while acknowledging accompanying, cognitive mindsets.¹²

The terms "good" and "bad" that are used in connection with work habits are commonly applied with regard to the balance of consequences or outcomes for work. The literature on performance management is quite clear about which work habits are believed to further modern performance activities, and those which are believed to be detrimental. Being regularly or typically aggressive or intimidating with others is generally regarded as a (very) bad work habit, as it hinders the ability to get along and thus achieve work goals. While interpersonal forcefulness can occasionally be productive, it is certainly not productive on a regular basis.¹³ Being pro-active, setting high standards, being flexible, finding ways of getting along well with others, being committed to a strong sense of ethics and having good communication skills are generally regarded as furthering high performance.¹⁴ Being passive, indecisive, closed-minded, sloppy, tardy or intimidating are among habits frequently associated with low performance.¹⁵ Indeed, such bad habits can become the Achilles' heels of organizations.¹⁶ While the above lists are not exhaustive, they are frequently mentioned in numerous articles concerning both public and private organizations.¹⁷

Good and bad habits are typically not mutually exclusive; the absence of a bad habit does not imply the presence of a good habit. For example, the absence of customarily being passive (a bad habit) does not imply the presence of a good habit such as being pro-active. Good habits and bad habits stand apart, and may affect each other. Generally, the relationship between good work habits and bad work habits is assumed to be a negative one. For example, being customarily proactive (a good habit) makes it less likely that someone is routinely tardy (a bad habit), as being proactive usually means that one is concerned about things that lie ahead, including work that is due, and barriers that might affect it. A general mindset about professional management practices may favor good habits and actively work against bad habits, broadly. A very important implication, sometimes overlooked by practitioners and scholars alike, is that getting managers to adopt good work habits may require them to arrest or reduce pertinent bad work habits, too. Knowledge and positive intent to adopt good work habits may not be enough for implementing management reforms. For example, seminars and training activities touting the virtues and promoting development of good management habits are likely to be only partially successful at best in the absence of also addressing management bad habits.¹⁸

In this study, good managerial work habits are assumed to further organizational performance, and bad work managerial habits are assumed to reduce organizational performance. As the saying goes, one rotten apple spoils the barrel. It takes only a few managers with a few unproductive work habits such as being overly passive to reduce their department's performance by lowering expectations, making it harder for top managers to implement jurisdiction-wide reforms, and creating a variety of problems that require top management attention. Anecdotally, some managers are described as 'killers' of management reform.¹⁹ By contrast, studies of high performance suggest that many managers in such settings have a broad range of productive orientations and behaviors. They may vary in these, but they need to have enough of them (e.g., being pro-active, having good communication skills, taking a stand on ethical issues) to deal effectively with the various technical, human, networking and leadership aspects of the managerial job. From this also follows another important implication, namely, that standards for evaluating good and bad work habits differ. Organizations need to evaluate good management habits by their abundance, and bad habits by their near absence.

There is ample basis in the literature to suspect that reducing or eliminating bad work habits is often a difficult task. First, many bad habits involve beneficial outcomes of a personal nature; for example, tardiness as a habit allows people to reduce stress, and intimidation allows people to control others. Eliminating bad habits implies finding other ways of dealing with these human challenges of stress and control. People may need help in devising new adaptive strategies and dealing with unfavorable underlying conditions.²⁰ Second, a key feature of all habits is that they do not require much thought. People may be largely unaware or in denial about their bad habits, or at least challenge the need for any course that diminishes the personal benefits that they derive from them.²¹ Indeed, a management process of changing bad work habits is well-established in the psychological literature and builds upon the work of Lewin,²²

often involving four specific steps, such as, uncovering, redefining, learning, and relearning to produce change in work habits;²³ the first step involves awareness or realization made by a manager that their bad work habits are problematic. Berman²⁴ uses the phrase “rule of three” to suggest that people often need to hear information several times before they take it seriously.

The above factors help explain why relinquishing bad habits is often a difficult process that typically requires persistence, practice and, hence, considerable time.²⁵ Processes of changing work habits are also furthered by organizational policies. For example, organizations can include manifest behaviors as criteria in performance appraisals of managers and promotion decisions. They can reward managers for productive orientations and behaviors, and punish others for unproductive ones. Organizations can also institute training programs that stress good work habits and identify and correct those that are bad or unproductive. Formalizing mentor programs and supporting on-the-job coaching can help managers to identify habit-based work practices that are positive or problematic, leading to tailored feedback, realistic goal setting, and appropriate action steps for improved performance. The literature on leadership, productivity, organizational change, learning theory, and staff development suggests these strategies have been used successfully.²⁶

Methods

During 2006, a mail survey of city managers and chief administrative officers (CAOs) was undertaken in all 653 U.S. cities with populations over 50,000,²⁷ which was followed-up by in-depth, telephone interviews with selected respondents in Spring and Summer 2006. The extensive mail survey, which has over 275 items, involved a pilot survey and three rounds of mailings that resulted in a final sample of 212 completed responses. As discussed below, we examined for possible problems of sample bias and non-response, but find these to be very minor and of little material import. The response rate of 32.5% is consistent with that reported elsewhere.²⁸ Regarding the sample, 55.5% of surveys were completed by the addressee (City Manager or Chief Administrative Officer, as appropriate), and, of the remainder, about half were completed by an assistant city manager. Almost all of the remaining were completed by respondents with such titles as city clerk, director of human resources, director of administrative services, or chief of staff. The respondent sample is referred to as “senior managers,” reflecting this diversity of positions. On average, respondents indicated that they have worked 22.5 years in government, and have spent 11.7 years within their present jurisdiction. 89.7% of respondents stated that they were very familiar or familiar with the performance of managers in their jurisdiction. This sample consisted of senior, informed leaders.

Among the respondents, 53.8% report that their highest degree was in public administration, the remainder reported business administration, political science, law, engineering, urban planning and other fields. Of the respondents, 70.1% of respondents have an MA degree, and 69.3% are male. 19.6% are younger than 45 years old, 37.8% are between the ages of 45 and 54, and 42.6% are older than 54. The sample

is broadly representative of the population of cities.²⁹ In the sample, 69.7% of respondents are from cities with populations between 50,000 and 99,999, 19.0% of the respondents are from cities between 100,000 and 249,999, and the remainder, 10.9% are from cities with populations of 250,000 and more. Of the population of cities, 62.2% had populations between 50,000 and 99,999, 27.4% had populations between 100,000 and 249,999, and 10.4% had populations of 250,000 and more. In the sample, 75.4% of these respondents are in cities that have a city-manager form of government, compared to 62.5% of cities in the population. In the subsequent analysis, we examine the impact of such minor differences in city size and form of government, but conclude that these do not materially affect study findings.

Measurement validity is furthered in the following ways. First, the survey assesses behaviors and communications of subordinate managers and supervisors that directly report to respondents. Such respondents are likely to be well informed regarding the behaviors and communications of these direct subordinates as a function of respondents' responsibilities.³⁰ Second, the survey items address empirically observable phenomena such as behaviors and communications, rather than mindsets of subordinates which cannot be directly or even accurately observed. This survey avoids, for the most part, using the term 'habit' which, for some, may also have judgmental connotations. However, the term "work habit" is used in the context of addressing work orientations and behaviors where doing so in the survey produces little ambiguity (see Table 3) and where it is a more efficient way of expressing this phrase.³¹ The research (and, hence survey questions) direct respondents to assess habits within the body of managers and supervisors that report to them, rather than individual managers.

The possibility of sample bias is examined by comparing the responses of addressees (city managers and CAOs) with those of other respondents. While a few such differences exist, they are relatively minor and do not significantly affect our results reported here. We also compared the responses of those working more versus fewer years in their present jurisdictions, and further assessed whether relevant personal orientations might be associated with different perceptions of habits, but find no such relationships. For example, respondents who express a strong work ethic for themselves (e.g., "I like a busy schedule" or "I feel guilty when I take a break from work") are not associated with perceptions of bad habits among managers reporting to them (both $p > .05$). We also conducted more than a dozen in-depth interviews (approximately one hour each) among managers in responding jurisdictions, including those who indicate very high or low prevalence of bad habits. This helped to validate mail survey responses. Finally, to examine non-response bias, we completed a phone survey among a random sample of non-respondents of the mail survey ($n=41$). Comparing these responses to those of respondents of the mail survey, we find no statistically significant difference between respondents and non-respondents to the mail survey.³² We also examined differences between early and late responders, but find no significant differences between these groups of respondents.

Results

Management Work Habits

Tables 1 and 2 shows perceptions of, respectively, good and bad management work habits. Table 1 shows the prevalence of productive (or, good) work habits. Among respondents, 88.6% agree or strongly agree that managers and supervisors who report directly to them regularly demonstrate civility, courtesy and decency.³³ Respondents also agree or strongly agree that they take a stand where issues of ethics are at stake (86.9%), safeguard confidential information (86.9%), show concern for the personal well being of team members (85.7%), refuse to comply with unethical requests (82.9%), consider the rights of others in making decisions (80.0%), and set high standards for themselves (77.0%). Clearly, most senior managers note many good management work habits in their subordinate managers and supervisors.³⁴ Perhaps it is not so surprising that many respondents have favorable assessments, as these habits are de facto requirements of many managers' jobs. About half of the respondents note

Table 1: Managers' Good Work Habits

<i>"Managers and supervisors who report directly to me regularly..."</i>	Agree or Strongly Agree	Association with Bad Habits
<i>A. Work Productivity</i>		
work efficiently in getting the job done	76.6	-.381**
set high standards for themselves	77.0	-.290**
demonstrate proper motivation at work	71.7	-.213**
show initiative and are pro-active in decision-making	68.5	-.348**
are flexible and quick to adapt	55.6	-.303**
<i>Index</i>	68.0	-.392**
<i>B. Work Collaboration & People Relations</i>		
demonstrate civility, courtesy and decency	88.6	-.211**
show concern for the personal well being of team members	85.7	-.239**
demonstrate a caring attitude toward others	79.8	-.231**
contribute their "fair share" on collaborative tasks	74.3	-.298**
work effectively with other managers and supervisors	74.7	-.371**
seek the input of those affected by decisions	69.1	-.266**
listen to others' views before making any judgments	55.4	-.174**
<i>Index</i>	83.0	-.345**
<i>C. Ethics</i>		
take a stand where issues of ethics are at stake	86.9	-.178**
safeguard confidential information	86.9	-.295**
refuse to comply with unethical requests	82.9	-.196**
consider the rights of others in making decisions	80.0	-.267**
avoid conflicts of interest	79.5	-.236**
<i>Index</i>	87.4	-.294**

Cronbach alpha scores of index variables are 0.80 (work productivity), 0.86 (work collaboration & people relations), 0.74 (ethics). The aggregate index has alpha = 0.80

Agree or Strongly Agree for index variables defined as scores between 1.0 and 2

that subordinate managers are flexible and quick to adapt (55.6%) and listen to others views before making judgments (55.4%).

Table 2 shows perceptions of bad work habits among subordinate managers and supervisors. Table 2 shows that, among bad work habits, most common is being overly judgmental of the shortcomings of others (39.1% of respondents who strongly agree, agree or somewhat agree that at least one manager reporting to the respondent has this work habit), overly aggressive and intimidating to others (33.3%), being passive and unwilling to take needed actions (33.3%), and being defensive and unable to take

Table 2: Managers’ Bad Work Habits

<i>Among managers and supervisors who report directly to me, there are one or more who regularly are....”</i>	Agree¹	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree²	DK
<i>A. Work Passivity</i>					
passive and unwilling to take needed action	10.9	22.4	13.2	49.4	4.0
unable to complete work on time	6.9	14.9	19.0	56.3	2.9
repeatedly late for work or meetings	6.4	11.0	13.9	65.3	3.5
indecisive and unwilling to take a stand	5.2	13.8	20.1	58.6	2.3
<i>B. Collaboration</i>					
overly judgmental of the shortcoming of others	19.0	20.1	16.1	40.3	4.6
overly aggressive and intimidating to others	14.4	19.0	17.8	46.5	2.3
willing to blame their failures on others	8.0	9.8	21.8	55.7	4.6
willing to claim credit for the accomplishments of others	9.2	12.1	16.1	60.3	2.3
distrustful of the motives of other team members	4.7	18.0	12.2	61.0	4.1
a source of unnecessary conflict with team members	5.2	9.2	16.2	68.2	1.2
unwilling to compromise with others	2.3	7.5	25.4	62.4	2.3
<i>C. Ideas and Information</i>					
defensive and unable to accept criticism	9.8	17.8	21.3	48.3	2.9
closed to new ways of doing things	3.4	15.5	19.5	59.8	1.7
prone to make hasty decisions without due deliberation	3.4	10.3	26.4	56.9	2.9
unwilling or unable to listen attentively	2.9	9.2	19.5	67.8	0.6
<i>D. Self-management</i>					
perform their job well some days but poorly on other days	4.6	10.9	23.0	56.3	5.2
unable to keep promises	2.9	6.9	16.1	69.5	4.6
unable to control his/her temper	2.3	8.6	14.9	70.3	2.9
knowingly make unreasonable demands	1.7	4.6	14.9	75.3	3.5
does not recognize the impact of their feelings on their actions	1.1	3.9	33.7	55.1	6.2

- 1) Includes Strongly Agree and Agree
 2) Includes Somewhat Disagree, Disagree and Strongly Disagree

Cronbach alpha scores of index variables are 0.79 (work passivity), 0.87 (work collaboration & people relations), 0.79 (ideas and information) and 0.65 (self-management). The aggregate index has alpha = 0.90

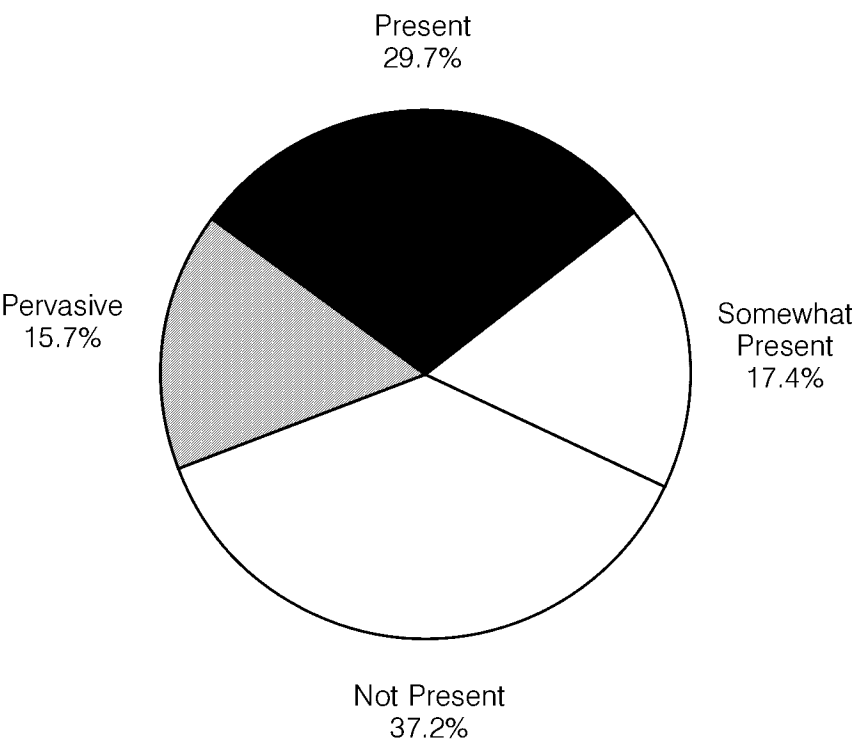
criticism (27.6%). Other bad work habits include not being able to complete work on time (21.8%), being distrustful of the motives of team members (22.7%) and claiming credit for the accomplishments of others (21.3%). The items shown in Table 2 are grouped into four categories: work habits that reflect work passivity, concern problems of self-management, as well as those that impede collaboration, and hamper acceptance of new ideas and decision-making. Somewhat fewer respondents report problems of self-management such as inconsistent performance on different days (15.5%) and managers being unable to control their temper (10.9%).³⁵

Table 1 also shows associations with bad work habits, discussed in the above Table. It is important to note that the good habits in Table 1 are worded quite differently from the bad work habits in Table 2. Then, Table 1 shows that each of the good habits is statistically negatively associated with the index of bad work habits (the alpha value of this index is 0.90, shown in Table 2). Beyond this, further analysis also shows that the following bad work habits are most strongly, negatively associated with the index of good work habits: managers do not recognize the impact of their feelings on their actions ($\tau\text{-}c = -.408$, $p < .01$), managers are closed to new ways of doing things ($\tau\text{-}c = -.454$, $p < .01$), and managers are willing to blame their failures on others ($\tau\text{-}c = -.416$, $p < .01$).³⁶ The strong negative association between good work habits and bad work habits suggests that they may crowd each other out; the presence of bad work habits can be a barrier to developing good work habits, and the presence of good work habits presupposes the absence or very limited existence of bad work habits. The matter of causality is taken up in the next section.

Also, while the prevalence of any specific bad management work habits in Table 2 is not very high (especially among those who agree or strongly agree), further analysis shows that many managers are likely to experience one or more of these. Figure 1 shows that, among respondents, 15.7% agree or strongly agree that three or more bad habits are present (such jurisdictions are labeled “pervasive”), 29.7% of respondents agree or strongly agree that one or two bad work habits are present, or ‘somewhat’ agree that five or more bad work habits are present (labeled “present”), and 17.4% of respondents somewhat agree that two, three or four bad habits are present (labeled “somewhat present”). While the cut-off points of these categories are somewhat debatable and subject to what-if analysis, it should be noted that about two-thirds of respondents at least somewhat agree that two or more bad habits are present.³⁷ While cities vary greatly in the bad work habits of managers, *about 45% of respondents report that one or more bad management work habits are present*. The same items that were mentioned earlier as being most prevalent are also most prevalent among cities labeled as “pervasive” or “present” regarding bad managerial work habits.

Finally, the presence of work habits, good or bad, does not vary significantly by city size, form of government or region (respectively, $F = 2.84, 3.76, 3.86$, all $p > .05$).³⁸ However, using the above classification, we find that cities with populations between 100,000 and 249,999 have a somewhat lower prevalence of bad management habits, according to respondents. For example, in such cities 54.8% are classified as not having bad management work habits, compared with 34.7% of those with populations less than 100,000, and 21.1% of those with populations over 250,000. Perceptions of bad

Figure 1: Bad Work Habits Among Managers



management work habits are not associated with respondents' age, gender or highest attained degree (respectively, $F = 0.40, 2.94, \text{ and } 1.21$, all $p > .05$), nor are they associated with whether the survey was completed by the addressee or someone else ($t = -0.25, p > .05$). Perceptions of good habits also are not associated with whether the survey was completed by the addressee, or the gender, age or the highest attained degree of respondents.

Work Habit Management Strategies and Outcomes

Table 3 shows the strategies that senior managers use in dealing with their subordinate managers and supervisors. Managers commonly point out changes that need to be made by their subordinate managers (89.2%), and often challenge managers to change their work habits (76.4%). About two-thirds of managers also call attention to negative work habits (65.9%), gather evidence to support the needed change (60.8%), openly discuss with managers the importance of good work habits (60.8%), set explicit goals for new work habits managers need to achieve (56.3%), include work habits as a criterion in performance appraisal (61.9%) and build good work habits into the organizational culture (59.7%). Slightly more than half of respondents also stress the following: indicating that not changing some habits is unacceptable (53.4%), celebrating the success of changed work habits (53.4%), and sharing stories of success and difficulties in changing work habits (55.7%). Table 3 shows that a broad range of

appropriate change-oriented strategies are used. On average, cities use 14.5 of these 31 strategies. The high frequency of these tactics is consistent with the above finding that about two-thirds of cities experience bad managerial work habits to some extent.

Table 3: Work Habit Management

<i>"In your experience with your current organization, which of the following actions have you undertaken in relation to another manager or supervisor reporting to you?"</i>	Yes
<i>A. Awareness – problem identification</i>	
pointed out what change is needed	89.2 %
challenged the manager to change work habits	76.4
called attention to negative effects of bad work habits	65.9
gathered evidence to support that change was needed in work habits	60.8
stressed that not changing some habits is unacceptable	53.4
escalated my admonishments to alter work habits	37.9
encouraged acknowledgement that current work habits were "bad"	35.2
<i>Index (mean)</i>	<i>59.8</i>
<i>B. Awareness – solution identification</i>	
openly discussed with the manager the importance of good work habits	60.8
shared stories of success and difficulties in changing work habits	55.7
provided information about managerial "good" work habits	49.4
created a motivating vision of what new work habits will produce	48.9
insured that the manager had knowledge and skills to change work habits	47.7
brainstormed as a management team to identify desirable work habits	46.0
told a manager to look towards a promising future with good work habits	34.7
showed how change in work habits advances shared values	25.0
<i>Index (mean)</i>	<i>46.0</i>
<i>C. Management</i>	
set explicit goals for new work habits managers need to achieve	56.3
celebrated the success of changed work habits	53.4
encouraged the manager to take the first step in changing work habits	53.4
redesigned work in ways that prompt changed work habits	40.3
provided incentives for continuing with positive work habits	35.2
provided evidence that changed work habits were successful	35.2
provided a coach to work one-on-one to support new work habits	27.8
proceeded step-by-step in the direction of improved work habits	20.5
separated the manager from influences that reinforced bad habits	14.8
<i>Index (mean)</i>	<i>37.4</i>
<i>D. Policy</i>	
included work habits as a criterion in performance appraisal	61.9
built good work habits into the organizational culture	59.7
included work habits as a criterion in promotion decisions	45.5
instituted training programs that stress good work habits	42.0
used management development programs to cultivate good work habits	40.9
established organizational standards to institutionalize good work habits	40.3
rewarded managers for good habits and punished for bad habits	37.5
<i>Index (mean)</i>	<i>46.8</i>

Cronbach alpha scores of index variables are 0.81 (problem identification), 0.77 (solution identification), 0.74 (management work, 0.76 (policy). The aggregate index has alpha = 0.82

Table 3 also groups these strategies into four categories that correspond with the substantive activities noted in the framework; bringing awareness to the existence of bad work habits (A), providing information about new behaviors and preferred outcomes (B), working with subordinate managers and supervisors to realize the new work habits (C), and the use of various organizational strategies and policies in support of these efforts (D). The alpha measures for these index variables are shown in Table 3. Further analysis of these four index variables shows that only bringing awareness to the existence of bad work habits (A), is directly associated with the reduction in bad managerial habits ($\text{tau-c} = -.185$, $p < .01$); however, the other three index variables (identified as B, C, and D) are associated with problem identification (respectively, $\text{tau-c} = .590$, $.413$ and $.291$, all $p < .01$) and, hence, indirectly associated with the reduction of bad management work habits. This finding suggests that *making subordinate managers aware of the existence of their bad work habits is key to the process of effecting change*. Change processes that only exhort managers to adopt new work habits, even when accompanied by reinforcing policies, are not associated with changes in bad work habits.

A city manager from a California city suggests that a key to effecting change is increasing awareness by directly confronting subordinate managers and supervisors of their bad work habits:

I think the first thing is feedback, and as soon as possible. Let the manager know right away, and it has to be consistent with follow-ups. For example, we had a supervisor of a water treatment plant that was a 24 hour operation. He kept falling asleep on the job. We are responsible for providing our citizens with clean water, and there could be severe consequences if the supervisor was asleep during a critical juncture of the job; we could become legally liable for contaminated water. The supervisor was reprimanded three times.... Yes, I frequently use feedback but it has to be immediate. If not, the entire situation becomes difficult.

But this manager also admits, "Confronting people is difficult. I learned that ignoring the situation is a big mistake. You have to be upfront and direct with people." A second respondent used counseling with mixed success, sometimes ending in separation from the public service, "In my experience one-on-one counseling and discussion regarding bad habits is how I dealt with managers' bad habits. Managers tend not to be informed of their bad habits; this is a mechanism to inform them. In some instances it helped and in others it did not help. In the instances it did not help, it was already time to recommend a release of duty from his/her job function." Regarding the latter, a third manager also stated, "...counseling and discipline...I keep it as informal as possible, but if there is no change in bad behavior then I start progressive discipline." A fourth seasoned administrator from the Southeast also uses this strategy, but with a twist:

“When the habit involves a manager who directly reports to me I intervene directly. If does not take long before word gets out that I came for an irregular visit, it is known by the person with the bad habit and by those with whom he/she works that it was time for a talk. This gets their attention. Sometimes such a mature adult conversation results in a contrite manager; sometimes it doesn’t.”

A fifth senior manager from a Western city also used feedback stressing the need for positive reinforcement of good habits: “Complimenting on good habits is important: ‘You handled that well,’ and ‘I am proud of you using your good judgment.’” He cautions, however, that when dealing with bad habits “In my opinion yelling and belittling never works. I don’t think I promote an office with yelling and screaming.... This is definitely a bad strategy and should never be used. I try to discourage all my managers from using this strategy.”

Table 4 examines perceptions of organizational performance. Many respondents have favorable assessments of their city’s performance. For example, 75.2% of respondents agree or strongly agree that they have a strong customer orientation, and 64.3% of them agree or strongly agree that they use up-to-date information technology applications. In addition, slightly more than half, 58.6% agree or strongly agree that their organizational productivity is high.

The relationships among work habits, habit management strategies and performance are best examined through a structural equation model. Though a complex figure, the key study variables are shown in bold, and the key study relationships are shown by bold arrows. These relationships are discussed in the framework and as research questions: (i) the impact of good and bad management work habits on each other; (ii) the impact of good management work habits and bad work management habits on organizational performance, and (iii) the impact of management strategies to reduce bad management work habits. Figure 2 also shows five (5) other variables that are included as control variables, whose purpose is to allow for a more stringent test of the above key relationships. Methodologically, including a range of control variables also increase the model’s degrees of freedom, thereby

Table 4: Outcomes

<i>“In our city...”</i>	Agree ¹	Somewhat Agree	Disagree ²	DK
<i>Performance</i>				
we have a strong customer orientation	75.2	17.6	5.3	1.9
collaboration with community leaders is good	75.2	19.5	3.9	1.4
organizational productivity is high	58.6	28.6	9.1	3.8
we use up-to-date information technology applications	64.3	20.0	15.2	0.5
we frequently develop new, innovative programs	58.1	28.6	11.4	1.9
citizen trust in local government is high	47.6	29.5	18.1	4.8

Cronbach alpha of this index variable is 0.85.

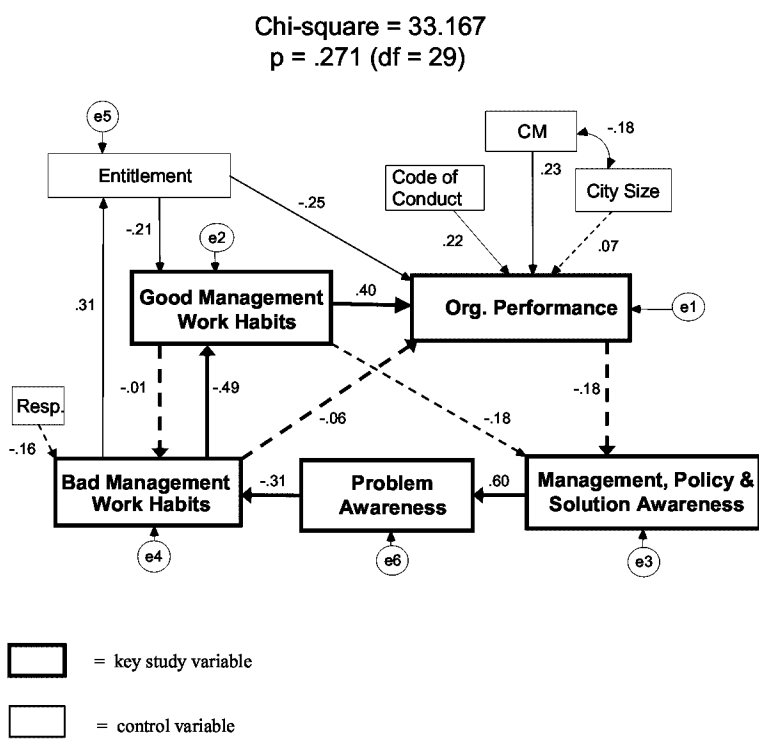
1) Includes Strongly Agree and Agree

2) Includes Somewhat Disagree, Disagree and Strongly Disagree

improving estimation and providing a more rigorous test of model fit, albeit at the expense of some model parsimony. In any event, Figure 2 is one of several models that can be shown, all of which produce similar substantive conclusions regarding the key relationships.

Regarding control variables, shown as thin-lined boxes in Figure 2, the literature suggests that cultures of entitlement negatively affect organizational performance by reducing enthusiasm and support for high performance.³⁹ “Entitlement” is measured by the survey item “In our city, people just act busy rather than doing meaningful work.” The adoption of codes of conduct is associated with management practices that increase professionalism and performance, such as more promptly responding to stakeholders and reducing unethical conduct.⁴⁰ “Code of Conduct” is measured by “In our city, we have a code of conduct.” Some studies suggest that smaller cities are less likely to engage in some of activities mentioned in Table 4 because they may lack the resources or management talent for doing so.⁴¹ City size is measured by population size. Some studies also suggest that jurisdictions with a city manager form of government are more professionalized and, hence, more concerned with aspects of organizational performance mentioned in Table 4. We also test whether assessments of bad management work habits vary between city managers and other senior respondents.⁴²

Figure 2: Bad Work Habits Among Managers



Note: the standardized regression coefficients are shown along the paths.

Before discussing the substantive results of Figure 2, we note that this model satisfies the usual goodness-of-fit test assumptions for such causal models. The variance-covariance matrix is consistent with that of the data (Chi-square = 33.17, $p > .05$), the RMSEA is .03 (under the norm of .05), the Goodness of Fit Index is .956, the Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index is .917, which exceeds the threshold of .90, and the maximum Modification Index is 2.2. The Tucker-Lewis Index is 0.93 and the Comparative Fit Index is 0.967, indicating good incremental fit, as they are close to the norm of 1.0. The Parsimony-Adjusted Normed Fit Index of .494 compares favorably with competing models. Figure 2 shows the effect sizes (standardized coefficients) of the relationships. The dotted arrows show relationships that are not significant at the customary 5% or 1% levels, but they are included for reasons of theoretical interest mentioned above.

We now discuss each of the results of Figure 2 with reference to each of the above key relationships. Regarding relationship (i), the impact of perceived good and bad work habits on each other, the results show that bad management work habits have a significant negative impact on good management work habits, but good management work habits are not statistically associated with reducing bad management work habits. Figure 2 also shows indirect effects of perceived bad management work habits on perceived good management work habits; the former are significantly associated with perceptions of increased entitlement orientations among managers and employees, which in turn are negatively associated with good management work habits. The result is that the total standardized effect (shown in Table 5) of bad work habits on good work habits is considerable, -.536 (bad habits → good habits), and that the total standardized effect of good work habits on bad work habits is quite small, -.052 (good habits → bad habits). Alternative model specifications do vary a bit in the magnitude of the latter, but it is never greater than about 35% of the impact of bad management work habits on good management work habits, and this direct impact is never statistically significant.⁴³ An important practical implication of this finding is that *managers cannot rely on the presence of good management work habits in order to reduce the presence of bad management work habits*; additional efforts should be sought after, such as those discussed in connection with relationship (iii), below.

Regarding relationship (ii), the effects of management work habits on organizational performance, Figure 2 shows that while good management work habits directly affect organizational performance, *much of the impact of bad management work habits occurs indirectly*. While the direct standardized effects on organizational performance are respectively, .399 (good work habits → performance) and -.056 (bad work habits → performance), the total direct effects (which include direct and indirect effects) are respectively .381 and -.344. *These results show that bad habits are significantly, negatively associated with organizational performance, and the impact of bad management work habits nearly offsets performance gains from good management work habits*; a practical implication is that managers will want to take the presence of bad management work habits seriously. These results are consistent with the simple bivariate analysis, too: the Pearson correlation coefficient of good

Table 5: Standardized Total And Direct Effects Of Relationships Shown In Figure 2

STANDARDIZED TOTAL EFFECTS										
	City Size	Code Of Conduct	CM	Respon- dent	Problem Aware- ness	Bad Work habits	Mgt. Policy & Solution Aware- ness	Good Work Habits	Entitle- ment	Org. Perfor- mance
Problem Awareness	-.008	-.024	-.025	-.015	-.030	.096	.584	-.147	.059	-.107
Bad Work habits	.002	.007	.008	-.151	-.302	-.033	-.182	.052	-.020	.033
Mgt., Policy & Solution Aware.	-.013	-.039	-.042	-.025	-.050	.159	-.030	-.244	.097	-.178
Good Work Habits	-.001	-.004	-.004	.084	.167	-.536	.101	-.029	-.203	-.018
Entitlement	.001	.002	.002	-.047	-.093	.300	-.056	.016	-.006	.010
Org. Performance	.072	.218	.231	.054	.107	-.344	.065	.381	-.332	-.012
STANDARDIZED DIRECT EFFECTS										
	City Size	Code Of Conduct	CM	Respon- dent	Problem Aware- ness	Bad Work habits	Mgt. Policy & Solution Aware- ness	Good Work Habits	Entitle- ment	Org. Perfor- mance
Problem Awareness	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.602	.000	.000	.000
Bad Work habits	.000	.000	.000	-.156	-.312	.000	.000	.006	.000	.000
Mgt., Policy & Solution Aware.	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	-.179	.000	-.184
Good Work Habits	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	-.488	.000	.000	-.214	.000
Entitlement	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.310	.000	.000	.000	.000
Org. Performance	.073	.220	.234	.000	.000	-.056	.000	.399	-.253	.000

Note: Total standardized effects = Direct standardized effects + Indirect standardized effects. Hence, the indirect standardized effects are readily inferred from the above tables.

management work habits with organizational performance is $r = .357$ ($p < .01$), and of bad management work habits with organizational performance, $r = -.250$ ($p < .01$).

A variety of interview comments support that the impacts of bad management work habits on organizational performance are often indirect. For example, a city manager from a city on the Midwest observes: “Attitude works its way down the ladder,” and a California manager states, “Persistent bad habits can be problematic because managers set the tone in the administration. It is likely to spread to employees.” Another stated: “Often bad habits revolve around comings and goings. This causes

inequities because those who don't arrive late or leave early resent the behavior of people who take advantage of lax enforcement. It can become a morale issue in your unit. There is a consequence to the organization." A senior manager in a Western city echoes this: "Managers will be imitated by their employees. If a manager continuously comes into work late, employees will imitate their manager and come into work later. This will impact productivity in the office."⁴⁴ These comments show indirect effects on performance.

What is the impact of effort to manage bad management work habits (relationship iii, above)? Figure 2 confirms the results discussed in connection with Table 3, above, namely that *only efforts to increase awareness about bad management work habits are directly, statistically associated with reducing perceived, bad management work habits*. Efforts that exhort managers to adopt good work habits, even with reinforcing policies (composed of the relevant items of Table 3, $\alpha = .787$), are not directly associated with reducing bad management work habits, though they do support them. The total standardized effect of increasing problem awareness on bad management work habits is $-.302$, and the total standardized effect of the aggregate index variable of exhorting good work habits (with reinforcing policies) on bad management work habits is $-.182$. A plausible explanation for the sequencing of these two variables in the model is that, in practice, managers may begin their change efforts targeting managers with bad habits by exhorting them that they ought to adopt better work habits, only to often realize that sustained efforts are also needed to obtain awareness and acceptance among managers with bad work habits that such work habits are indeed bad and therefore must come to an end.⁴⁵

Beyond these key relationships, Figure 2 also shows other results worth mentioning. Entitlement attitudes significantly reduce perceptions of good management work habits and organizational performance; the respective total standardized effects are $-.203$ and $-.332$. Such negative impacts support numerous studies about the detrimental effect of entitlement attitudes in organization; this study adds to such findings that reducing bad management work habits can reduce entitlement attitudes, too. Figure 2 also shows that the presence of good management work habits and organizational performance are negatively associated with efforts to exhort managers into adopting good management work habits (with reinforcing policies).⁴⁶ Such negative relationships make sense, of course (why increase attention on work habits when management work habits and performance are perceived as positive?), but it also suggests the possibility of a vicious cycle; when things are going well, the possibility exists of giving insufficient attention to bad management work habits which, however minimal, sow the seeds of subsequent performance problems. Finally, regarding other control variables, the type of respondent, city manager or other senior manager, is also not significant in this study. Alternative specifications, consider impacts on other key study variables, are also not significant.⁴⁷ Figure 2 also shows that effects of the city manager form of government and codes of conduct are positively associated with increased organizational performance, consistent with above mentioned studies. City size is not significant, reflecting that really small cities, that may lack resources, are not part of this sample which includes only cities over 50,000.

Conclusion and Discussion

This article finds that managerial work habits affect organizational performance – good managerial work habits raise performance, and bad managerial work habits reduce it. Bad management work habits are significantly present in about 45% of cities, and most commonly involve managers being overly passive, judgmental, defensive, intimidating, closed-minded or tardy in their performance. While these behaviors vary among settings, the presence of just a few managers with bad work habits significantly, negatively affects both organizational performance and the presence of good management work habits. While good management work habits are widely reported, such as being pro- active and setting high standards, bad management work habits almost cancel out gains from good management work habits, and are therefore a relevant concern. This study also finds that a key step to reducing bad management work habits is to promote awareness and acceptance among managers with such bad work habits that these habits are indeed occurring, that they are undesirable, and that they need to subside. Bad management work habits cannot be overcome by merely exhorting such managers to change their work habits, even when such efforts are reinforced by appropriate policies and evaluation criteria.

This study contributes to the literature in several ways. First, it augments the literature on managerial professionalism by examining the nature and extent of good as well as bad management work habits. Intimidation, closed-mindedness and tardiness are serious matters that are shown to be systematic, and regularly occurring phenomena of management, rather than the aberrant issues of isolated individual managers, as they are sometimes portrayed. Both good and bad work habits exist in abundance. While studies of professionalism and ethics already consider unethical and illegal behavior as detrimental to performance and stakeholder relations, this study shows that bad management work habits should also be included among those behaviors to be arrested. Results here suggest that at some point progress toward professionalism and organizational performance is significantly hindered, if not stifled, by the presence of sometimes just a few managers with significantly bad work habits.

Second, this study contributes to literatures that discuss the importance of informal and on-going supervisory management practices. Studies of 360-degree feedback and psychological contracts suggest in different ways the need to provide more feedback than that merely given through annual or bi-annual performance appraisal and to provide consequences for work habits through promotion, reward and discipline processes. Findings from both the survey and interviews show the significance of frequent and repeated feedback from top managers to subordinate managers and supervisors about their work habits. The fact that managers often work together and frequently talk with each other does not mean that they talk about bad work habits, too. It is time to start thinking about standards and better practices for managing the managers in pursuit of organizational effectiveness.

This study also has many practical implications. First, it tantalizingly provides an explanation for the failure of many management training exercises to improve performance and address bad work habits. This study finds that such habits require

active management, not merely training seminars. A distinguishing feature of “high performance” organizations is that managers talk about ‘what is really going on,’ and are thus able to benefit more from training seminars and the like.⁴⁸ Second, awareness of bad habits is key, but many managers are not well-trained to identify various ways in which bad work habits may occur. At the very least, they need some checklists, distinctions and rating criteria, but the complexity becomes clear when considering that some managers have deep-seated problems, and that these managers may be quite adept at camouflaging their bad work habits, at least for a time (below). Third, managers need better training and support regarding discipline. Many managers find discipline and termination to be among their most difficult tasks. The literature and practice suggests that more support and training on this topic would be helpful if managers are going to be asked to address the bad habits of those that report to them.

Finally, the consequences of bad habit management may well be more than those examined in this study. For example, workplace stress is exacerbated by the bad habits of managers. Many times, managers think that intimidating their employees and placing more demands on them somehow guarantees a more productive work environment, but stress in the workplace can lead to higher turnover rates, high levels of absenteeism, and overall poor work performance. Bad habits can also lead to conflict among managers and staff. For example, when managers fail to provide support, assistance or understanding to those under their supervision, such habit-based work practices can induce stress, ignite conflict and harm performance. Similarly, managers who habitually fail to communicate sufficiently or effectively, who are unwilling to delegate tasks or responsibilities, or who have poor social skills, are a hindrance to subordinates in doing their job, which adds to their stress. Intervention strategies are needed in such cases, whether through formal mentoring or leadership development programs, to address poor workplace habits that heighten stress, foment conflict and dampen productivity. As one astute manager told us, “If an organizational culture allows bad habits to continue, it is a deficiency of leadership, especially if this has a negative impact on organizational performance.”

Future research needs to begin by acknowledging that systems-based improvement and reforms are dependent on those who execute them. By virtue of their position and power, the judgments of managers matter. We need to design systems that better account for the behaviors and orientations that managers may exhibit. Regarding bad management habits, achieving measurable improvements is complex, but successful change is possible. Future research needs to emphasize the importance of awareness and communication. Open communication allows for top management and employees to give corrective feedback to managers with bad habits. Case studies, field reports, survey-based research and other quantitative or qualitative methodologies can be used to further identify the ways in which habit-based work practices impact productivity or stress in the government workplace and the managerial strategies which successfully reinforce positive work habits and correct negative habits. Achieving a better understanding of the role of workplace habits is crucial if we are to achieve the robust, high performing public organizations—alert, nimble, flexible, and adaptable—extolled in the academic and professional literature.

Notes

- ¹ Berman, E. & West, J. (2003)a. What is managerial mediocrity? Definition, prevalence, and negative impact (Part 1). *Public Performance & Management Review* 27, 9-29; Light, P. (1999). Does management matter? *Government Executive* 31, 6; Light, P. (2005). *The four pillars of high performance: How robust organizations achieve extraordinary results*. NY: McGraw-Hill; Nutt, P. (2002). *Why decisions fail*. San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler; Field, T. (2002). The serial bully. www.bullyonline.worldwidebully/serial.htm (Retrieved 12/14/06).
- ² Sutton, R. (2007). *The no asshole rule*. NY: Warner Business Books.
- ³ The importance of workplace habits among organization leaders was recently documented in Welbourne's study of more than 300 private-sector executives and senior managers. When asked to rate 15 items in terms of the degree to which each might derail execution of organizational strategy, the number one barrier was the organization's past and habits. Close behind in the rating were two factors linked to an organization's past and habits: organizational culture and the way employees work together. Getting bogged down in routines is not unique to the private sector, of course. Welbourne, T. (2005). Leaders talk about executing strategy. *Leadership pulse survey results*. (March). www.umbs.leadership.eepulse.com (Retrieved May 1, 2006).
- ⁴ Stinson, E. & Mueller, D. (1980). Survey of health professionals' information habits and needs. conducted through personal interviews. *JAMA* January 11, 243, 2: 140-143.
- ⁵ Berman, E. (2006). *Performance and productivity in public and nonprofit organizations*. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe.
- ⁶ Salamon, L. (2002). *The tools of government: A guide to the new governance*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press; Kettl, D. (2002). *The transformation of governance*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- ⁷ Nutt, P. (2004). Prompting the transformation of public organizations. *Public Performance & Management Review* 27, 9-33; Ammons, D. (2004). Productivity barriers in the public sector. In M. Holzer and S-H. Lee, eds. *Public productivity handbook*, 2nd ed. NY: Marcel Dekker, 139-164; Oreg, S. (2003). Resistance to change: Developing an individual differences measure. *Journal of Applied Psychology* 88, 680-693.
- ⁸ Rousseau, D. (1995). *Psychological contracts: Understanding written and unwritten contracts*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage; Berman, E. & West, J. (2003)b. Psychological contracts in local government: A preliminary analysis. *Review of Public Personnel Administration* 23, 267-285; Guest, D. & Conway, N. (2002). Communicating the psychological contract: An employer perspective. *Human Resource Management Journal* 12, 22-38.
- ⁹ A close alternate for the phrase "work habit" is "work practice." However, the term 'practice' also involves chosen patterns of behaviors, sometimes in accordance with group norms (e.g., 'professional practices'). However, bad management work habits are typically unprofessional, based on individual rather than group norms, and not always reflecting conscious choice. Hence, to avoid any such confusion, we use the phrase work habit. Covey even refers to "being pro-active" or "thinking win-win" as habits to be developed. This use of the word habit is misleading, as it involves mindsets, only. However, it, too, shows that 'habit' rather than 'habitude' has become the prevailing usage. Waldroop, J. & Butler, T. (2000)a. Managing away bad habits. *Harvard Business Review* 78, 89-98; Covey, S. (1990). *The 7 habits of highly effective people*. NY: Simon & Schuster.
- ¹⁰ Ohly, S., Sonnentag, S. & Pluntke, F. (2006). Routinization, work characteristics and their relationship with creative and proactive behaviors. *Journal of Organizational Behavior* 27, 257-279.
- ¹¹ Beatty, S. & Kahle, L. (1988). Alternative hierarchies of the attitude-behavior relationship: The impact of brand commitment and habit. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science* 16, 1-10;

Kahle, L. & Beatty, S. (1987). The task situation and habit in the attitude-behavior relationship: A social adaptation view. *Journal of Social Behavior and Personality* 2, 219-232.

- ¹² As noted by one anonymous reviewer, work habits represent a mélange of behaviors, practices, predispositions, proclivities, etc. This, however, does not suggest any inaccuracy of definition, but rather a plethora of synonyms for the phenomena under study.
- ¹³ As a further example, smoking is statistically associated with numerous illnesses, and is now widely regarded as a bad practice, but, in the moment, smoking also reduces stress which is a positive or productive outcome. Only when practices are seen as, on balance, problematic or deficient in some way, may reflection and analysis occur, possibly leading to modification.
- ¹⁴ Holzer, M. & S. H. Lee, eds. (2004). Op. cit.
- ¹⁵ Another line of inquiry identifies orientations and behaviors of exceptionally dysfunctional managers, such as those who are highly abusive, grandiose, controlling or antisocial. These are significant manifestations of the unproductive orientations and behaviors noted in the text. Finkelstein, S. (2004). The seven habits of spectacularly unsuccessful executives. *Ivey Business Journal Online* (January/February): 1; Lubit, R. (2004). The tyranny of toxic managers: Applying emotional intelligence to deal with difficult personalities. *Ivey Business Journal* 68, 1-7; Waldroop, J. & Butler, T. (2000)a. Op. Cit.
- ¹⁶ Waldroop, J. & Butler, T. (2000)b. *The 12 bad habits that hold good people back*. NY: Doubleday.
- ¹⁷ A wealth of practitioner literature exists in business management, largely non-empirical commentaries, identifying critical habits in information technology, safety administration, manufacturing, management, negotiations, financial services, insurance, and human resources. A few practitioner-oriented articles in public administration focus on developing effective habits of elected city councils, and on habits of public managers in the United Kingdom, but none deal with senior managers in U.S. local governments. Datz, T. (2003). 6 habits of highly effective CIOs. *CIO* 16, 17 (June 15): 72; Kincaid, W. (1996). Habits of effective safety managers. *Occupational Hazards*. (November): 41-43; Pollock, T. (1997). July. Bad habits that may be holding you back. *Automotive Manufacturing & Production*. 109, 13-14; Haddock, P. (1997). Secrets for getting things done: Develop work habits that stress success, Not Ineffectiveness. *Incentive*. 171, 120-121; Barrier, M. (1999). Discovering the habits of well-regarded CEOs. *Nations Business* 87, 3-15; Finkelstein, S. (2004). Op. cit.; Sebenius, J. (2001). Six habits of merely effective negotiators. *Harvard Business Review* 79, 87-95; Leeds, D. (1996). How to work smarter, not harder. *National Underwriter Life & Health-Financial Services Edition*. 41, 21; Van Zijl, C. (1999). Sharpening up social skills. *Credit Management* (November): 22-23; Groner, D. (1997). The habits of highly ethical insurance professionals. *National Underwriter Life & Health-Financial Services Edition*. 101, 19, 21; Rosner, B. (1999). Building trust is a good HR habit. *Workforce*. 78, 25-7; Neu, C. (1997). 10 habits of highly effective councils. *Public Management*. 79, 4-9; Vogelsang-Coombs, V. (1997). Governance education: Helping city councils learn. *Public Administration Review* 57, 490-500; Brookfield, D. (2000). Management styles in the public sector. *Management Decision* 38, 13-18.
- ¹⁸ This is yet another likely reason for being skeptical of many consulting training efforts as the basis for achieving lasting change. It is anecdotally observed that training alone seldom suffices.
- ¹⁹ Ashworth, K. (2001). *Caught between the dog and the fireplug, or How to survive in public service*. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press; Berman, E. & West, J. (2003)a. Op. cit.
- ²⁰ This can include mental health or alcohol/substance. While the latter are presumably infrequent among managers, the discussion about standards suggests that even just a few of such instances will have negative impacts on organizational performance.
- ²¹ McDonald, T. (1998). Eye-opener—New circumstances require new ways of thinking. *Successful Meetings* (July): 20.
- ²² Lewin, K. (1947). Frontiers in group dynamics. *Human Relations* 1:5-41.

- ²³ These four steps are similar to the more comprehensive learning program initiated at General Electric by Jack Welch who was concerned about bad habits in the company. GE's Change Acceleration Process (CAP) focused on "making change stick" and included a seven-step model of change: leading change (requires a committed champion), creating a shared need (communicates the rationale for change), shaping a vision (conveys desired behavioral outcomes), mobilizing commitment (building support), making change last (developing short plus long-term plans), monitoring progress (installing metrics), and changing systems or structures (reinforcing change). These various step-by-step approaches can help to guide the habit management initiatives of organizations seeking improved performance. Vogelsang-Coombs, V. (1997). *Op. cit.*; Garvin, D. (2000). *Learning in action: A guide to putting the learning organization to work*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.
- ²⁴ Berman, E. (2006). *Performance and productivity in public and nonprofit organizations*. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe.
- ²⁵ Waldroop, J. & Butler, T. (2000)a. *Op. cit.*; Waldroop, J. & Butler, T. (2000)b. *Op. cit.*
- ²⁶ Buckingham, M. & Coffman, C. (1999). *First, break all the rules*. NY: Simon-Schuster; Guy, M. (2004). *The human side of productive work environments*. In M. Holzer and S-H. Lee, *Op. cit.*, pp. 447-462; Olshfski, D. & Levine, H. (2004). *Organizational change and innovation*. In M. Holzer and S-H. Lee, *Op. cit.*, pp. 593-609; Shafritz, J., Rosenbloom, D., Riccucci, N., Naff, K., & Hyde, A. (2004). *Personnel management in government*. 5th ed. NY: Marcel Dekker chapter 8; Van Wart, M. (2004). *Training and development for productivity*. In M. Holzer & S-H. Lee, *Op. cit.*, 529-549; Van Wart, M. (2005). *Dynamics of leadership in public service*. NY: M.E. Sharpe.
- ²⁷ ICMA. (2005). *Municipal yearbook 2005*. Washington, D.C.: International City/County Management Association.
- ²⁸ In practice, it is nearly impossible to achieve higher response rates for surveys of this length which are necessary for providing the kind of detailed study that this is. The challenge for any realistic response rate is to show that the sample is representative of the sampling frame. To this end, we use two approaches that have now become standard in the discipline. We compare the sample against the sampling frame, and compare a sample of non-respondents against respondents. The results of these tests are reported below, and we conclude that the survey results can be generalized to the study population. We are very concerned that some might judge this matter solely by response rate; even surveys with, say, a 60% response rate can have substantial sample bias; the purpose of the above methods is to assess whether such bias exists. Hays, S. & Kearney, R. (2001). Anticipated changes in human resource management: Views from the field. *Public Administration Review* 61, 485-597; Berman, E. & Korosec, R. (2005). Planning to coordinate and coordinating the plan: Evidence from local governments. *American Review of Public Administration* 35, 380-401; Sheehan, K. (2001). E-mail survey response rates: A review. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 6, 2. <http:jcmc.indiana.edu/vol6/issue2/Sheehan.html> (Retrieved on 4/9/07).
- ²⁹ Specifically, the survey sample is broadly representative of the sampling frame, which is a listing of all U.S. cities with populations over 50,000. As is common, survey participation is a bit lower in the Northeast than elsewhere in the country.
- ³⁰ We also think that asking others to report on the bad habits of others is more accurate than asking people to report on their bad habits which, as noted in the Framework section, people are apt to be at least somewhat in denial about.
- ³¹ While this study takes great pains to further measurement validity, we acknowledge the limitations of the data as noted in the introduction. On the one hand, the estimates of managers may be considered as a conservative estimate of bad habits because (i) some bad habits of subordinate managers and supervisors may only be revealed to their employees, and not to their superiors, who are the respondents in this study, and (ii) respondents do not have around the clock access to subjects as a basis for their observations. On the other hand, respondents are subject to Fundamental Attribution Error Theory, which is the tendency to explain the

behavior of others on the basis of disposition or character, rather than context or the actions of third parties. This may cause some overestimation of bad habits. While the net effect of these different considerations cannot be known with certainty, of course, we note that no data in social science are ever known in ways that are completely free from all possible distortions, errors and biases. We caveat our perceptual data for these possibilities, as is conventional practice.

- ³² A sample of four randomly selected items was used. These items, along with tau-c and p-values for testing significant differences between respondents of the mail survey and the abbreviated phone survey among non-respondents, are: "I have challenged the manager to change work habits" (tau-c = .020, p=.635), "set explicit goals for new work habits managers need to achieve" (tau-c= .080, p=.101), "provided a coach to work one-on-one to support new work habits" (tau-c= .020, p= .653) and "included work habits as a criterion in performance appraisal" (tau-c=.079, p=.097). Demographic variables of phone survey respondents were collected, too, but these do not significantly affect the above relationships.
- ³³ Note that the item lead-in is worded differently in Tables 1 and 2. Table 1 concerns good habits among at least one manager, whereas Table 2 concerns bad habits among managers that report to the respondent. This is appropriate, because, as noted in the framework, standards for evaluating good and bad habits differ. The prevalence of just a few managers with bad habits can have a strong impact on senior managers' team, whereas good habits are widely seen as required among all or most members for the purpose of high performance.
- ³⁴ In fact, very few disagree to any extent with these statements. The percentage of those who strongly agree, agree or somewhat agree is at least 95% for each of these items.
- ³⁵ The categories are based on theoretical considerations, and are supported by measures of internal reliability (alpha) shown in Table 2. Construct validity is evidenced as follows. For example, the index of ideas & information is associated with such items as "making consequential decisions unilaterally" (tau-c=.358, p < .01), the index of collaboration is associated with "being uncomfortable in social situations" (tau-c=.415, p < .01), and the index of self-management is correlated with "managers are not well attuned to their feelings" (tau-c=.278, p < .01). While none of these individual items constitute aspects of the index measures, they do correlate with them as might be expected, hence, providing construct validity to the measures.
- ³⁶ Also, among the 340 possible pairs of correlations between items in Tables 1 and 2, 270 pairs are statistically significant.
- ³⁷ If one (1) somewhat agree is included as constituting a jurisdiction in which managers have bad habits (including of course, any cities that agree or strongly agree), then an additional 11.5% should be added for a total of 74.3% of cities. If three (3) somewhat agree are required, then 7.2% should be subtracted, yielding 55.6% of cities. Beyond this, different definitions can also shift percentages among categories, of course, but sensitivity analyses do not suggest changes by more than about 6%.
- ³⁸ A variety of statistical tests all support these conclusions. Here, ANOVA is used, as the dependent variable is continuous, and the independent variables are categorical with three or more categories. Df = 160 to 164.
- ³⁹ West, J. and Berman, E. (1997). Administrative creativity in local government. *Public Productivity & Management Review* 20, 446-457.
- ⁴⁰ While by themselves codes of conduct are unlikely to affect performance, they are thought to be part of other strategies which collectively do aim to further performance. Here, they are viewed as an indicator of such broader efforts. This, too, is reflected in the survey data. For example, having a code of conduct is positively associated with the statement "unethical conduct is dealt with harshly around here" (tau-c= .168, p < .01), which in turn is associated with the measure of performance (tau-c=.249, p < .010).

⁴¹ West, J. & Berman, E. (1997). *Op. cit.*

⁴² While the literature is silent on this matter, city managers might have a more positive assessment because their role includes strong elements of marketing the city and its staff. The variables city size and manager-council form of government were gathered from the ICMA. 2005. *Municipal yearbook 2005*. Washington, D.C.: International City/County Management Association.

⁴³ In an alternative model specification, excluding all of the above control variables, the total standardized effects of these relationships are, respectively -.426 and -.140, which supports the text conclusions. However, this alternate model has only three degrees of freedom and is therefore not shown.

⁴⁴ Another provided an example of this: "We had one manager who was here for many years, but did not adapt well to the changing conditions in the city. All city employees know that they should stay at work until 5:00 p.m., but he would leave early routinely. Others felt he was doing it, so why couldn't they leave when they wanted to as well. Eventually everyone in the unit was leaving early. To deal with this problem the manager was reassigned to a job where he had a flexible schedule and the rest of the staff returned to working the approved schedule."

⁴⁵ This explanation is consistent with a rational approach to managing that sequences subsequent efforts, starting with strategies of least effort, to those that involve more effort. Many medical treatments follow the same strategy, starting with interventions that are least invasive.

⁴⁶ While these relationships are not statistically significant in Figure 2, bivariate results are significant. Good management work habits are associated with exhorting good management work habits, $r = -.23$, $p < .01$, as is organizational performance, $r = -.24$, $p < .01$. This seems to be a good reason for bringing this point up here.

⁴⁷ We also examined whether the age or type of respondent is associated with perceptions of organizational performance, but find no such relationship.

⁴⁸ Kearney, R. & Berman, E., eds. (1999). *Public sector performance*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press; Holzer, M. & S-H. Lee, (2004). *Op. cit.*; Cohen, S. & Eimicke, W. (2002). *The new effective public manager*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Authors

Jonathan P. West, PhD

Department of Political Science
P.O. Box 248047
University of Miami
Coral Gables, FL 33124
(305) 284-2500
jwest@miami.edu

Professor Evan M. Berman, PhD

National Chengchi University
International Doctoral Program in Asia-Pacific Studies
General Building of Colleges, 12th Floor, North Wing
No. 64 (Section 2) ZhiNan Road, Wenshan District
Taipei 11605
Taiwan
evanmberman@gmail.com

Dr. Jonathan P. West is a professor of political science and director of the graduate public administration program at the University of Miami. He has published eight books and more than 100 scholarly articles and book chapters. He teaches undergraduate and graduate courses in American politics, public management, and human resource management and is managing editor of *Public Integrity* journal.

Dr. Evan M. Berman is the distinguished university professor at the National Chengchi University, in Taipei, Taiwan. He has published eight books and more than 100 publications, many of which appeared in the leading journals of the discipline. Berman teaches HRM and quantitative methods, and has interests in productivity. His recent books include *HRM in Public Service* (2010, 3/e, with West, Bowman and Van Wart), *Public Administration in East Asia: China, South Korea, Japan and Taiwan* (2010), and *People Skills at Work* (forthcoming with Dira Berman).