THE BIG EFFECTS OF SMALL TALK IN THE WORKPLACE

By

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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Small talk—superficial, non-task related communication—comprises up to one-third of adults' conversation, and is a key component of employees' experience in the workplace. Despite its ubiquity, little is known about small talk at work, and scattered research across disciplines suggests it may have either positive or negative outcomes. To examine workplace small talk, I draw on Interaction Ritual Theory to conduct four complementary studies. In Study 1 (n=367), I develop and validate a multidimensional scale to measure workplace small talk (with dimensions varying in the extent to which they are scripted) in samples of undergraduate students, employees of a social services organization, and employees recruited through the Amazon Mechanical Turk platform (MTurk). In Study 2, I analyze open-ended responses from employed adults recruited through MTurk (n=244) to identify motives for why employees engage in small talk. In Study 3, I use latent profile analysis (LPA) to analyze data from employees recruited through MTurk (n=580) to investigate whether various motives for small talk are associated with different small talk profiles, and whether small talk profiles impact employees' ego

depletion and interpersonal citizenship behaviors (ICB). In Study 4, I examine whether

small talk profiles influence supervisor-rated ICB and task performance in a sample of

employees from various small business (n=70). Studies 3 and 4 both demonstrate a

positive association between small talk and ICB, suggesting that employees who engage

in small talk are more likely to perform extra-role helping behaviors. Study 3 also finds

that employees with a high proportion of less scripted small talk are more depleted.

Taken together, the results of these studies suggest small talk is a multidimensional

phenomenon that can have both positive and negative effects in the workplace.

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INTRODUCTION

Communication is essential in organizations (Jones, Watson, Gardner, & Gallois, 2004; Weick, 1979). Even seemingly solitary organizational functions, such as finance and accounting, require communication between employees to coordinate work, share information, and exchange advice (Keyton, 2017; Reagans & McEvily, 2003). This instrumental communication between employees can have a direct impact on employees' performance (Ben Hador, 2016; Tsai & Ghoshal, 1998) and attitudes toward the organization (Cross, Rebele, & Grant, 2016; Soltis, Agneessens, Sasovova, & Labianca, 2013). Moreover, friendly discussion between supervisors and subordinates (Moutoux & Porte, 1980), or between coworkers (C. R. Scott, Corman, & Cheney, 1998; Silva & Sias, 2010) creates feelings of belonging and identification with the organization, and personally supportive communication helps buffer against employee stress (Bakker, Demerouti, & Euwema, 2005; Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001). Unequivocally, communication influences every facet of employee functioning (Keyton, 2017), and the nature of communication is a crucial factor in determining employees' contributions to organizational success (Guo, Yu, & Gimeno, 2017; Shinkle, Goudsmit, Jackson, Yang, & McCann, 2017; Snyder & Morris, 1984).

While scholars have focused largely on substantive, meaningful communication, there has been a relative lack of research on the seemingly insignificant exchanges that comprise much of employees' daily communication (J. Coupland, 2000). *Small talk* is defined as superficial or trivial communication that does not involve task-related exchange of information (Malinowski, 1923/1945). Small talk accounts for up to one third of an average adult's daily conversation (King, Spoeneman, Stuart, & Beukelman,

1995), and includes such topics as the weather, sports games, weekend plans, and the archetypal chats around the water cooler (J. Coupland, 2000; Epley & Schroeder, 2014; Fayard & Weeks, 2007; Mullany, 2006; Shaughnessy, Mislin, & Hentschel, 2015). Within organizations, employees may engage in small talk to build and maintain relationships (Holmes, 2000a), transition between activities (e.g., chatting before a meeting; Mirivel & Tracy, 2005), socialize new employees (Chun, Mak, & Chui, 2013; Pullin, 2010), or fill awkward silences (Jaworski, 2000). Managers may engage in small talk with subordinates to build a positive workplace climate (Moutoux & Porte, 1980), build solidarity within a workgroup (Mullany, 2006), or soften conversations about difficult or uncomfortable topics (Laver, 1975; Maynard & Hudak, 2008). Given its ubiquity and varied functions, researchers propose that, "the case of language used in free, aimless, social intercourse requires special consideration" (Malinowski, 1923/1945, p. 313).

This dissertation addresses two primary gaps in the literature. First, there is little agreement or research on the type of content that comprises small talk (for exceptions, see Schneider, 1987; Holmes, 2000a) or the motivations that people have for engaging in small talk at work. Small talk is considered distinct from other types of conversation because it is scripted and superficial, which means that it, "can satisfy needs for human contact with little effort or chance of self-disclosure." (Beinstein, 1975, p. 148). And yet, this may not always be the case. Whereas research proposes that small talk provides energy from connection without requiring cognitive labor (e.g., Collins, 2004), prototypical examples of small talk, such as talking about current events or weekend plans (J. Coupland, 2000), are not necessarily formulaic and may require a great deal of

energy to continue. It is not surprising then, that countless articles are written in the popular press to help employees navigate workplace small talk, with titles such as, "How to make small talk less painful" (Evans, 2015), and, "Tips for making small talk with bigwigs" (Baldoni, 2010). Given this lack of clarity on what constitutes small talk, it is pressing to define the nomological network of small talk, and in doing so, clarify ways that it can be measured quantitatively in order to assess its relationship with employee outcomes of interest.

Second, the effects of small talk on employee attitudes and behaviors have been under investigated, and extant research has conflicting findings. Some researchers and practitioners believe that small talk is, "dispensable, irrelevant, or peripheral" in the workplace (Holmes & Marra 2004, p. 378), and there is research to suggest that it can be exhausting or disingenuous (e.g., Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002; Hochschild, 1993). Contrastingly, emerging work in communication, psychology, anthropology, health care, sociology, and law suggests that small talk may have a more positive role in organizations than previously acknowledged. For example, recent work in social psychology has associated small talk with positive affect (Dunn, Biesanz, Human, & Finn, 2007; Epley & Schroeder, 2014) and feelings of belonging (Sandstrom & Dunn, 2014a). By taking an interdisciplinary view of small talk, it is clear that there is potential for both positive and negative outcomes. With specific regard to the phenomenon of workplace small talk, I propose it is important to understand how this behavior impacts outcomes of relevance to organizations, such as coworker helping behavior and employees' task performance.

Therefore, I draw from Interaction Ritual Theory (IRT; Collins, 2004) for three interrelated purposes. First, I investigate the dimensions of small talk and establish its nomological network. Second, I examine employees' motivations for conducting small talk with coworkers, and the ways in which these motives are associated with different types of small talk. Finally, I investigate the attitudinal and behavioral outcomes of small talk at work. Small talk may influence the quality of communication in organizations by serving to establish rapport (Ladegaard, 2011; Pulin, 2010; Nadler, 2004) and a common frame of reference (Cheepen, 1988) between employees that can lead to more instrumentally or emotionally rewarding communication (Chun et al., 2013). Since communication is essential to the functioning of organizations (Guo et al., 2017; Shinkle et al., 2017; Snyder & Morris, 1984), it is crucial to understand how this aspect of communication influences employee attitudes and behaviors.

In conducting this research I make two primary contributions. First, in light of mounting evidence that seemingly inconsequential connections are important (Blau & Fingerman, 2009; Coupland, 2003; Epley & Schroeder, 2014; Fingerman, 2009; Maynard & Hudak, 2008; Methot, Melwani, & Rothman, 2017; Penn & Watermeyer, 2017; Pullin, 2010; Sandstrom & Dunn, 2014a), my research shifts the focus in management research from an emphasis on instrumental (i.e., transactional, informational or task-based; Levin, Cross, Abrams, & Lesser, 2004; Levin, Kurtzberg, Phillips, & Lount, 2010; Reagans & McEvily, 2003) and expressive (i.e., intimate; Ibarra, 1992; 1993; 1995) communication to consider outwardly inconsequential communicative acts. As small talk is pervasive and potentially has significant utility, such a shift is necessary to understand how employees

can best communicate to support both their own well-being and their interactions with coworkers.

Second, I extend the literature on IRT (Collins, 2004), which states that ritual interpersonal interactions, such as small talk, produce emotional energy. IRT states that ritual interactions can either be energizing or draining depending on their characteristics, with equally plausible explanations that would suggest small talk might have positive and negative outcomes. This parallels tension in the previous literature on small talk, which holds that small talk can be both uplifting (e.g., Roy, 1959) and fatiguing (e.g., Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002). I go beyond the basic tenets of IRT to make specific predictions about small talk's effects on workplace outcomes by considering the potential for *different types* of small talk to have different effects, even if they may outwardly appear to meet the criteria of successful interaction rituals. Specifically, I examine the extent to which having different constellations of scripted and unscripted small talk might lead to positive and negative employee outcomes. Because IRT is a general theory of human behavior that was originally applied to contexts as diverse as socializing, sports, and sexual encounters (Collins, 2004), this emphasis on attributes of different types of small talk has the potential to add additional insight beyond the core tenets of IRT.

To achieve these goals, I conducted four complementary studies that explore the effects of small talk through the lens of IRT. In the first study, I developed and validated a multidimensional scale to measure self-reported workplace small talk using three samples. I identified three dimensions: salutations, polite talk, and news updates, which are qualitatively distinct from related constructs (e.g., gossip, friendship). In my second study, I collected qualitative data from working adults recruited through MTurk, who

provided information about why they engage in small talk at work. Using inductive content analysis, I identified three primary motivations for individuals to have workplace small talk. Building on the results of the first two studies, in my third study I surveyed 580 employed adults through the MTurk platform about their small talk behavior, as well as their motivations for engaging in small talk and various work-related attitudes and behaviors. These survey data were analyzed using person-centered Latent Profile Analyses (LPA; Marsh, Lüdtke, Trautwein, & Morin, 2009; Muthén & Muthén, 2017) in order to see whether there are certain small talk profiles, or combinations of small talk dimensions, that characterize people's small talk behaviors and are differentially associated with certain motivations for engaging in small talk. In the final study, I surveyed employees in ten organizations to replicate and extend the results of my LPA and see whether different small talk profiles systematically influence supervisor-rated performance. Taken together, these studies provide insight into how and why people have small talk in the workplace, and the empirical results largely support the association between workplace small talk and positive employee outcomes.

CHAPTER 1
LITERATURE REVIEW

Interaction Ritual Theory

Interaction Ritual Theory (IRT; Collins, 2004) holds that individuals engage in a series of formal and informal interaction rituals, and that these ritual interactions produce emotional energy and collective symbols that ultimately lead to future exchanges (Collins, 1993; 2004). According to IRT, a successful interaction ritual meets four criteria, "[1] Two or more people are physically assembled in the same place, so that they affect each other by their bodily presence. [2] There are boundaries to outsiders so that participants have a sense of who is taking part and who is excluded. [3] People focus their attention upon a common object or activity, and by communicating this focus to each other become mutually aware of each other's focus of attention. [4] They share a common mood or emotional experience" (Collins, 2004, p. 48). Importantly, IRT proposes that interactions devoid of these characteristics, or those that lack the ritual, socially-normative component of the interaction, may not produce positive outcomes. IRT further highlights the role of interaction ritual chains, which refers to the fact that interaction rituals imbue individuals and the shared symbols they develop with energy, and that both individuals and symbols carry this energy into subsequent interactions (Collins, 2004).

Relevant to the present study, Collins (2004) notes that interaction rituals do not need to be formal, and such minor occurrences as "the rituals of everyday sociability," (p. 50) such as talking superficially about one's daily activities or common acquaintances, are also considered interaction rituals. Collins (2004) similarly highlights the applicability of salutations—specifically "goodnight," "hello," and, "goodbye" (p. 17)—

to the study of IRT. These informal, or "natural" interaction rituals are distinct from the formal interaction rituals that are represented by ceremonies or religious observance. Indeed, in his description of the interaction ritual process, Collins (2004, p. 48) notes that the common action or event that sparks a ritual interaction includes "stereotyped formalities", such as those that might occur during small talk (J. Coupland, 2000).

A critical tenet of IRT is that successful interaction rituals have positive outcomes, even if the interactions themselves are fleeting or seemingly meaningless. IRT proposes that interaction rituals meeting certain criteria produce positive energy in the form of "collective effervescence," which in turn leads to outcomes such as group solidarity, emotional energy in participants, symbols of social relationships, and commonly accepted standards of behavior. Although IRT refers to this as "emotional energy", it is not synonymous with the conventional definition of emotion in the literature (e.g., Frijda, 1986, Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996) (Collins, 2004, p. 119). Whereas the prevalent conceptualization of emotion in the management literature is characterized by its strong hedonic tone (e.g., positive or negative; Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996), the shared emotion in that results from successful interaction rituals in IRT may not be strongly valenced. Therefore, it may not represent one of the emotions that is often studied in management research (e.g., pride, excitement, envy, etc.). An example in Collins's (2004) introduction of IRT is the potential of interaction rituals to produce the emotion of "ordinariness" (p. 106), which is a possible response to routine small talk in the workplace (Holmes, 2000a), and which highlights the applicability of IRT to the study of small talk at work.

There are elements of IRT that suggest workplace small talk may have either positive or negative effects. With respect to positive effects, when small talk is successful, it can create a shared reality between participants (Cheepen, 1988). This parallels Collins's (1993) explanation that, "collective symbols are items on which a group has focused attention during an IR [interaction ritual]…in personal interactions, particular items of conversation become emblems of membership" (p. 212). Given that collective symbols are a key component of interaction rituals, small talk's potential to create a shared reality—for example, mutually focused attention on unseasonably pleasant weather—makes it likely to be a successful, energy producing interaction ritual. This potential is intimated in Collins's (2004) work on IRT, which suggests that "everyday sociability" (p. 50) is an example of interaction rituals. Moreover, Collins (1993) proposes that, "collective symbols tend to be used repeatedly in IRs [interaction rituals] of a well-established group and hence to be recharged with feelings of solidarity; the symbols and the interactions are chained together over time" (pp. 212-213). A common workplace example of this type of collective symbol production might be discussion of a local sports team, whose wins and losses affect both small talk participants by virtue of their shared membership in the local community. Over the course of a season, the subject of the sports team might become a collective symbol for the coworkers, which both provides energy and helps to regenerate their feelings of solidarity. Taken together, these examples highlight IRT's support for previous research on small talk's association with relationship creation and solidarity (e.g., J. Coupland, 2000; Malinowski, 1923/1945).

Other tenets of IRT imply that workplace small talk might have negative effects on employee outcomes. Collins (1993, 2004) notes that interaction rituals may fail in a number of ways, and that failed interaction rituals are unlikely to produce emotional energy. To the extent that failed rituals require resources to produce without creating emotional energy, unsuccessful (e.g., counter-normative) small talk may lead to a net loss of emotional energy (Collins, 1993). Examples of this potential for workplace small talk are scattered throughout extant research. For instance, many people fail to provide socially-expected responses during workplace small talk (Holmes, 2003). A manifestation of this might be an individual responding to a scripted, "Hi, how are you" greeting with a detailed account of their actual well-being (J. Coupland, 2000). This is counter to the normative small talk script because it is generally understood that "howareyou [sic]" is merely a scripted greeting (Schegloff, 1986), and thus taking the question at face value would be a deviation from the socially expected script.

Beyond counter-normative responses to scripted small talk, the literature on small talk as strategic or forced (e.g., as part of instrumental networking) also parallels work in IRT that suggests an exchange might have negative effects. Specifically, Collins (2004) notes that interaction rituals that are enacted because of reluctant obligation may not produce emotional energy. Indeed, this is consistent with the emotional labor perspective on small talk (e.g., Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002), which highlights the fact that workplace small talk, in particular, may be enacted because participants feel compelled to do so. Compounding this potential for net energy loss is the fact that forced small talk may not involve a mutual focus of attention. The initiating person might be concentrating on what to say next (in the case of trying to build an instrumental connection), and thus

the content of the conversation is unlikely to create a truly shared focus of attention that is required for interaction rituals to produce energy. Taken together, these examples highlight the ways in which IRT might predict both positive or negative outcomes of small talk, and underscore the need for considering the types and motivations of small talk.

A Brief History of Small Talk

The study of small talk spans multiple disciplines and dates back at least 100 years. References have been made to small talk in a number of contexts, such as the condemnation of small talk in Chaucer's medieval poetry (Phillips, 2007). In more recent history, scholars have recognized the centrality of small talk in Creole culture during the antebellum period in the American South (Tregle, 1952), and its prominence in the typical "machismo" display of masculinity common in Latin American cultures (Stevens, 1973). Indeed, the phenomenon of small talk appears to be both wide-spread and well-established, and its general meaning is understood across a wide variety of contexts and cultures (Bubel, 2006).

Malinowski (1923) coined the term "phatic communication," defined as "a type of speech in which ties of union are created by a mere exchange of words" (Malinowski, reprinted in 1945, p. 315), during his study of language in the Melanesian tribes of Eastern New Guinea. During his broader study of linguistic functions, he was struck by the prevalence of small talk, and proposed that this discourse served a previously unstudied function. After describing specific contexts in which small talk occurred, including sitting around the fire after a day of work and socializing during work breaks, Malinowski further noted that phatic communication in Melanesian tribes closely

paralleled the types of rhetorical activity he had previously observed in upper-middle class English society. Based on this comparison, Malinowski proposed that although manifestations varied depending on the national culture, phatic communication was a universal phenomenon that served similar relational and social functions across contexts.

In the decades following Malinowski's research, a number of other communication scholars began to investigate the phenomenon of small talk. Two seminal scholars are specifically cited as contributing foundational research upon which the small talk literature has been built. First, Goffman (1959) introduced the concepts of "front stage discourse"—which reflects primary work-related or socially appropriate conversation—and "backstage discourse"—which represents conversation that is conducted informally but nevertheless crucial to facilitating front stage discourse. It is the backstage discourse that has been foundational in conceptualizing the importance of small talk (J. Coupland, 2000). For example, Vaughan (2007) relied on this metaphor in her research on teachers' interactions outside of the classroom. She notes that teachers' speech with students in the classroom is considered front stage discourse, while their small talk with one another outside the classroom is backstage discourse. In a non-work example, Coates (2000) relies on the backstage metaphor in her examination of girls' social discourse. She finds that girls and women engage in backstage talk with close friends, in which they speak in ways that do not correspond to traditional, socially-sanctioned notions of femininity. She contrasts this with their front stage talk, which represents gender-conforming speech they have with those who are not close friends.

Laver's (1975) research has also been foundational to the study of small talk. He acknowledged Malinowski's original emphasis on creating relationships, but extended

the study of small talk by emphasizing the transitional function of small talk in discourse. Specifically, he proposed that small talk usually came at the beginning or end of an exchange, and believed that this position within a communicative sequence highlighted its importance in facilitating transition during conversation (see also J. Coupland, 2000). As reviewed in the following sections, rhetoricians have found that the transitional function of small talk is a core component of its role in discourse.

Defining Small Talk

Scholars have defined small talk in a number of ways. Malinowski's seminal work on phatic communication, defined earlier, is often considered synonymous with terms such as, "chit-chat", "casual conversation" (Walsh, 2007), and "schmoozing" (Hamermesh, 1990; Morris, Nadler, Kurtzberg & Thompson, 2002). However, there is some discrepancy in the literature about the exact boundaries of small talk. For instance, most people consider small talk to be synonymous with phatic communication, although others consider small talk to be a narrower subset of phatic communication. Schneider (1987) proposes that small talk refers to "entire dialogues" of "ritualized formulas" (p. 250), such as a conversation between coworkers, whereas phatic communication may include any utterances or smaller communicative acts that meet Malinowski's (1923/1945) original definition, such as saying hello in the hallway. Holmes (2000a) proposes that conversation at work can be classified on a continuum, whose scale anchors include "core business talk", at one extreme, then "work-related talk", "social talk", and finally "phatic communication." She defines small talk as talk that occurs at either the "social talk" or "phatic communication" anchors of the continuum. While this is a useful way to categorize workplace discourse, adopting this definition does not help

differentiate between small talk and other forms of "social talk," such as the more intimate discourse that occurs between friends at work.

Common small talk topics may include weather, sports, weekend plans, joking, and gossip (e.g., Chun et al., 2013; J. Coupland, 2000; N. Coupland & Ylanne-McEwen, 2000; Epley & Schroeder, 2014; Fayard & Weeks, 2007; Gildberg, 2013; Holmes, 2000a; Malinowski, 1945; Mattar & Wachsmuth, 2012; Pullin, 2010). While individual topics can vary based on culture (Chun et al., 2013; Malinowski, 1923/1945; Schneider, 1987), some topics are generally considered off-limits for small talk, such as "death, (serious) illnesses, also sex and income" (Schneider, 1987, p. 251). Among academics, there is some debate about the boundaries of small talk in respect to other literatures. Specifically, while many scholars consider gossip part of small talk (see Schneider, 1987, for a debate on this inclusion), there is a literature that has developed on gossip that is completely separate from the small talk literature. Based on my review of the literature, I define small talk as *superficial or trivial communication that does not involve task-related exchange of information*.

Attributes of Small Talk

One of the defining features of small talk is that it is scripted (Beinstein, 1975; Chun et al., 2013; J. Coupland, 2003). Beinstein (1975) notes that "small talk is a set of messages like any other, except that it is highly ritualized and predictable. Once learned, small talk can become a resource that facilitates confident entrance into novel social encounters because there is great certainty associated with its cycle of exchanges" (p. 147). This is evidenced in the fact that some topics of conversation are nearly universal in their classification as small talk, such as discussion about the weather (N. Coupland & &

Ylänne-McEwen, 2000). Beinstein (1975) notes that participants benefit from the ritualized nature of small talk. She proposes that participants, "can control disagreement and prevent conflict by performing this conversational ritual. They can satisfy needs for human contact with little effort or chance of self-disclosure." (p. 148). Indeed, N. Coupland and Ylänne-McEwen (2000) note that the weather is an architypal small talk topic precisely because it is unlikely to offend the participants. In their structural analysis of small talk during supermarket checkout encounters, Kuiper and Flindall (2000) find that small talk is extremely formulaic, with little variation in structure or function.

Further evidence of small talk's predictability is found in research on failure to perform small talk in the workplace. For example, Holmes and colleagues (e.g., Holmes, 2003; Holmes & Fillary, 2000) examined small talk exchanges of workers with intellectual disabilities. They concluded that intellectually impaired employees found it challenging to adhere to a socially accepted "script." Holmes (2003) gave an example of a worker who did not use the accepted scripted small talk (pp. 72-73), by interrupting his conversational partner, switching to instrumental topics too soon, and failing to provide more substance to continue the small talk when expected to do so. Holmes noted that this failure to keep to a conventional small talk script was noticeable to employees and decreased the chances of employees with intellectual disabilities being fully accepted by their peers.

Another notable characteristic of small talk is that its duration is set by the interactional partner with more power (Holmes, 2000a). For instance, in her research on small talk during meetings, Mullany (2006) found that it was only the chair of the meeting who initiated small talk, and similarly the chair of the meeting signaled the end

of small talk and return to instrumental conversation. In another qualitative study, Holmes (2000a) described supervisor-subordinate small talk interactions at the beginning of the day, whereby the supervisor initially signaled that small talk would occur and signaled the end of the small talk by turning the conversation to work-related topics. These examples stand in contrast to small talk among friends with equal social status. For example, in their study of small talk between friends, Knutson and Ayers (1986) found that both partners stopped and started episodes of small talk within their conversation to transition between topics.

The final attribute of small talk that should be noted is its link with gender (Coates, 2000; Coupland, 2000; Holmes & Marra, 2004; Mullany, 2006). In particular, gossip, which is sometimes considered a form of small talk, is considered a characteristically female style of communication (McDowell, 2015). Small talk is often conceptualized as diametrically opposed to task-oriented discourse (Holmes & Marra, 2004). Because task-oriented discourse has been traditionally associated with male professionals (Holmes & Marra, 2004), small talk, which is relationally-oriented (Malinowski, 1923/1945) is seen as a feminine discourse (Coates, 2000; Holmes & Marra, 2004). J. Coupland (2000) proposes that, "the deprecation of small talk and the deprecation of women have been mutually reinforcing social processes," (p. 7) and that it is the inherently gendered nature of small talk that has contributed to its relative marginalization in the study of organizational communications.

Related Literature

There are a few established literatures that are closely related to the study of small talk, but have nevertheless developed independently. I briefly review three of these literatures below.

Gossip. Gossip refers to "evaluative talk about a person who is not present" (Eder & Enke, 1991, p. 494). While it is often assumed to be a negative form of communication, it is not necessarily so (Brady, Brown, & Liang, 2017; Grosser, Lopez-Kidwell, & Labianca, 2010). For instance, people may gossip about strangers (Baumeister, Zhang, & Vohs, 2004), such as political figures or celebrities, which more closely resembles talking about the news than the stereotypical act of negative gossip. In fact, researchers (e.g., Baumeister et al., 2004; Brady et al., 2017) have recently recognized that gossip may have beneficial consequences in the workplace, such as creating bonds between employees and helping them gather information about their surroundings (Baumeister et al., 2004). Grosser and colleagues (2010) found that coworkers who are not close friends generally engaged in positive gossip, whereas friends engaged in both positive and negative gossip in the workplace. While it is true that not all gossip is considered small talk (e.g., discussion between close work friends about a problem with a supervisor), trivial gossip is often considered a form of small talk (Malinowski, 1923/1945). Therefore, the literature on workplace gossip is directly relevant to understanding the functions of small talk at work.

Politeness. A body of literature has also examined the role of politeness in the workplace (e.g., Holmes, 2000b; Holmes & Marra, 2004; Mullany, 2006). This work is largely based on Goffman's (1959; 1967) foundational work on "face needs" or the

"public self-image that every member [of society] wants to claim for himself," (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 311) and Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory. Brown and Levinson propose that each individual has a "positive face," which refers to "the want of every member [of society] that his wants be desirable to at least some others" (p. 312), and that engaging in polite discourse is a way to affirm another's positive face. Politeness theory also describes "negative face," or the need that people have for their "autonomy to be respected" (Holmes & Marra, 2004, p. 379). As Holmes (2000b) explains, small talk in the workplace is a clear manifestation of attending to a relational partner's positive face needs, as it is intended to make another person feel valued and acknowledged. Moreover, small talk is uniquely sensitive to relational partners' negative face needs, in that prototypical small talk topics (e.g., sports, weather) engage partners without pressuring them to reveal personal information. Given this inextricable link between politeness and small talk, it is clear that politeness theory and its related literature also serves to inform the understanding of small talk in the workplace.

Interpersonal relationships. In the course of examining small talk—and workplace communication more broadly—it is important to clarify the distinction between interactions and relationships, which are related yet distinct constructs. There is significant variation in the connection between relationships and interaction across disciplines, and a full examination of those discrepancies is beyond the scope of this dissertation. In this study, I conceptualize relationships as "an aggregate set of interactions between two people…that can be characterized as positive and/or negative or lacking affective tone" (Methot et al., 2017, pp. 1793-1794). As this quote illustrates, regular interactions may lead to relationships, but they are distinct episodic occurrences

that need not culminate in a permanent connection. In his seminal work on the "strength of weak ties," Granovetter (1973) proposes that even repeated interactions, such as those between neighbors, do not necessarily culminate in the formation of a relationship. These types of repeated interactions, sometimes termed "nodding relationships" (Granovetter, 1973; Lofland, 1995), often involve small talk[1], and thus it is worthwhile to briefly summarize the characteristics of these connections to provide context for the following discussion on small talk.

Acquaintances, also referred to as "weak ties," (Granovetter, 1973) "peripheral ties" or "consequential strangers," (Fingerman, 2009) are an important social resource. Indeed, these ties often connect individuals with disparate groups that provide access to novel information and additional opportunities (Adler & Kwon, 2002; Burt, 1992; Granovetter, 1973). They can spur benefits such as increased creativity (Burt, 2004; Perry-Smith & Mannucci, 2017), information about new professional opportunities (Granovetter, 1973), or provide pleasant diversions that are not offered by close ties (Fingerman, 2009). Weak ties are also beneficial because, unlike close ties, they do not require much energy to maintain, and thus provide benefits and access to resources without necessitating significant time or emotional investment (Burt, 1992, Methot et al., 2017).

While the benefits of acquaintances sometimes inform the dynamics of small talk, the remainder of this paper will discuss small talk as an independent communicative act,

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[1] Goldsmith and Baxter (1996) contend that relationships comprised solely of repeated small talk interactions can actually be classified as "small talk relationships". They claim that, "when partners enact small talk, that is the nature of their relationship; an ongoing pattern of conversations that are limited to small talk constitutes a particular kind of relationship between the parties, and they reproduce this relationship type every time they engage in small talk" (p. 89). While I acknowledge this definition exists, it is relatively particular to the constitutive orientation of the communication literature (see Brummans, Cooren, Robichaud, & Taylor, 2014, for a review of this perspective), and not representative of the relationship literature broadly. Therefore, I acknowledge this difference in conceptualization across disciplines, yet follow Methot et al. (2017) in fully distinguishing between interactions and relationships.

separate from the strength or weakness of the ties in which it occurs. Episodes of small talk may occur between complete strangers, such as passengers on a train (Epley & Schroeder, 2014), and between close friends, such as superficial discussion before delving into serious topics (Knutson & Ayers, 1986). Indeed, the function of small talk varies depending on the relational context in which it occurs (J. Coupland, 2000).

Functions of Small Talk

Transitions. One of the primary functions of small talk is to mark transitions (J. Coupland, Coupland, & Robinson, 1992; J. Coupland, 2000; Laver, 1975). Laver (1975) notes that small talk often occurs at the boundaries of discourse, such as greetings before entering into more serious topics, or casual conversation toward the end of discussion. Small talk may also occur during the transition between one subject and another within the same conversational act (e.g., Knutson & Ayers, 1986; Mullany, 2006). For instance, in her research on small talk during business meetings, Mullany (2006) observed several instances of small talk in between discussion of the official topics on the meeting agenda. Knutson and Ayers (1986) similarly found that friends often used small talk as a form of light conversation to transition between, and momentarily break from, their discussion of serious topics.

Small talk also marks more visible transitions, such as the beginning or end of a conversation (J. Coupland et al., 1992), meeting (Holmes, 2000a; Mirivel & Tracy, 2005) or workday (Beinstein, 1975; Holmes 2000a; Holmes, 2003). Jaworski (2000) notes that "small talk…is a label typically associated with transitional aspects of conversations such as openings and closings, which include greetings, self-introductions, recollections of previous meetings, expressions of concern for members of addressee's family, etc." (p.

111). In their study of elderly adults, J. Coupland and colleagues (1992) found that small talk occurred in response to the greeting of "how are you?" prior to discussion about elderly individuals' medical situations. In an organizational context, many scholars have observed that small talk specifically occurs in transition to and from meetings. For example, Mirivel and Tracy (2005) found that "pre-meeting talk" was crucial to helping employees establish friendly rapport prior to the instrumental requirements of a formal meeting, and Holmes (2000a) observed that almost every meeting in her study was bookended by episodes of small talk between employees. In an even more visible transition, small talk often occurs at the beginning of the workday, prior to employees beginning their tasks (J. Coupland, 2000).

Signaling. Small talk may serve a signaling function, especially in the case of small talk with acquaintances or strangers. When first meeting someone, small talk can be used to avoid a silence that is considered rude or threatening (Goldsmith & Baxter, 1996; Jaworski, 2000), and it can reduce uncertainty in social exchanges (Goldsmith & Baxter, 1996; Laver, 1975). Malinowski's (1923/1945) original explanation of phatic communication included a long discourse on the threatening nature of silence, and he posited that one of the primary functions of small talk was to signal positive intentions by filling the silence that would occur absent such discussion. Laver (1975) proposes that small talk helps individuals gain a shared understanding of one another and signals positive intentions. J. Coupland (2003) notes that the signaling function of small talk is often present in service encounters, where the worker and customer signal the positive intentions that will define their interactions through initial small talk (see also Beinstein, 1975).

Distraction. Small talk can serve as a distraction from instrumental tasks. In their observational study of surgeons, Sevdalis, Healey, and Vincent (2007) found that small talk accounted for half of the discourse during surgery that was unrelated to the patient. They noted that this talk could sometimes be distracting, and concluded that discussion in the operating room should be more carefully coordinated to reduce distractions. Moreover, they found that the identity of participants in small talk impacted the degree of distraction it caused: small talk was more distracting when initiated by external staff than by those conducting the surgery, and was more distracting when targeting anesthetists and nurses than when addressed to surgeons. Importantly, some scholars (Holmes & Stubbe, 2015; Maynard & Hudak, 2008; Walsh, 2007) note that the distracting nature of small talk can be beneficial in the workplace, such as doctors' intentional use of small talk to distract patients during unpleasant procedures (Maynard & Hudak, 2008). A more detailed discussion of strategic distraction with small talk is presented in the section on antecedents of small talk.

Facilitating instrumental communication. Many studies of small talk note that the presence of small talk "oils the social (interpersonal) wheels" (e.g., Holmes, 2000b, 2003; Holmes & Fillary, 2000; Holmes & Marra, 2004). Indeed, small talk facilitates instrumental communication in two ways: (1) by developing the solidarity, trust, and positive affect necessary to improve instrumental communication, and (2) by providing an opportunity for employees to speak about work-related topics. With respect to developing positive regard, several studies illustrate how small talk helps employees find common ground (Cheepen, 1988). For instance, in her qualitative study of a multilingual workplace, Pullin (2010) found that engaging in small talk allowed employees to build

solidarity by discovering things they had in common and developing positive regard for one another. Chun and colleagues (2013) note that this process is particularly pronounced when a new employee joins the organization. In this case, small talk helps the new employee learn the organizational norms and customs that subsequently enable instrumental collaboration. In both of these studies, the small talk occurred between groups of multicultural employees, where commonalities are less obvious and there are higher barriers to effective communication.

Second, because employees switch between small talk and instrumental conversation fluidly within the same conversation (Knutson & Ayers, 1986), episodes of small talk may provide an opportunity for instrumental topics to be discussed. For example, in their study of school teachers, Clement and Vanderberghe (2000) observed that when teachers engaged in small talk during breaks, this small talk often led them to share ideas for improving the school. In another context, Driessen and Jansen (2013) discuss the importance of small talk in ethnographic fieldwork. They claim that much of their data access was procured because of instrumental communication interspersed with small talk in the field.

Maintaining relationships. Although small talk is considered trivial conversation, it can serve an important function in maintaining relationships (e.g., J. Coupland, 2000; Malinowski, 1923/1945). The clearest evidence of this is in the literature on familial relationships. In their research on long-distance couples, Gerstel and Gross (1984) found that the lack of small talk created by physical distance was a key component in their dissatisfaction. As Baumeister and Leary (1995) observed about this research, "Couples seemed to find it ironic that small talk over trivial matters would turn out to be something

they missed, but as Gerstel and Gross noted, these seemingly insubstantial interactions are believed to be an important aspect without which the marital bond is not fully satisfactory or fulfilling" (p. 512). In related research on long-distance family relationships, Drew and Chilton (2000) found that small talk was an important part of the relationship maintenance act of calling to catch up. In their qualitative study of mother-daughter phone calls, they found that seemingly meaningless conversation about current happenings such as the weather, plants growing in the garden, and similarly minor news served to create feelings of closeness. They concluded that these feelings of closeness helped participants overcome the negative feelings created by physical distance.

Knutson and Ayers's (1986) rhetorical analysis of small talk in friendships provides a detailed examination of the mechanisms through which small talk maintains relationships. Specifically, they found that small talk was used in multiple ways during conversation between friends. In keeping with the theme of small talk as transition (e.g., Laver, 1975), one important function of small talk was to provide a "gateway" into serious topics of conversation and a break between these topics. Moreover, Knutson and Ayers found that the content of small talk between friends served to validate the relationship. For instance, when one friend indicated concern for their friend or agreement with the friend's perspective, the affirmation served to reinforce the valued nature of the friendship.

Even in less intimate relationships, specific types of small talk can serve to maintain relationships. For instance, it is common for acquaintances to inquire about the other person's well-being during small talk, including questions about their health and the well-being of their loved ones (e.g., children; Tracy & Haspel, 2004). Employees,

particularly salespeople and those engaged in long-term business-to-business relationships, may even call valued contacts for the sole purpose of conducting small talk and catching up (Forret & Dougherty, 2001). These types of conversation convey concern for the relational partner, which in turn reinforces the existing relationship.

In the following sections, I will discuss several antecedents of small talk in the workplace. Some of these antecedents are contextual (e.g., office design characteristics), while others are driven by individuals' motivations in a given communicative act. Below, I summarize extant research that has described contextual and individual antecedents of small talk.

Contextual Antecedents of Small Talk

There are some contexts in which social customs suggest that small talk is required. In general, western cultures expect that people who are physically close to one another will engage in small talk instead of standing in silence (Jaworski, 2000; Kiesler & Cummings, 2002; Malinowski, 1923/1945). Other cultures require varying degrees of small talk in the beginning of a meeting (e.g., Yang, 2012), and it is generally understood that failing to engage in pleasantries conveys rudeness and causes offense (Holmes & Stubbe, 2015).

In the workplace, office design influences the extent to which employees may find themselves in close proximity. Management scholars have long emphasized the importance of physical characteristics in enabling and constraining employee behaviors, and have investigated these dynamics for nearly 50 years (e.g., Grant & Parker, 2009; Oldham & Brass, 1979). Indeed, the pressure to engage in small talk based on physical characteristics is so strong that Monge, Rothman, Eisenberg, Miller, and Kirste (1985)

define organizational proximity as, "two or more people being in the same location where there is both the opportunity *and psychological obligation for face-to-face communication*" (p. 1129, emphasis added). With respect to enabling communication broadly, several qualitative studies suggest physical conditions that increase the likelihood that communication will occur (e.g., Elsbach & Bechky, 2007; Fayard & Weeks, 2007; Kim & de Dear, 2013; Oldham & Brass, 1979; Sailer, 2014; Zalesny & Farace, 1987). While a full review of the office design literature is beyond the scope of this dissertation, I summarize two exemplar studies below to illustrate the physical workplace characteristics that enable small talk.

In their research, Fayard and Weeks (2007) found that physical artifacts required by multiple employees (e.g., copy machines, water coolers) were instrumental in creating an opportunity for small talk. They specifically reference the importance of physical proximity in this process, noting, "if a person is standing at the photocopier making copies and a colleague approaches with some documents to copy and stands waiting nearby, the two people might feel an obligation to acknowledge each other's presence with words of greeting or even feel obliged to exchange small talk or engage in conversation" (p. 608). Similarly, in Sailer's (2014) qualitative work on architectural configuration of a German office, she found that people passing in the hallway often felt obliged to make small talk. In that particular company, this obligation was sometimes seen as an annoyance, because employees were often walking in the hallway to take care of urgent business and viewed small talk as a hindrance to their work.

Shifting focus to the interpersonal context of organizations, some business activities involve a clear social expectation of small talk. For instance, business associates

are generally expected to make small talk during a business lunch in addition to their instrumental communication (Cunha, Cabral-Cardoso, & Clegg, 2008; Fine, 2005). Small talk during a business lunch may include polite remarks about the restaurant or food served (Cunha et al., 2008), in addition to archetypal topics such as the weather. Similarly, employees who are sitting next to one another before a meeting may feel an obligation to engage in small talk while they wait for the meeting to begin (Mirivel & Tracy, 2005). In service jobs, employees are often encouraged to make small talk with customers because customers in certain contexts expect employees to be engaging and friendly (e.g., retail settings, Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002; airplane travel, Hochschild, 1993).

Motivations for Making Small Talk

An examination of literature across disciplines suggests that individuals have varied reasons for engaging in small talk. Indeed, in his conversation analysis of response tokens, McCarthy (2003) notes, "small talk episodes were something participants worked hard at and were not something just tossed in for good measure" (p. 34).

Interpersonal connection. Individuals engage in small talk in order to feel connected with others (Malinowski, 1923/1945; Cole, 2015). For example, developing an ability to make small talk is recognized as an important step to reduce loneliness in diverse contexts—from school children (Schilit & Nichols, 1988) to self-employed workers (Clark, 2018). In their study of friendship development at work, Sias and Cahill (1998) found a positive association between discussion of non-work topics and interpersonal closeness. For example, when describing becoming closer with a colleague, one of their participants explained, "we talked more about things than work, other stuff,

news or whatever, music" (p. 285). Beyond making new connections, Sias, Pedersen, Gallagher, and Kopaneva (2012) found that friendly coworkers sometimes make small talk to maintain interpersonal connections in the midst of a precarious social situation. The latter study parallels research outside of an organizational context, such as research on family relationships that finds people engage in small talk when they would like to feel verbally connected to a relational partner, either interspersed with—or in lieu of—substantive conversation (Blum-Kulka, 2000; Drew & Chilton, 2000).

Impression management. Often, people engage in small talk in an effort to create the appearance that they possess certain attributes or attitudes. For instance, some bosses make small talk with their employees deliberately so that employees believe that the supervisor cares about their well-being (e.g., Monteneux & Porte, 1980). In fact, in a popular scale of impression management (Turnley & Bolino, 2001), one item in the scale asks respondents the degree to which they "Take an interest in other group members' personal lives to show them that you are friendly" (p. 354), which could include such small talk topics as asking about weekend plans or inquiring about family's wellbeing (Collins, 2004). This motivation is part of a long-standing cultural belief that it is sometimes necessary to make small talk in order to be seen as likable (Fine, 2005; Shaughnessy et al., 2015).

Networking. Related to impression management, there is a growing body of research that investigates networking (Bensaou, Galunic, & Jonczyk-Sédès, 2014; Casciaro, Gino & Kouchaki, 2014; Forret & Dougherty, 2001; Kuwabara et al., 2018; Porter & Woo, 2015; Wolff & Kim, 2012), or "the purposeful creation of social ties in support of task and professional goals" (Casciaro et al., 2014, p. 705). Networking is

related to impression management because it involves the strategic use of small talk to appear likeable and similar to instrumentally-beneficial others. Indeed, small talk is often used in networking because it offers individuals the power to connect as equals, even if they are at vastly different levels in the organization (Fine, 2005). An example of this is an exchange in which a line employee might connect with a supervisor over their shared discomfort during a heat wave. The emphasis of the networking literature has been on the antecedents and consequences of networking behavior as a whole, which is comprised of activities such as attending professional workshops, calling business contacts to keep in touch, and socializing with the intention of building helpful connections (Forret & Dougherty, 2001). Other examples of "networking behaviors might include, for example, taking current and potential clients to dinners and sporting events [where small talk is expected to occur]" (Forret & Dougherty, 2001, p. 290). Importantly, although not the focus of many networking studies, almost all networking studies—either implicitly or explicitly—indicate that small talk is a key component of networking. For instance, in their scale to measure networking behaviors, Forret and Dougherty (2001) note that talking with coworkers about sports, stopping by colleagues' offices to say hello, and calling work acquaintances just "to keep in touch" are considered prototypical networking behaviors. To that end, it can be inferred that many individuals engage in small talk for the purpose of networking, and thus the literature on networking offers great insight to the motivations for small talk.

Research in this field has found that individuals systematically differ in their propensity to engage in networking behaviors. For example, in their inductive study of networking behaviors Bensaou and colleagues (2014) found three types of networking

profiles: people who networked often, people who never networked, and those who networked selectively. For instance, in the group of people that the researchers termed "Purists"—those who did not like networking—participants were clear that they did not engage in small talk just for instrumental purposes. This sentiment is made explicit in a quote from one participant, who explains, "I always make it clear to my network that I am not calling them once a month or once every three months, but I will give them a call when I've got time and when it makes sense. *The worst thing, at least that I experience, is that I get a call just for getting a call. It's just blah, blah, blah*" (p. 41, emphasis added). The negative sentiments about small talk expressed by this group are relatively common. For instance, Casciaro and colleagues (2014) found evidence that engaging in work-related networking behaviors can make individuals feel "dirty", and can thus be seen as aversive and unpleasant. Similarly, Kuwabara and colleagues (2018) propose a theoretical model that accounts for the tension between laypeople's understanding of the importance of networking and their reluctance to actually network.

Boredom. There is evidence that sometimes individuals have small talk at work simply to pass the time or prevent boredom (Fine, 1990; Loukidou, Loan-Clarke & Daniels, 2009; Roy, 1959). This is often the case in work contexts that do not provide adequate mental stimulation, spurring employees to engage in small talk with one another during work to increase their levels of mental stimulation and prevent the subjective experience of boredom (Spector & Fox, 2010). For instance, Fine (1990) found that restaurant workers who were bored during slow periods often engaged in "play", or joking and bantering that could be defined as small talk. This is consistent with experimental findings by Isaac, Sansone and Smith (1999) which indicate that the

presence of others during the performance of a task increase participants' interest in the task, and which suggests that "off-task" behaviors such as small talk can improve participants' motivation. Because small talk is formulaic and does not require much cognitive energy, it may be used to cope with boredom because it provides mental stimulation without taking too much mental energy away from an employee's work task.

De-emphasis. A common reason for engaging in small talk is to deemphasize bad news or uncomfortable subjects. In their research on conversations between married couples, Honeycutt and Wiemann (1999) found that couples often engaged in small talk to deemphasize uncomfortable situations and prevent arguments. In an organizational setting, substantial research has identified this antecedent of small talk in a medical setting (e.g., Gildberg, 2013; Macdonald, 2016; Maynard & Hudak, 2008; Penn & Watermeyer, 2012; Walsh, 2007), where doctors must frequently deliver bad news to patients or engage in sensitive discussions. One example of this is Walsh's (2007) research on communication in a speech language pathology clinic. In this research, Walsh observed practitioners making small talk (e.g., about their hobbies) as a way to ease into discussing a sensitive therapy. Interestingly, Walsh also observed patients engaging in small talk as a way to deemphasize uncomfortable topics. For instance, a schizophrenic patient used small talk (in this case, humor) to deemphasize the fact that he was feeling so troubled he contemplated signing up for inpatient psychiatric treatment.

These findings are consistent with Maynard and Hudak's (2008) research on small talk between surgeons and their patients. According to their findings, small talk can not only distract from sensitive topics of conversation, but can "disattend to the movements, bodily invasions, and recording activities functional for the instrumental tasks of

medicine" (p. 661). For instance, doctors in this study engaged in small talk with patients during physical exams to distract from unpleasant poking and prodding. Penn and Watermeyer (2012) extended this line of research by studying translators for non-native language speakers in a medical setting. They found that the translators engaged in small talk in the form of "asides" while translating for similar reasons that doctors engaged in small talk with their patients.

In non-medical workplaces, using small talk to soften an uncomfortable topic can take several forms. For instance, in their research on politeness, Holmes and Stubbe (2015) note that employees may engage in small talk with their supervisors before making a sensitive request, such as time off or a desired promotion. Similarly, managers may use small talk to cushion a directive to their subordinates that could be received unfavorably (Holmes & Stubbe, 2015). Supervisors may also use small talk to deemphasize unpleasant discussion, such as easing into an informal evaluation of an employee's poor work performance (e.g., Roy, 1959).

Obligation. Employees make also make small talk out of obligation, for example, due to instructions from management or adherence to strong norms. For instance, in many service settings, making small talk with customers is considered an important part of providing good customer service (Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002). Examples of such contexts include beauty salons (Beinstein, 1975; Toerien & Kitzinger, 2007), retail establishments (Gremler & Gwinner, 2008), and restaurants (Hallett, 2003). Requirements to perform small talk are considered alongside requirements to perform related behaviors, such as smiling and giving compliments (Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002). Taken together, these activities often involve emotional labor—the requirement to

display emotions that they do not have (Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002; Hochschild, 1993)—as employees are required to feign interest in conversations in which they are not actually interested. For instance, Hallett (2003) talked about servers in restaurants "buttering up" customers through small talk (p. 712) in addition to performing the required tasks of collecting customers' food orders and delivering food to the table. Research in these scenarios has consistently found that performing such emotional labor leads to a host of negative outcomes, including emotional exhaustion and poor job performance.

 Power. Employees may use small talk in an effort to exert power without risking direct confrontation. This is especially true when an employee lacks power, either because of their formal status (Holmes, 2000b) or because they have a characteristic that is socially devalued (e.g., stigmatized gender; Mullany, 2006). For example, Holmes's (2000b) research on humor in the workplace finds that subordinates engage in joking that could be classified as small talk in an effort to resist organizationally-sanctioned power imbalances. Specifically, subordinates use this rhetorical strategy to claim power and resist unfair treatment by their supervisors without being perceived as insubordinate (see also Holmes & Stubbe, 2015). As an example, Mullany (2006) conducted a qualitative study on female managers and small talk, finding that although female managers had formal power, they felt the need to use small talk to resist the unspoken power deficit they experienced based on their gender. Related to employees' motivations for making small talk, several scholars have examined the outcomes of small talk. Below I review interdisciplinary research on the frequently-identified outcomes of engaging in small talk.

Consequences of Small Talk

Belonging. Even the most basic instances of small talk can help people feel more connected to those around them (Epley & Schroeder, 2014; Sandstrom & Dunn, 2014a). In one experiment, Sandstrom and Dunn (2014a) instructed subjects in one group of coffee shop customers to make their interactions with the barista "social" (e.g., involving small talk), while they instructed subjects in the other group to "avoid unnecessary conversation" with the barista (p. 438). They found that subjects who made small talk were happier and, crucially, they found that this increase in positive affect was mediated by a sense of belonging. In other words, even though the instances of small talk were brief and involved a stranger, participants still felt a sense that they belonged. Vaughan (2007) found that teachers' small talk helped them develop a sense of professional belonging and camaraderie. In his study of male nurses, McDowell (2015) found that small talk between male and female nurses led to the men's sense of belonging in a professional context where men are normally stigmatized.

The impact of small talk on belonging is underscored in research on populations that do not adeptly perform small talk. For example, in their study of immigrants in Australia, Yates and Major (2015) note that the inability of non-native speakers to conduct small talk is a major barrier to their sense of belonging in the new country (see also Holmes, 2000c). This parallels research on workers with an intellectual disability (e.g., Holmes, 2003; Holmes & Fillary, 2000) whose lack of belonging is perpetuated by an inability to successfully engage in small talk. Similarly, expatriates who struggle to adapt to the small talk norms in their host country may also feel a lack of belonging at work as a result of their inability to make small talk (Chun et al., 2013).

Positive affect. According to recent experimental research, a primary consequence of small talk is positive affect (e.g., Dunn et al., 2007; Epley & Schroeder, 2014; Sandstrom & Dunn, 2014a). As described previously, Sandstrom and Dunn (2014a) found that small talk with a barista resulted in positive affect for customers. Epley and Schroeder (2014) conducted similar experimental research of riders on the Metra (Chicago's public transit system), and found that subjects who were instructed to engage in small talk with other commuters had more positive affect than those who kept to themselves. Relatedly, Dunn and colleagues (2007) found that individuals experienced more positive affect when they had to put their "best face forward", as is often the case in small talk interactions. In addition to positive affect derived from feelings of belonging, this research suggests that the self-presentation aspect of small talk may explain its positive effect on affect.

Rapport. Perhaps the most common focus of research on small talk has been its role in building rapport. For instance, an emerging body of work examines the role of small talk in building rapport during negotiations (e.g., Ladegaard, 2011; Morris et al., 2002; Nadler, 2004; Shaughnessy, Mislin, & Hentschel, 2015). In general, researchers find that negotiations are more successful when participants engage in small talk, although the effects may be somewhat complicated by gender (Shaughnessy et al., 2015). In two separate projects, Nadler and colleagues (Morris et al., 2002; Nadler, 2004) conducted experiments examining the effect of small talk and rapport in email negotiations between students. In both projects, subjects in the experimental condition were instructed to have a "brief getting-to-know-you" (Nadler, 2004, p. 223) telephone call in which they engaged in a few minutes of small talk prior to beginning email

negotiations. In the control condition, the pair of students negotiated via email without having spoken on the phone. In both experiments the group that had engaged in pre-negotiation small talk had significantly better negotiation outcomes than the control group. Specifically, both studies found that subjects in the experimental condition were more likely to reach an agreement and more likely to have positive feelings toward their negotiation partners. Morris and colleagues (2002) additionally found that rapport mediated these effects, providing direct evidence of the mechanism through which small talk improves negotiation outcomes.

Researchers have also found that the rapport developed through small talk can facilitate improved performance in multiple ways. For instance, the rapport created through small talk is essential in conducting qualitative research (Corbin & Morse, 2003; Driessen & Jansen, 2013). Specifically, Corbin and Morse (2003) note that introductory small talk is an essential first step in the process of unstructured interviews, as it helps develop rapport that leads participants to trust researchers and provide honest answers to questions. Driessen and Jansen (2013) recount how small talk during their ethnographic field research built rapport that ultimately resulted in data access opportunities, increased honesty from participants, and their increased understanding of the research context.

Interestingly, research has also acknowledged contexts in which the rapport created by small talk may negatively impact performance. For example, Posner and Hamstra (2013) found that medical students were significantly worse at performing female pelvic exams when they practiced on a live subject with whom they engaged in small talk, as compared to performing on a plastic replica or a live subject with whom they did not engage in small talk. Based on their observations, the authors believe that

this poor performance can be explained by feelings of awkwardness at simultaneously developing rapport while performing a task in which they preferred to have more social distance from the patient. Finally, small talk might have simultaneously positive and negative effects on performance. In the context of employment interviews, Swider, Harris and Barrick (2016) found that interviewers who develop rapport with applicants through pre-interview small talk were biased in their evaluations of applicants' responses to structured interview questions. However, they note that small talk may still be an important component of the interview process because it (1) sends a signal of the potential employer as being caring, and (2) may carry valid information about applicants' competence and desirable attributes.

Workplace culture. Specific to the work context, research has found that small talk has an impact on workplace culture (Holmes & Marra, 2002; Monteaux & Porte, 1980). For instance, in their study of leaders' use of small talk in the workplace, Monteaux and Porte (1980) found that some leaders intentionally conducted small talk with employees to build a sense of camaraderie. In their survey research, they found that such small talk resulted in a "climate of optimism" within the workplace. In related qualitative research on humor in the workplace, Holmes and Marra (2002) discovered that different workplace subcultures developed as a function of the amount of humorous small talk used in a workgroup, and that more small talk was associated with a more positive climate.

Limitations of the Existing Small Talk Literature

Although there has been excellent research on small talk in the workplace, two primary gaps in the literature remain. First, there is no consensus about the precise

boundaries of small talk. Indeed, whereas small talk is defined as superficial communication that builds interpersonal connections (Malinowski, 1923/1945), both scholarly literature and anecdotal reference to small talk describe small talk in widely varied ways. For instance, some literature on phatic communication explains small talk as including passing greetings, whereas other scholars define small talk as much more involved, including non-routine topics such as gossip (see Schneider, 1987, for a detailed review of this debate). Given that one of the defining features of small talk is that it is scripted, the focus on idiosyncratic small talk (e.g., updates about one's family or hobbies) calls into question researchers' basic assumptions about the boundaries of small talk. It is therefore critical to define small talk in the workplace and distinguish whether there are different types of small talk that have different impacts on employee attitudes and behaviors.

Second, because research on workplace small talk has been largely descriptive (see Keyton, 2017 for a review), previous research has paid limited attention to the effects small talk has on work-related behaviors and attitudes. Importantly, the fragmented literatures in which small talk research resides have diametrically opposed assumptions. In the communications and sociology literatures, small talk is generally assumed to have positive consequences. Communications literature, in particular, emphasizes the facilitation of transitions and the development of rapport between small talk participants. Correspondingly, sociology research (e.g., Collins, 2004) emphasizes the creation of emotional energy through engaging in interaction rituals, and social psychology research has found empirical evidence of the association between small talk and positive affect (Epley & Schroeder, 2014; Sandstrom & Dunn, 2014a).

Contrastingly, various topical literatures in the management discipline function under the assumption that small talk is aversive. Specifically, emotional labor research focuses on the performance of small talk that is required by management, implying that small talk in the workplace is part of a series of positive interpersonal behaviors that do not correspond to the way that employees actually feel. This research is particularly common in research on the service industry. For example, Hochschild (1993) proposes that organizations "manage" their employees' hearts by requiring small talk, which ultimately leads to burnout and exhaustion. Similarly, the networking literature describes small talk as a necessary but aversive component of making instrumental connections (Bensaou et al., 2014). As Kuwabara and colleagues (2018) observe, "perhaps no other word in business is imbued with so much moral ambivalence, sense of futility, or even dread and distaste as 'networking'" (p. 50). Taking these contrasting perspectives together, it is unclear what impact—if any—small talk might have on behaviors in the workplace.

CHAPTER 2
STUDY 1: SCALE DEVELOPMENT AND VALIDATION

The purpose of Study 1 is to determine the nomological network of small talk,

including investigation of its dimensionality (e.g., whether it is unidimensional or

multidimensional). As noted in Chapter 1, the previous research on small talk is largely

descriptive, and small talk is often described in contrasting and incongruent ways across

studies (Schneider, 1987). Interestingly, its ubiquity sometimes leads researchers to avoid

defining it altogether. For instance, in her study of small talk among Irish educators, Farr

(2005) notes, "the boundaries of what constitutes small talk are in many ways unclear,

and perhaps *the search for a precise definition may be futile and unnecessary as its*

essence is understood by all" (p. 211, emphasis added). Contrastingly, other researchers

are very specific about the exact boundaries of small talk (e.g., Holmes, 2000a;

Schneider, 1987). For instance, some scholars describe small talk as including gossip,

banter, and related constructs (e.g., McDowell, 2015), including both short phatic

communication (e.g., greetings) and more extended social discourse (Holmes, 2000a).

Other scholars define small talk more narrowly, and focus on substantive, impersonal

dialogue, such as conversations that are considered polite enough to have with any

relational partner (Schneider, 1987). These descriptions underscore the wide range of

possibilities for engaging in small talk, with the common acknowledgement that there are

a few areas that are certainly excluded from small talk. As Schneider (1987) explains,

"There are, of course, certain taboo areas like death, (serious) illnesses, also sex and

income [that are always excluded from small talk]. Whatever the topic, it must not be too

personal" (p. 251).

It is clear from these opposing descriptions that small talk encompasses a wide variety of potential conversation topics. Yet, there has been little research to distinguish between different *types* of small talk (for exceptions, see Holmes, 2000a, Laver, 1975, and Schneider, 1987). Contrary to Farr's (2005) aforementioned proposition that such a definition is "futile" (p. 211), I view the precise definition and nomological network of small talk as a critical first step in conducting quantitative research on its effects in the workplace.

One distinction is neutral tokens and participant-oriented tokens (Laver, 1975). Neutral tokens represent obvious statements related to the time and place of the conversation, such as discussion of the weather or physical office environment. Conversely, participant-oriented tokens represent small talk statements that refer to one of the conversational participants, such as inquiries about someone's health and well-being, or superficial statements about one's self (Bubel, 2006; Laver, 1975). This distinction parallels Ventola's (1979) distinction between indirect approaches, which refer to, "the weather, the current news, the concrete 'set up' of the situation" (p. 273) and direct approaches, "which concern the interactants themselves, their health, their appearance, e.g. new clothing, hairdos [sic], etc., their family members, their everyday or professional life and so on" (p. 273). In her study of intercultural business small talk, Bubel (2006) proposes that the type of small talk used is partially dependent on the status of the conversational participants, with neutral tokens being used with both strangers and acquaintances, while participant-oriented tokens are used primarily between people who are already acquainted. Bubel's data show that neutral tokens and participant-oriented

tokens may appear in quick succession within a small-talk interaction, but that they remain distinct forms of small talk.

Further, small talk is generally noted for its scriptedness (Coupland et al., 1992; Schegloff, 1986), or the degree to which the speech is ritualized and participants feel a normative obligation to conduct the conversation in a certain way (Cheepen, 1988). I propose that different dimensions of small talk might have varying degrees of scriptedness, which may in turn explain why small talk is sometimes considered automatic and easy (Beinstein, 1975; Schegloff, 1986) while other times it is considered effortful (Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002; Martin, 1964). Greetings and closings offer a prototypical example of small talk that is considered scripted. Indeed, in his analysis of telephone greetings, Schegloff (1986) found that people were so accustomed to the "hello", "howareyou" [sic] sequence that they sometimes began their response to the scripted greeting even before their conversational partner had finished speaking. Schegloff and Sacks (1973) similarly found formulaic small talk phrases at the end of conversations, including some variation of "I'll let you go" to demonstrate concern for the conversational partner while definitively signaling the end of the conversation. This pattern was common in their data, and parallels the scripted, other-oriented "howareyou?" [sic] small talk that is often used at the beginning of a conversation (Schegloff, 1986).

In contrast to the extreme scriptedness of salutations, anecdotal evidence to support more idiosyncratic talk can be deduced from common examples of small talk topics, and is referenced across a variety of scholarly works. For example, talking about personal matters, such as weekend plans or hobbies, is likely to be idiosyncratic. In his

publication on small talk aversion, Martin (1964) quotes a patient as lamenting, "I try to guess what will please the other person and I say things that I don't believe or mean. I wildly bombast them with disorganized words or ideas that are not mine—but hoping that they are the other person's!" (p. 396). Similarly, in his discussion of topic choice in phatic communication, Schneider (1987) notes that, "In phatic communication, with no first order aim, interactants are *under the constant strain of finding discourse topics*, because silence would at least be impolite or embarrassing" (p. 247, emphasis added). These quotes highlight the lack of scriptedness involved in many small talk encounters, thus bolstering the position that there is more than one type of small talk at work.

When listening to idiosyncratic small talk, individuals must respond to, and potentially incorporate, information specific to their conversational partner (Martin, 1964). As this information changes in conversations with each new relational partner, individuals must constantly work to formulate their responses in each new conversation. When adopting the speaking role in idiosyncratic small talk, individuals may work to adjust the amount of information they give about personal matters depending on their conversational partner (Lynch & Rodell, 2018). In their research on individuals with concealable stigma (e.g., sexual orientation, invisible disability), Lynch and Rodell (2018) found that individuals use a variety of strategies to determine the degree to which they will share potentially sensitive personal information in casual conversation (e.g., information about weekend plans that involved a same sex partner). More broadly, Roberts (2005) proposes that individuals at work often worry about saying something "stupid" (p. 690) or emphasizing discrediting characteristics (e.g., a minority gender or

racial status), and therefore they carefully monitor their speech during informal workplace conversations.

Given these different characteristics of small talk, I propose that small talk is not a homogenous construct; rather, it is composed of multiple dimensions. In light of this potential, my first research question is:

Research question 1: Are there different types, or dimensions, of small talk in the workplace?

METHODS

Scale Development

Procedure and Sample. The purpose of this study is to develop a multidimensional scale of workplace small talk. Following Hinkin's (1995) recommendations for scale development, I began with a thorough review of the literature which informed my generation of items that might measure small talk. Through this review, I identified seven potential categories of small talk, including polite talk (e.g., talk about the weather), greetings, venting (e.g., complaining), banter, networking, gossip, and news updates (e.g., inquiries about general well-being). Within those potential categories, I generated 95 items that might measure small talk, including both original items and those used in established scales. I purposefully limited items that were based on discussions of a particular subject, as extant research has shown that small talk's content can vary significantly based on participants and context (Leech, 1983). By minimizing items based on specific topics (e.g., sports, traffic), I aim to create a scale of workplace small talk that is generalizable across contexts.

After my initial item generation, thirteen subject matter experts (SMEs), all of

whom were doctoral students or had obtained their PhDs in management-related disciplines, rated the degree to which each item corresponded to the definition of their hypothesized small talk subdimension on a five point Likert scale (1= "this item is a very poor match to the concept defined above"; 5= "This item is a very good match to the concept defined above"). Definitions of each subdimension can be found in Table 1. Following the SME ratings and their additional open-ended feedback, 42 items were removed. This stage included the removal of all the "networking" items, as it became clear that networking was more accurately classified as a motive for small talk rather than a distinct type of small talk.

The remaining 53 items were given in a survey to a sample of employed adults recruited through the Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) platform, who were paid $.70 for their participation. MTurk is an online platform where individuals can register for the opportunity to perform a wide range of tasks in exchange for varied levels of monetary compensation. MTurk is often used to solicit participation in tasks such as taking academic surveys, reviewing websites, and providing feedback on potential advertisements to marketing professionals (Buhrmester, Kwang & Gosling, 2011). In order to perform work on MTurk, individuals must be at least 18 years old and have a valid Amazon account (all correspondence and payment is conducted through Amazon to protect participants' anonymity).

MTurk is a desirable sample source for this study for several reasons. Importantly, results from MTurk studies have been found to be valid across a wide variety of disciplines (Berinsky, Huber, & Lenz, 2012; Buhrmester et al., 2011; Goodman, Cryder, & Cheema, 2013; Mason & Suri, 2012). Previous research has determined that samples

recruited through MTurk are often more demographically heterogeneous than more traditional methods such as convenience sampling (Buhrmester, et al., 2011), increasing the chances that items selected in this stage will generalize beyond certain demographic groups. Although there are minor systematic differences between MTurk workers and the general population (see Goodman, et al., 2013 for a review of these differences), none are relevant to this study. In the present study, participation was restricted to those who were over 18 years of age, employed, and residents of the United States. The criteria of age and employment restrictions are necessary to ensure that participants have sufficient experience in a professional context, and the criteria of residency restriction is necessary to ensure that no systematic cultural variables confound the results.

I took multiple steps to limit participation from inattentive survey respondents, which is a known risk of using data gathered through MTurk (Berinsky et al., 2012). First, participation was restricted to individuals whose previous work on MTurk had been approved at least 95% of the time, and who had successfully completed at least 500 tasks through the MTurk platform. These standards were introduced to prevent habitually careless respondents from taking the survey. Additionally, the survey contained an attention check item ("To prove that you are paying attention, please select 'never' to answer this question"), which is recommended to increase the quality of data collected through MTurk and remove data from careless participants (Goodman et al., 2013). After removing five participants who failed the attention check, the final sample was 155 participants, of which 42.6% were women, 74.8% were Caucasian, and who had an average age of 34 years.

Analysis and Results. In order to identify the final set of small talk items, I conducted a series of exploratory factor analyses (EFA) using promax rotation, which is a type of oblique rotation, with principle axis factoring. I used promax rotation because the dimensions of small talk were expected to correlate with one another, and thus oblique rotations in the EFA are more appropriate than orthogonal rotation techniques (Hinkin, Racey & Enz, 1997). I found that constructs related to small talk, such as gossip, venting, and banter, were empirically distinct from the core content of small talk as non-instrumental, trivial conversation. This is consistent with theorizing on small talk, which notes that it can be performed with anyone, from close friends (Knutson & Ayers, 1986) to strangers (Sandstrom & Dunn, 2014a). Constructs such as gossip and venting, however, require a certain degree of relational trust, as individuals may be concerned about the discourse being publicized beyond their immediate relational partner. Therefore, I removed items that tapped gossip, venting, and banter, and conducted a series of exploratory factor analyses using the remaining items.

---Insert Table 1 about here---

Consistent with recommendations by Hinkin and colleagues (1997), I removed items that had factor loadings below .40 and items that loaded on more than one factor (in which the secondary factor loading was more than half of the primary factor loading). In the end, 15 items remained and showed a clear three factor structure. One of the fifteen items was removed because its content was inconsistent with the factor on which it loaded, thereby producing a three factor scale with 14 original items. The scale consists of salutations (4 items, e.g., "My coworkers and I greet each other during personal encounters"), polite small talk (5 items, e.g., "My coworkers and I talk about non-

controversial topics, such as the weather"), and news update small talk (5 items, e.g.,

"My coworkers and I talk about our weekend plans"). The salutations category aligns

with my originally-theorized category of "greetings" small talk, but was re-named to note

that the category includes items related to greetings and closings (e.g., "saying

goodbye"). The final list of items and their factor loadings can be found in Table 2. To

ensure the reliability of the small talk subscales, Cronbach's alpha was calculated for

each subdimension. Subscale alphas ranged from .85 to .87, which exceeds the minimum

threshhold of .70 that indcates adequate inter-item reliability (Nunnally & Bernstein,

1994). With respect to research question 1, these results suggest an affirmative answer to

my question of whether there are different dimensions of workplace small talk.

<div align="center">---Insert Table 2 about here---</div>

Scale Validation

Procedure and Sample. I validated the 14 item small talk scale using three

samples (n=212), including employed undergraduate students from a large northeastern

university (43% female, 92.5% Caucasian, mean age=23.0), employees from a non-profit

company in the northeastern United States (39% female, 16.7% Caucasian) and

employees recruited through the MTurk platform (60% female, 78.7% Caucasian, mean

age=34.1). The undergraduate students were compensated in the form of extra credit in

their course, whereas the non-profit and MTurk samples were compensated with gift

cards and monetary compensation, respectively. To evaluate the small talk scale's

discriminant validity, employees were given an online survey in which they were asked

about their workplace small talk, as well as their experience with several related

constructs. All items were rated on a 7-point Likert scale.

Measures. The following established scales were included in the validation survey:

Friendship. Friendship was measured using Nielsen, Jex, and Adams's (2000) six item measure. An example item is "I have formed strong friendships at work." Cronbach's alpha for this scale is .86. Friendship was included in the validation survey because, although it describes a relationship and not a behavior (e.g., Sias & Cahill, 1998), workplace small talk may be incorrectly associated with friendship. Indeed, workplace interactions are often dichotomized as either "instrumental" or "social" (Methot, LePine, Podsakoff, & Christian, 2016), and thus "social" interactions—which may include both small talk and emotionally-laden friendships—have the potential to obscure the distinction between social relationships at work and the social discourse that may (or may not) occur within the context of those relationships. This conflation between small talk and friendship is most evident in the research on intercultural small talk, where non-Western participants often misconstrue the superficial personal information shared in the course of small talk as an overture for friendship (Meyer, 2014; Rings, 1994).

Gossip. Both positive and negative gossip were measured with five items each from Brady and colleagues' (2017) scale. An example positive gossip item is "I complimented a coworker's actions while talking to another work colleague," and an example negative gossip item is, "I told an unflattering story about a coworker while talking to another colleague." Cronbach's alpha for these scales are .92 and .95, respectively. Gossip was included in this scale validation because there is significant controversy over whether it is synonymous with small talk (cf. Schneider, 1987). Admittedly, gossip technically meets the qualification of superficial, non-task related

communication, and thus it is important to determine whether it is actually a distinct construct. While I found gossip to be empirically distinct from the three core subdimensions of small talk in the aforementioned scale development process, and while there is a theoretical distinction based on the prerequisite of a prior relationship to engage in gossip, I felt it was important to include in the validation to be sure it is distinct from small talk.

Affective Trust. Affective trust was measured with five items from McAllister's (1995) affective trust subscale. An example item is "I can talk freely to my coworkers about difficulties I am having at work". Cronbach's alpha for this scale is .89. Affective trust was included in the scale validation because it may be associated with social conversation in the workplace (Schaubroeck, Peng & Hannah, 2013). Indeed, there is a common perception in the workplace relationships literature (e.g., Dutton & Heaphy, 2003) that high quality workplace connections are those that involve strong positive affect and trust. Because small talk creates social connections that likely have positive implications (e.g., Malinowski, 1923; J. Coupland, 2000), it is important to ensure that small talk is conceptually distinct from positively-valenced coworker attitudes. I chose to include affective trust, specifically, because it is may impact the way that coworkers speak with one another by promoting more honest, positively-valenced communication (Nadler, 2004).

Surface Acting. Surface acting was measured with three items from Brotheridge and Lee's (1998) surface acting measure (see also Grandey, 2003). An example item asks employees the degree to which they "pretend to have emotions that they don't really have". Cronbach's alpha for this scale is .89. Together with gossip, I felt that this was the

most important construct to distinguish from small talk. The most popular scale for measuring surface acting (Brotheridge & Lee, 1998; Grandey, 2003) includes the performance of small talk as a component of one of its items. Whereas small talk may obviously occur in the performance of surface acting (Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002), it is also possible for small talk to occur in a variety of other contexts, ennumerated in Chapter 2, that do not involve the performance of emotional labor (e.g., waiting for a meeting to begin, saying hello to a friend on the way into the office). Despite this conceptual distinction, given the frequent co-occurance of small talk and surface acting, and the empirical inclusion of small talk in the common measurement of surface acting, it is necessary to ensure the distinction between small talk and surface acting.

Analysis and Results. Using MPlus version 8.0 (Muthén & Muthén, 2017), I tested the discriminant validity of the multidimensional small talk construct through two methods. First, I calculated the average variance extracted (AVE) for each scale, including the three subscales of small talk. The AVE for each scale exceeded the minimum threshhold of .50, which suggests that the construct captures meaningful variance beyond that which would result from measurement error (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Subsequently, I compared the square root of the AVE for each subdimension to the correlations between small talk subdimensions and potentially related constructs. For each subdimension, the square root of the AVE exceeded the largest correlation between constructs, suggesting that the multidimesional small talk scale has good discriminant validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Inter-scale correlations and the square root of the AVE for each construct are presented in Table 3,.

<div align="center">---Insert Table 3 about here---</div>

Additionally, I conducted a confirmatory factor analysis to ensure that the hypothesized model fit the data, and to rule out alternative theoretically plausible measurement models. Model 1 represented my hypothesized model, in which each dimension of small talk loaded on a higher-order small talk factor, and the factor was distinct from friendship, positive gossip, negative gossip, affective trust, and surface acting. The hypothesized model had acceptable fit (χ^2=1302.40, df=132, CFI=.90, RMSEA=.07), as judged by the recommended criteria of CFI greater than or equal to .90 and RMSEA value less than or equal to .08 (Cohen, Cohen, West & Aiken, 2003). Moreover, the hypothesized model was superior to several theoretically plausible alternative models (e.g., considering gossip as part of the higher order small talk construct). Fit statistics and model comparison data can be found in Table 4.

---Insert Table 4 about here---

Study 1 Discussion

In Study 1, I addressed the need to precisely define the nomological network of small talk. Taken together, the results of Study 1 show there are three dimensions of small talk: salutations, polite talk, and news update talk. Furthermore, the scale development showed that—although these subdimensions of small talk manifest in unique ways—they represent a higher-order "small talk" construct. Importantly, these three dimensions are most clearly differentiated by their level of scriptedness on a continuum from very scripted to relatively idiosyncratic. At one extreme, salutations are almost completely scripted, with little variation in socially acceptable ways to enact this speech (Schegloff, 1986; Schegloff & Sacks, 1973). Polite talk is slightly less scripted, as there is a wider range of acceptable speech in this category than in salutations, although

there is still a common set of topics that are commonly understood as appropriate polite talk (e.g., talk about the weather; Schneider, 1987). Finally, news updates are the least scripted of the three subdimensions I identified. Whereas news update talk is often initiated with a set of commonly-used questions, such as inquiring about a colleague's weekend or general well-being (Ventola, 1979), the responses to these questions are relatively idiosyncratic. Importantly, extant research suggests that this type of idiosyncratic small talk may be effortful as people have to make split-second decisions about how much personal information to disclose (Lynch & Rodell, 2018). Contrastingly, scripted small talk—such as salutations and polite talk—require less effort in proportion to their scriptedness, as individuals can rely on well-known scripts in order to successfully enact these interaction rituals (Beinstein, 1975). These findings align my conception of small talk with "chatting" behavior that is emphasized by the ethnomethodologist tradition of communications research (e.g., Schegloff, 1986; Schegloff & Sacks, 1973), which uses conversation analysis and notes that small talk can either be quite short (e.g., salutations or polite talk), or more prolonged (e.g., news update talk), and that both short and long small talk represent the phatic communication that Malinowski originally identified (Cheepen, 1988).

This study also differentiated small talk from related constructs—particularly gossip—that are often confounded with small talk. Whereas both gossip and traditional small talk may meet my original definition of "superficial, non-task related conversation", there are important theoretical differences that support the empirical exclusion of gossip from the higher order small talk construct. Specifically, small talk is unique in that it can be conducted with almost anyone (e.g., friends, acquaintances,

strangers, work colleagues, etc.), and the act of having small talk de-emphasizes any difference in status that otherwise exists between participants (Cheepen, 1988). This ability to have small talk with anyone is due in part to the fact that small talk conversations are neutral (Malinowski, 1923/1945), and involve topics that are unlikely to offend anyone involved (Coupland, 2000).

In contrast, gossip requires some preexisting trust and familiarity between participants (Burt & Knez, 1996; Ellwardt et al., 2012). Therefore it can only be had with select partners, because people are unlikely to share confidential information with those who might leak that information to unintended recipients (Afifi & Steuber, 2009). Furthermore, gossip has the potential to offend a conversational partner, as negative gossip, in particular, may involve sentiments that are judgemental or unflattering. The latter distinction also encapsulates the logic underlying small talk's theoretical distinction from venting and banter. In his discussion of small talk topics, Schneider (1987) noted that small talk is often neutral or positive because, "negative remarks require a certain degree of social audacity" (p. 253), as negativity is often considered impolite (cf. Leech, 1983). Venting inherently involves the sharing of negative sentiment (Brown, Westbrook & Challagalla, 2005), and banter often involves statements that could be perceived as negative, such as teasing a peer about their flaws (Roy, 1959). Therefore, while these types of speech may also fit the definition of superficial, non-task related conversation, they are both theoretically and empirically distinct from the core small talk on which my research centers.

Conclusion

Taken together, the results of Study 1 make two primary contributions. First, Study 1 resulted in the creation and validation of a multidimensional scale to measure small talk in the workplace. This is a crucial first step to research small talk's association with employee outcomes of interest, as it allows employees to quantify the extent to which they have different types of small talk. Second, the process of developing a small talk scale resulted in greater clarity about what exactly constitutes small talk. Indeed, because much of the research on small talk has been descriptive and contextual (e.g., examining small talk's function in a given conversation), there has been significantly less attention to investigating the nomological network of small talk. Through the process of examining the boundaries of small talk, I was able to prevent contamination of the small talk construct, and clarify my focus on Malinowski's (1923) original conceptualization of small talk as a neutrally-valenced, superficial, non-task related exchange that created ties between people "through a mere exhange of words" (p. 315).

Although Study 1 provided insight on the nomological network of small talk, it did not account for individuals' motivations for engaging in small talk in the workplace. To investigate the reasons that employees make small talk at work, I conduct an inductive analysis of qualitative data in Study 2. Taken together with the results of the present study, I hope that the joint consideration of small talk's dimensions and individuals' small talk motivations will ultimately enable a nuanced investigation into its association with employee outcomes.

TABLES AND FIGURES

Table 1: Subscale Definitions (Study 1)

1. Polite talk: "Superficial, socially appropriate conversation in which the subject of the conversation is of little or no importance"

2. News Updates: "Superficial conversation about one participant's welfare or the current happenings in their life"

3. Gossip: "Evaluative talk about a person who is not present"

4. Joking: "Superficial conversation that is intended to be amusing or humorous"

5. Greetings: "Superficial verbal interaction designed to acknowledge an interaction partner's presence, including their arrival or departure"

6. Networking: "Engaging in casual conversation to create social ties that support one's professional or personal goals"

7. Complaining: "Superficial expressions of unpleasant emotions, irritation, fatigue, or annoyance"

Table 2: Exploratory Factor Analysis (Study 1)

ITEMS	**Factor 1 News Updates**	**Factor 2 Salutations**	**Factor 3 Polite Talk**
1. My coworkers and I exchange pleasantries	-.092	**.825**	.090
2. My coworkers and I talk about non-controversial topics, such as the weather	.109	.145	**.561**
3. My coworkers and I talk about superficial things	.035	-.019	**.742**
4. My coworkers and I respond to each other when talking about non-work matters, even if we don't care about the subject	.009	.127	**.643**
5. My coworkers and I chat with each other even if we don't have anything important to say	.115	.141	**.534**
6. My coworkers and I talk about trivial things	-.067	-.091	**.936**
7. My coworkers and I talk about our weekend plans	**.720**	-.127	.152
8. My coworkers and I ask about each other's families	**.780**	.081	-.105
9. My coworkers and I discuss our hobbies	**.686**	-.089	.126
10. My coworkers and I discuss our vacations and leisure activities	**.599**	.076	.044
11. My coworkers and I update each other on our weekend activities	**.809**	.069	-.094
12. My coworkers and I say hello to one another	.046	**.770**	-.044
13. My coworkers and I say goodbye to one another	-.016	**.848**	-.017
14. My coworkers and I greet each other during personal encounters	.086	**.674**	.037

Notes:
n=155
Rotation: promax rotation
Extraction: principle axis factoring.

Table 3: Construct Correlations for Scale Validation (Study 1)

	Mean	S.D.	√AVE	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Salutations	5.45	1.24	.77	(.84)							
2. Polite talk	5.16	1.36	.79	.74	(.89)						
3. News update	4.60	1.45	.84	.62	.74	(.92)					
4. Friendship	4.66	1.35	.75	.45	.43	.60	(.86)				
5. Positive gossip	4.04	1.47	.83	.34	.37	.54	.52	(.92)			
6. Negative gossip	2.86	1.75	.89	-.03	.08	.34	.09	.49	(.95)		
7. Affective trust	5.05	1.24	.79	.60	.50	.60	.83	.52	.07	(.89)	
8. Surface acting	3.93	1.79	.86	.01	.15	.19	-.04	.18	.37	-.01	(.89)

Notes:
n = 194 - 212 (pairwise deletion used for missing data)
Values on the diagonal represent the Cronbach's alpha for each construct
r >.18 are significant at p<.01 (two-tailed); r > .14 are significant at p<.05 (two-tailed).

Table 4: CFA Model Comparisons (Study 1)

	χ^2	Df	CFI	TLI	SRMR	RMSEA	$\Delta\chi^2(df)$
Model 1: 9 factors	1302.395	132	.897	.888	.084	.069	
Model 2: 8 factors, ST & FRIEND combined	1456.81	128	.873	.863	.101	.076	154.415(4)
Model 3: 7 factors, ST & GOSSIP combined	1368.805	126	.887	.879	.096	.072	66.41(6)
Model 4: 6 factors, unidimensional ST	1551.064	129	.858	.847	.082	.081	248.669(3)

Data from Mturk, student, and employee samples. $n = 212$ after listwise deletion. ST, small talk; GOSSIP, positive and negative gossip; FRIEND, friendship. CFI, comparative fit index; TLI, Tucker-Lewis index; SRMR, standardized root mean square residual; RMSEA, root-mean-square error of approximation. All χ^2 and $\Delta\chi^2$ values are p < .01. $\Delta\chi^2$ tests relative to Model 1.

CHAPTER 3
STUDY 2: MOTIVATIONS

Having identified multiple dimensions of small talk in Study 1, Study 2 investigates *motivations* for engaging in workplace small talk. Indeed, the literature reviewed in Chapter 1 suggested several motivations that people have for engaging in small talk generally, yet there is no research that directly examines employees' motivations for small talk and their attendant implications on small talk's form and outcomes. To that end, I sought to identify prototypical small talk motivations using an inductive analysis of qualitative data. Below I draw on IRT to frame my research question regarding the importance of considering individuals' small talk motivations.

I propose that people have different motives for engaging in small talk. According to the logic of IRT, some people may engage in workplace small talk because they find it enjoyable and have a genuine desire to connect with conversational partners. This is consistent with a broader literature on belongingness theory, which notes that individuals have a fundamental need to belong to a social group (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Consequently, those who find genuine energy from interpersonal connections are likely to have workplace small talk because it provides them with energy and positive affect (cf. Sandstrom & Dunn, 2014a). This is consistent with a foundational assumption of IRT, which views individuals as seeking to maximize their emotional energy, and thus choosing to engage in activities that have the most potential to be energizing (Collins, 2004).

Beyond conscious enjoyment, other potential motivations for small talk have been described in extant literature. For instance, Roy (1959) examines the case of employees who have small talk to pass the time in their monotonous manufacturing job. The

foundational assumptions of IRT apply to this case as well; in the language of IRT, employees in Roy's study engage in small talk because it provides them with necessary emotional energy while doing their work. However, the implications of this motivation suggest that it might produce different results than somebody who makes small talk with a coworker because they enjoy connecting with others. Whereas both cases might involve engaging in small talk for the receipt of emotional energy, somebody who likes connecting with others might make just enough small talk to feel an interpersonal connection without disrupting their workday. Conversely, an employee who is engaging in small talk in order to pass the time might embark on more extended small talk—such as elaborate news update conversations—that are likely to be idiosyncratic and have a longer duration.

Shifting gears, other research has found that employees may engage in small talk because they feel pressured to do so. This feeling of obligation can take several forms. For instance, employees may engage in small talk because they work in a context where small talk is considered normative and desirable, and they do not want to be seen as out of place (Naraine & Fels, 2013). Relatedly, employees may feel the need to make small talk because it is explicitly required. The latter case is less directly relevant to the present study, as it largely refers to requirements for small talk with customers (e.g., in service settings, Hochschild, 1993), which is beyond the scope of this research. However, limited research suggests that in some workplaces, there is the strong expectation that employees should socialize with one another using discourse that could be considered small talk (Holmes, 2005).

Many employees also feel the need to engage in small talk as a part of networking, or building instrumental connections (Forret & Dougherty, 2001), which they might feel is necessary but nevertheless aversive and unpleasant (Casciaro et al., 2014). Examples of motivations that might induce an otherwise reluctant employee to network include trying to gain or keep clients (Fine, 2005) or find a new job at an affiliated company (Granovetter, 1973). In these cases, employees may value the outcome of networking so much that they are willing to engage in small talk even though they find it aversive. In extreme cases, employees might research networking targets in order to gain information about their personal lives and interests that could later be referenced in a small talk conversation (Fine, 2005).

Collins (2004) discusses small talk motivated by obligation, noting that the intention behind interaction rituals is a crucial boundary condition in considering the effects of interaction rituals more broadly. Specifically, Collins proposes that forced interaction rituals—those in which an individual only engages in the ritual because they feel they obligated to do so—do not produce the benefits normally associated with interaction rituals. However, he does not treat motivations in a detailed way beyond saying that forced interaction rituals do not have the same effects as those that are enacted voluntarily.

Given the diversity of explanations for workplace small talk in extant research, it is clear that employees may have a range of different motivations for choosing to engage in small talk. The aforementioned motivations for having small talk highlight ways in which an employee's motivation might influence both the attributes of small talk itself (e.g., duration, scriptedness), as well as its ultimate impact on employee outcomes. In

light of the potential importance of considering small talk motivations, Study 2 addresses the following research question:

> *Research question 2: What motivations do employees have for engaging in workplace small talk?*

Methods

Sample and Procedure*.* Data were gathered from 301 working adults recruited through the MTurk platform, who also participated in the scale development or validation surveys described in Chapter 2. After removing data from participants who (a) did not provide enough information to interpret (e.g., one or two word answers, such as "good"), or who (b) did not answer the question (e.g., by listing topics of small talk rather than motivations), the final sample included 244 valid responses that indicated various motivations for engaging in small talk. To obtain this information, employees were asked to respond to the following question:

> "Think about the small talk you have with your coworkers…including your peers, your supervisor, your subordinates, the janitorial staff, IT workers, HR professionals, cafeteria workers, and people in departments throughout the organization. In this study, small talk refers to superficial, non-task related conversation. Remember that small talk can occur in many contexts, including during breaks, waiting for meetings, while performing a work task, or at after-work events, such as dinners or happy hours. In the space below, please write a few sentences about your motivations for engaging in small talk with coworkers, or why you might continue having small talk if a coworker initiates it with you."

In order to maximize participants' freedom of expression, they were not given a minimum or maximum word count for their response to this question.

Analysis and Results

Using content analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994) I engaged in a two-step coding procedure to inductively analyze data on employees' motivations for engaging in small talk. The first step of this process involved 1st-order coding (Gioia, Corley & Hamilton, 2013), also known as open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 2014), in which each response was assigned a label (or set of labels) that reflected the participant's motivation for engaging in small talk. In cases where participants expressed more than one motivation in their response (e.g., mitigating boredom and wanting to form relationships with coworkers), I assigned multiple labels to the text to capture each small talk motivation. Following precedent in inductive analysis of qualitative data (e.g., Gioia et al., 2013; Strauss & Corbin, 2014), I attempted to use the participants' own terminology to avoid prematurely imposing my own assumptions on the data. This is necessary because qualitative researchers acknowledge participants as self-aware, knowledgeable actors who are capable of articulating their thoughts and intentions (Gioia et al., 2013), and prematurely imposing my own interpretation of their small talk motivations would risk degrading the meaning of their responses (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Some examples of 1st-order codes that mirrored participants' own language for their motivations to engage in small talk were "appearing friendly" and "builds comradery". This 1st-order coding process resulted in the identification of 253 codes that represented the 244 responses from my sample. Some 1st-order codes were mentioned frequently, such as "pass the time" (n=46) and "enjoyment" (n=32). Contrastingly, other 1st-order codes for small talk motivations were

relatively idiosyncratic; for example, only one participant of 244 mentioned that they engage in workplace small talk for the purpose of flirting.

After all 244 responses were coded, I engaged in 2nd-order coding (Gioia et al., 2013, also known as axial coding; Strauss & Corbin, 2014), in which I analyzed the 1st-order codes to identify themes that described broader patterns of motivations for engaging in small talk. Specifically, I considered only the 1st-order codes and compared them to one another to see which codes showed significant overlap and which showed substantial differences (cf. Strauss & Corbin, 2014). When there was ambiguity in the 1st-order codes, I went back to the original data to further consider the nuance of the participant's response. This comparative process resulted in the identification of three primary motivations for engaging in small talk: relationship building/maintenance, boredom, and impression management. In determining the final categories of small talk motivation, I erred on the side of coding broader categories that were maximally distinct from one another, as opposed to identifying more narrow categories with nuanced differences. For example, participants reported engaging in small talk for motivations that could be described as both "normative pressures" (e.g., because they feel implicit pressure to make small talk) or "networking"—engaging in small talk to build instrumentally-beneficial connections. Although these categories are not identical, I combined them to form the broader category of "impression management", representing participants who had motivations for engaging in small talk that were rooted in the desire to appear a certain way to others. This approach was most appropriate for the present research because the ultimate goal of this study was to determine small talk motivations that could be quantified and measured in studies 3 and 4. The identification of numerous

motivations that were relatively similar would result in subsequent studies that required a burdonsome amount of self-reported information from participants, and that produced results from which it would be difficult to draw theoretically meaningful conclusions. Importantly, while the categories were theoretically distinct, some participants gave responses that clearly fit into more than one category (e.g., relationship building and impression management), and those responses were coded in both categories.

Approximately 65% of respondents indicated that they engaged in small talk for relationship building/maintenance purposes, giving reasons such as, "I engage in small talk because I like to stay connected to my coworkers". Approximately 29% of respondents said they engaged in small talk because they were bored, or wanted to pass the time faster. An example of this is, "I engage in small talk mainly just to kill time when things slow down". Finally, 30% of respondents indicated that they engage in small talk for reasons related to impression management. An example description of this motivation is, "I don't want to come across like an uptight person who doesn't care about others". Figure 1 shows the data structure (e.g., examples of 1st-order codes that comprised the final 2nd-order codes; Gioia et al., 2013), and additional examples of quotes that exemplify each of the three primary categories of motivation are listed in Table 5.

---Insert Table 5 about here---

---Insert Figure 1 about here---

Study 2 Discussion

As the results of this study demonstrate, individuals have a variety of reasons for engaging in small talk at work. Yet, there are clear patterns in the motivations that

employees report for engaging in this behavior. According to my data, nearly two-thirds of employees engage in small talk because they genuinely enjoy making a connection with other coworkers. This supports the basic logic of IRT, which holds that individuals strive to maximize their receipt of energy, and therefore they continue to engage in interaction rituals, such as small talk, to the extent that they continue to provide energy. In this case, it seems that most employees consider small talk interaction rituals to be positive experiences, and this directly motivates them to engage in future small talk. The prominence of the relationship building/maintenance motivation also echoes experimental research that has found a positive association between small talk and positive affect (e.g., Sandstrom & Dunn, 2014a, Epley & Schroder, 2014), suggesting that small talk can be a positive experience for many employees.

Additionally, this study finds that a substantial number of employees engage in small talk for impression management and to avoid boredom. Impression management, including both networking and normative pressures, is consistent with a significant volume of descriptive literature about the workplace. Indeed, the participants in my study used language that is consistent with established research in both networking and normative pressure (e.g., requirement to be friendly in certain office cultures). For instance, one participant said, "If small talk is initiated, I continue small talk because it's polite. I find that I have to keep an upbeat personality a majority of the days, even when I'm not feeling it. I work in hospitality and it's part of the game for customers and coworkers." This closely parallels the broader hospitality literature, which suggests that employees are expected to maintain generally friendly attitudes at all times during their work (e.g., Kao, Tsaur & Wu, 2016).

Finally, nearly one-third of respondents indicated that they engage in small talk for reasons related to mitigating boredom or "passing the time". While my data suggest this is a common motivation, comparatively scant management literature addresses this phenomenon (Fisher, 1993). Extant literature on boredom at work dates back nearly a century, when Wyatt and Langdon (1937) discovered that 97% of the manufacturing workers they studied were at least occasionally bored. More recently, scholars have found that untreated boredom at work is associated with counterproductive work behaviors (Bruusema, Kessler & Spector, 2011). Given the negative effects of boredom at work, this research suggests that small talk might have positive effects through mitigating the boredom that would otherwise cause negative employee outcomes. While scholars have previously focused on the relational and transitional mechanisms through which small talk has positive effects, the reduction of boredom may also explain small talk's positive effects in the workplace.

A secondary implication of the association between boredom and small talk is that it may partially explain the reputation of workplace small talk as being antithetical to productivity (Holmes & Marra, 2004). Indeed, if employees are largely engaging in small talk when they are not actively working, then it stands to reason that small talk would become associated with a lack of work. While it is undoubtedly true that workers occasionally delay work *because* they are busy having small talk (Garrett & Danziger, 2007), it may also be the case that managers assume small talk to prevent work, when actually employees who are not working are merely engaging in small talk to ameliorate their boredom. This potential for reverse causality may create interesting questions for further research in the domain of workplace boredom studies.

Conclusion

In Study 2, inductive analysis was used to demonstrate that employees have different motivations for engaging in workplace small talk. Furthermore, content analysis of the data revealed that these motivations generally fall into one of three major categories: relational motivations, impression management, and boredom alleviation. These results—especially the prevalence of relational motives—lend support to the underlying assumptions of IRT that propose individuals to be energy-maximizing actors. Considering these results in light of Study 1 raises the possibility that there are systematic associations between certain types of small talk and motivations for engaging in small talk, which I now address in studies 3 and 4.

Table 5: Small Talk Motivations

Motivation	Exemplar Quotes
Relationship Building	• "**It helps make friends**. It helps create bonding" • "I want to make friends and have **good relations with everyone**…small talk is the perfect way to do this" • "I want to get to know my coworkers to make work a more comfortable place. If everyone around you is strangers, then work is not fun. You need to get to know people and want to be around them to make work a fun place. **I am actually interested in the people around me and want to know what is going on in their lives.**" • "I engage in small talk because I like to **stay connected to my coworkers**."
Boredom	• "I engage in small talk with coworkers to **alleviate boredom** while we wait for something, or to **pass the time** if we're traveling from one location to another. It would be awkward and uncomfortable to spend our time in silence but small talk is really all we have to talk about with each other." • "I engage in small talk mainly **just to kill time when things slow down**. I do not like a slow work day as it drags out badly so I **try to fill in the blank spots**." • "Small talk with my coworkers mostly originates because I'm bored. It's usually when I am **tired of staring at the computer screen** and need a break for a few minutes that I will engage someone in small talk. There's usually nothing more behind it."
Impression Management	• "I do it to pass time or to show interest in the person. I do it to be friendly and sociable with my coworkers. **I don't want to appear cold and distant.**" • "I do it because you're supposed to. I wouldn't want to be singled out as the weird guy who doesn't talk to anybody. **If I don't** talk to my boss about even little things **I'm probably not going to get promoted** or might be the first guy to get cut." • "I engage in these small talks **to be accepted by others at my work**" • "I **don't want to come across like an uptight person** who doesn't care about others."

Figure 1: Coding Structure

First Order Codes   **Second Order Codes**

- **Enjoy work** (e.g., "I continue to have small talk with my coworkers because it's the best way to stay at work")
- **Get to know coworkers** (e.g., "I just like to get to know my co workers. I really enjoy talking to them.")
- **Maintain relationships** (e.g., "I like to keep relations with my co[-] workers. It is nice to have someone to talk to daily.")

→ **Relational (Enjoyment)**

- **Instrumental tie building** (e.g., "[I make small talk] so you can work you way up to the top of the food chain")
- **Prevent silence** (e.g., "I only engage in small talk to diffuse uncomfortable silence. I really don't think it has much more benefit than that.")
- **Appear friendly** (e.g., "We want to get along but not always be friendly so we say just enough to appear to really care. it isn't a bad thing.")

→ **Impression Management**

- **Pass the time** (e.g., "It [small talk] helps the time go by")
- **Entertainment** (e.g., "I make small talk with my coworkers to keep ourselves entertained")
- **Boredom** (e.g., "out of boredom, mostly, as I like to just get away from working once in a while and shoot the shit.")

→ **Boredom Alleviation**

CHAPTER 4
STUDIES 3 AND 4

Jointly considering the results of studies 1 and 2, it is clear that individuals engage in different types of small talk, and that they have different motives for engaging in these types of conversations. Given these findings, studies 3 and 4 have three primary goals. First, acknowledging that there are different types of small talk that vary according to scriptedness, the studies in this chapter attempt to examine (Study 3) and confirm (Study 4) whether there are different small talk profiles, or combinations of amounts of each small talk dimension that co-occur. Second, in concert with identifying small talk profiles, studies 3 and 4 investigate whether there are certain motivations for small talk that are associated with membership in different small talk profiles. Finally, the studies investigate whether membership in a given small talk profile is associated with employee outcomes, including ego depletion (studies 3 and 4), interpersonal citizenship behaviors (other-oriented helping behaviors; studies 3 and 4), and task performance (Study 4).

The Case for Small Talk Profiles

As noted in Chapter 2, different types of small talk often co-occur. For instance, a typical instance of small talk might begin with a greeting (salutation), then comments on the weather (polite talk), and segue into a superficial discussion of weekend plans (news updates) (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973). With respect to determining outcomes of small talk, it is important to look beyond the effect of a particular type of small talk on employee outcomes and consider the small talk dimension (e.g., polite talk) in the context of the other small talk in which it might occur. This is an important analytic tactic for two reasons. First, as the aforementioned example shows, it is unrealistic to assume that one type of small talk happens completely independently of another type of small talk.

Indeed, because small talk is at the boundaries of topics (Laver, 1975)—including framing other small talk topics—any realistic examination of its effects must consider how a given type of small talk affects employee outcomes in a broader linguistic context. Second, as described in Chapter 2, inferences from IRT suggest that different types of small talk can be either draining or energizing. To the extent that some kinds of small talk might be energizing and other kinds may be depleting, research must simultaneously consider all three dimensions of small talk in order to account for the net gain or loss of emotional energy caused by small talk. For instance, it may be that there is a group of people (a "small talk profile") that engages in a great deal of very scripted small talk (e.g., salutations), while having proportionally less polite talk and news updates. For these people, the positive energy gained from connecting through salutations might outweigh any minor effort required to successfully complete the interaction ritual, and therefore the people in this category might have beneficial outcomes from engaging in small talk. Conversely, someone whose small talk involves proportionally more idiosyncratic small talk (e.g., news updates) might expend more energy engaging in small talk than they gain from connecting with others. Given this potential for a net loss in emotional energy, it could be assumed that members of the two profiles would see significantly different outcomes from engaging in small talk.

There are three ways that a simultaneous consideration of small talk dimensions might be accomplished. First, the three small talk dimensions could be aggregated, and investigations of the effects of small talk could consider the overall level of small talk and its association with employee outcomes of interest. However, this would obscure the nuance of different small talk dimensions. Recall that in Study 1 the modeling of small

talk as a three dimensional construct fit the data significantly better than small talk as a unidimensional construct. To that end, it would be imprecise to consider all three forms of small talk to be equivalent and interchangeable. Moreover, it would likely yield inaccurate results, as the theorizing reviewed in Study 1 suggests that small talk varies widely in its degree of scriptedness and idiosyncrasy.

Another option is to investigate the effects of small talk on employee outcomes by using a three-way interaction in a traditional, variable-centered analysis, such as structural equation modeling (Cohen et al., 2003). However, this approach is suboptimal for two reasons. First, three way interactions are relatively difficult to interpret, and thus findings from these interactions might be limited in terms of providing clear takeaways for both researchers and practitioners. Relatedly, three-way interactions would not describe the way people *actually* configure their small talk. In other words, three-way interactions do not say whether people with different small talk configurations actually exist, only what their outcomes would be if they did exist.

The third option, and the one I have chosen for this research, is to take a person-centered approach instead of a variable-centered approach. Specifically, as described in detail in the methods section, I use Latent Profile Analysis (LPA; Gibson, 1959) to inductively determine whether certain configurations, or "profiles" of small talk dimensions exist. Once determined, I continue using LPA and related techniques to further investigate whether employee outcomes of interest are associated with membership in a given profile. In the case of small talk, this person-centered approach is preferable to other options because it does not suffer from the limitations associated with the other two techniques. Specifically, it retains the nuance of each small talk dimension,

while simultaneously accounting for varying levels of each small talk dimension in the context of the other dimensions. Importantly, LPA inductively determines which types of small talk profiles actually exist in the data, so results only include small talk combinations that are reported by participants. This has the benefit of eliminating emphasis on hypothetical outcomes of small talk configurations that may not occur in the data, thereby making results maximally useful for drawing inferences for practice and theory. Additionally, the inductive identification of small talk profiles also adds to the sparse descriptive research of workplace small talk. While the emphasis of studies 3 and 4 is on determining the association between small talk and employee outcomes, an expanded understanding of the structure of workplace small talk is helpful in interpreting the results of this research. Given the unique suitability of person-centered analysis to investigate small talk, these studies address the following research question:

> *Research Question 3: Are there different "small talk profiles", representing*
> *configurations of small talk types?*

Motivations

Studies 3 and 4 examine whether the three motivations identified in Study 2 are associated with membership in a given small talk profile. As described in the previous study, there is reason to expect that people who enact small talk for different reasons are likely to have different types of small talk. Drawing on IRT, employees who engage in small talk for relational motives might be more likely to engage in salutations and polite talk because their enjoyment is likely caused by the energy that small talk provides. Employees who have small talk because they enjoy it are likely to engage in these salutations and polite talk because they provide energy through interpersonal connection

(Collins, 2004), and by virtue of their scriptedness they do not require much cognitive labor to enact. Conversely, news updates have the potential to be draining because they are unscripted (Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002), and thus news update talk may cause a net loss in energy if it drains more energy than is produced through the interaction ritual. Assuming that IRT is correct that individuals are energy-maximizing rational actors, it is not likely that people who expect to benefit from small talk would knowingly engage in the type of small talk that is most likely to be draining.

Contrastingly, it is possible that people who engage in small talk for impression management reasons will have more news update talk because they are motivated to project an intensely friendly or caring image (Fine, 2005). This possibility is described the popular press literature on networking, in which practitioners suggest that people should "study" their conversational partners' background and be prepared to speak about them knowledgably (Baldoni, 2010; Fine, 2005). As Collins (2004) explains, IRT assumes that those who engaged in "forced" interaction rituals are not enacting those rituals as energy-seeking rational actors, but instead they engage in interaction rituals because they perceive the rituals as necessary. Given this motivation, there is no reason to think that employees who make small talk as impression management would seek the most scripted—and therefore potentially most energizing—forms of small talk (e.g., salutations and polite talk). Rather, these individuals are likely to engage in the form of small talk that has the greatest potential to create their desired impression, and thus they are likely to have more news update talk even if they view it as laborious or aversive (Kuwabara et al., 2018).

Finally, it is likely that people who make small talk to alleviate boredom will engage in proportionally more news update talk than those with other motives. This is because people who are trying to alleviate boredom are likely to make small talk that will consume significant time, and it is possible for superficial discussions about participants' lives to occupy an entire work day if necessary (Roy, 1959). Contrastingly, the scripts associated with salutations only take a moment (Schegloff, 1986), and the scripts associated with polite talk are also relatively brief, and is therefore less likely to fulfill the goal of alleviating boredom for more than a few moments.

Hypothesis 1: High relational small talk motives will increase the probability of membership in small talk profiles that have a high quantity of salutations and polite talk.

Hypothesis 2: High impression management motives will increase the probability of membership in small talk profiles that have a high quantity of news update talk.

Hypothesis 3: High boredom alleviation motives will increase the probability of membership in a small talk profile that has a higher percentage of news update talk as compared to salutations and polite talk.

Outcomes

Given the competing explanations of the significant effects of small talk in the workplace, there are opposing narratives that suggest it could have either positive or negative effects. Below I describe the relevance and importance of examining three potential outcomes of small talk, and I theorize about ways that small talk profiles may be associated with each variable.

Ego depletion. As previously mentioned, extant research suggests that small talk might be both depleting and energizing. Drawing on IRT, it may be the case that employees who engage in more small talk have greater emotional energy (Collins, 2004). In contrast, the literature on surface acting—which suggests that small talk is often part of the display of inauthentic emotions at work (Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002)—suggests that employees might feel drained from engaging in frequent small talk at work. Because both of these logics suggest the importance of small talk to energy, studies 3 and 4 investigate the association between small talk profiles and ego depletion, which refers to a depleted state of self-control caused by a depletion of self-regulatory resources (e.g., through the excessive performance of surface acting) (Baumeister, Heatherton & Tice, 1994; Lanaj, Johnson & Barnes, 2014).

To rectify these contrasting portrayals of small talk's effect on energy, I rely on IRT to propose that small talk's effects on ego depletion depend on an employee's membership in a given small talk profile. Specifically, employees who engage in a high proportion of scripted small talk (salutations and polite talk) as compared to unscripted small talk (news updates) are less likely to be depleted for two reasons. First, employees in profiles with a high proportion of scripted small talk may gain energy from interaction rituals without having to expend cognitive labor thinking of unique statements and responses required in unscripted small talk. Contrastingly, employees who are in a profile characterized by relatively high proportions of unscripted small talk as compared to scripted small talk may be more depleted, as the cognitive labor they expend in unscripted small talk may outweigh the energy they receive from successfully enacting an interaction ritual.

Second, profiles characterized by disproportionately high levels of unscripted small talk may be more likely to result in failed interaction rituals, which would not provide energy to participants at all (Collins, 2004). Employees may be more likely to have a mutual focus of attention, which is a key component of successful interaction rituals, when engaging in salutations or polite talk. Contrastingly, news updates are more likely to be comprised of one person providing excessive detail about their personal updates and the other person feigning interest, which is less likely to provide an intense focus of mutual attention in which both participants are highly engaged. Indeed, in his foundational explanation of phatic communication, Malinowski (1923/1945) observed that small talk can take the form of, "personal accounts of the speaker's views and life history, to which *the hearer listens under some restraint and with slightly veiled impatience*, waiting till his own turn arrives to speak" (p. 314, emphasis added). This type of news update talk is less likely to provide a strong mutual focus of attraction than scripted forms of small talk—for example, talk about the weather or other feature of the participants' immediate context—which affects both conversational participants equally. Therefore, in addition to high proportions of news update small talk being draining due to their idiosyncrasy, I propose that individuals in high news-update profiles may gain less energy from their interactions because the interactions have a lower chance of involving a strong mutual focus of attention.

ICB. Additionally, extant literature on small talk emphasizes that engaging in small talk may have a positive effect because it fosters a sense of rapport, which may ultimately lead to building social relationships (e.g., J. Coupland, 2000; Malinowski, 1923). Given this logic, studies 3 and 4 also examine whether small talk is related to

interpersonal citizenship behaviors (ICB), or the performance of prosocial, discretionary behaviors for the benefit of a coworker (Settoon & Mossholder, 2002; Williams & Anderson, 1991). Small talk is known to create interpersonal connection (Malinowski, 1923/1945), and as noted in Chapter 1, IRT strongly suggests that successful interaction rituals, such as small talk, create feelings of solidarity by producing both energy and collective symbols that carry from one interaction to another. With this logic, it stands to reason that that there should be a positive association between small talk and ICB. This is because participants who feel closer to their coworkers are more likely to go beyond their job description to perform extra role behaviors for the benefit of a coworker (Bowler & Brass, 2006). It is therefore likely that the overall quantity of small talk in a given profile determines the degree of ICB, rather than the proportion of one dimension or another. This is because even superficial polite talk about the weather might establish a common reality and solidarity between participants that could engender an employee to help their coworkers (cf. Cheepen, 1988). Moreover, polite talk and salutations might engender more ICB because they create extra energy that can be used toward the performance of ICB. Whereas news update small talk may create a stronger rapport, this benefit is likely to be offset by the increase in energy caused by scripted small talk interactions. Therefore, I propose that employees in profiles with higher volumes of small talk are likely to perform greater ICB than employees in profiles characterized by low volumes of small talk.

Task performance. Similar to the association between small talk and ego depletion, there are plausible reasons to think that small talk may impact employees' task performance, which refers to an employee's enactment of the tasks that are required in

their job description (Williams & Anderson, 1991). With respect to a positive association between small talk and task performance, as noted in Chapter 2, small talk might provide the opportunity to gather task-related information interspersed with small talk conversations. Consistent with IRT, small talk may also create emotional energy that employees could use to improve their performance of assigned tasks. Finally, in jobs with low cognitive demands, small talk might positively affect task performance by ameliorating the negative effects of boredom.

Acknowledging that unscripted small talk may be draining, it is possible that employees may utilize energy to engage in unscripted small talk that they would otherwise devote to completing their assigned work. Therefore, I propose that both the quantity and configuration of small talk dimensions influence task performance. Similar to the aforementioned description of small talk's impact on ego depletion, employees in profiles characterized by proportionately higher levels of scripted small talk will have higher task performance than employees in profiles characterized by proportionately higher levels of unscripted small talk.

Given the potential for small talk profiles to be differentially associated with ego depletion, ICB, and task performance, I propose the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 4: Membership in a small talk profile with comparatively more scripted small talk (as opposed to unscripted small talk) will be negatively associated with ego depletion.

Hypothesis 5: Membership in a small talk profile characterized by a higher overall volume of small talk (as opposed to profiles with lower overall volumes of small talk) will be positively associated with ICB.

Hypothesis 6: Membership in a small talk profile with comparatively more scripted small talk (as opposed to unscripted small talk) will be positively associated with task performance.

Study 3 Methods

Sample and Procedure. I surveyed 600 adults working in a variety of industries, and who were recruited through the Amazon MTurk platform. As in the previous studies, participants had to be employed, reside in the United States, be at least 18 years of age, and work outside of the home in a context with other employees (e.g., coworkers). Participants received monetary compensation through MTurk in exchange for completing the survey. As in studies 1 and 2, I removed participants who failed an attention check question ("To ensure that you're paying attention, please select 'strongly disagree' to answer this question") in keeping with best practices for social science research with MTurk. After removing participants who failed the attention check question, the final sample was 580 employees (age: mean = 36.84 s.d.=11.25; 44.5% male, 71.9% Caucasian).

Measures

Employees were given a survey in which they were asked about their workplace small talk, as well as their motivations for engaging in small talk. All items were rated on a 7 point Likert scale. The validated scale described in Study 1 was used to measure the types of small talk that employees had with their coworkers. To measure the three small talk motivations described in Study 2, three established scales were modified to refer to small talk behavior. The first three measures listed below represented the scales adapted

to measure small talk motivations, while the final two scales represent those used to measure effects of small talk at work:

Relational motives. To determine whether participants engaged in small talk for relational motives, I adapted Hill's (1987) Need for Affiliation scale to produce eight items that refered specifically to engaging in small talk for relational reasons. An example item is, "I engage in small talk because I get a warm glow from contact with others". Cronbach's alpha for this scale was .953.

Boredom. To determine whether participants engaged in small talk in order to alleviate boredom, I adapted Koball, Meers, Storfer-Isser, Domoff, and Musher-Eizenman's (2012) Eating While Bored scale, and adapted it by changing "eating" to "having small talk", and included an explicit workplace reference. The resultant scale contained seven items, for example, "I engage in small talk because I am disinterested in work". Cronbach's alpha for this scale was .947.

Impression management. To determine whether participants engaged in small talk because they were motivated by impression management, I adapted the ingratiation subscale of Bolino and Turnley's (1989) impression management scale. Relevant items were re-worded so they specifically referred to having small talk, which resulted in a four item measure. An example item is, "I engage in small talk so my colleagues will see me as likeable". Cronbach's alpha for this scale was .907.

Ego depletion. To measure ego depletion, I used the five item measure validated by Lanaj and colleagues (2014). A sample item asks, "In general, it would take a lot of effort for me to concentrate on something". Cronbach's alpha for this measure is .939.

Interpersonal citizenship behaviors. To measure ICB, I used the seven item subscale of Williams and Anderson's (1991) performance measure that relates to interpersonal citizenship behavior. A sample item is, "I help others who have heavy work loads". Cronbach's alpha for this measure is .890.

Study 3 Analysis

Prior to conducting the latent profile analyses, I conducted a confirmatory factor analysis to ensure that the established scales had correctly captured their intended construct. As noted in Table 7, the hypothesized measurement model had an adequate fit (χ^2=2868.36, df=927, CFI=.913, RMSEA=.06), and fit better than alternative theoretically plausible models. Subsequently, I employed LPA (Muthén & Muthén, 2017) to identify latent small talk profiles. LPA differs from other analytic techniques in that it is person-centered, not variable centered (Wang & Hanges, 2011). In other words, instead of examining the relationship between variables (e.g., more small talk leads to more ego depletion), LPA holds that there are different profiles of people who engage in small talk, and these profiles are based on varied constellations of the types of small talk they perform. Assuming that there are indeed discernable latent small talk profiles, participants' ego depletion and ICB should vary systematically based on their membership in a given profile.

In order to conduct a LPA, the first step is to inductively determine how many profiles best fit the data. To do this, the model is run with two profiles, then three, and so on, until the profile shows good fit and the subsequent profiles do not fit the data significantly better (Nylund, Asparouhov & Muthén, 2007). In the present study, variances of each smal talk dimension were fixed across profiles. This is the default

approach in the MPlus software (Muthén & Muthén, 2017), and it is appropriate in the present research because there is no theoretical reason to expect that variance of each dimension would systematically differ based on a subject's membership in a given small talk profile. This analysis relies on a bootstrapping method, and I ran all analyses reported in this dissertation with 100 bootstrap draws.

Fit statistics for each profile tested are listed in Table 6. In keeping with normative standards for LPA research in the management discipline, I have assessed my model fit through a variety of fit statistics, including log-likelihood, Akaike information criteria (AIC), Bayesian information criteria (BIC), sample-size adjusted BIC (SSA–BIC), Lo, Mendell, and Rubin (2001) test (LMR), bootstrapped log-likelihood ratio test (BLRT), and entropy. As of this writing, there are no commonly accepted cutoff values for log likelihood, AIC, BIC, and SSA-BIC, although lower values relative to other models indicate good fit (Nylund et al., 2007). Higher values of entropy are associated with better model fit (Celeux & Soromenho, 1996), with values above .80 indicative of good fit (Tein, Coxe & Cham, 2013). With respect to BLRT and LMR, significant p values for these statistics indicates that a model with k classes fits the data significantly better than a model with (k-1) classes (Oberski, 2016). Importantly, while fit often improves in models with more profiles, it is often necessary for researchers to choose the model that balances appropriate fit with conceptually meaningful and interpretable results, and to stop when adding additional profiles is no longer theoretically meaningful (Oberski, 2016; Wang & Hanges, 2011).

---Insert Table 6 about here---

---Insert Table 7 about here---

After identifying the most appropriate model, I use two procedures to determine whether membership in a given profile is associated with a variety of variables. With regard to antecedents of class membership, I use a three-step procedure known as R3STEP (Vermunt, 2010) to determine whether the three motivations uncovered in study 2 predicted membership in one of the four small talk profiles. Conceptually R3STEP resembles a logistic regression, with antecedents (in this case, small talk motivations) predicting the likelihood of membership in a given class, but simultaneously accounts for the possibility of an individual's misclassification in a given profile (Asparouhov & Muthén, 2014). For this reason, it is more appropriate to use this procedure to determine the antecedents of small talk profiles than it is to use traditional logistic regression.

Following the R3STEP procedure, I also examined the relationship between membership in each small talk profile and ego depletion (studies 3 and 4), interpersonal citizenship behavior (studies 3 and 4), and task performance (study 4) using the BCH procedure (Bakk, Oberski & Vermunt, 2014; Bolck, Croon & Hagenaars, 2004). This procedure identifies the average level of each dependent variable within each small talk profile, while simultaneously accounting for potential measurement error (Bakk et al., 2014). Moreover, it is considered the preferred method for predicting outcomes of latent profile membership (Muthén & Muthén, 2017) because it considers auxiliary variables (e.g., outcomes) of latent profiles alongside the latent profile indicators (e.g., types of small talk) withouth risk of the auxiliary variables changing the latent profile structure. This represents an improvement over other methods to determine mean differences in a non-indicator variable across classes, some of which are known to have profile structures

change as a result of simultaneously considering non-indicator variables in the calculations (Asparouhov & Muthén, 2014).

Study 3 Results

In Study 3, which inductively determined the latent profile structure of small talk behavior, I selected the four profile model based on its suitable fit statistics and theoretical relevance. The fit statistics for each model tested—ranging from two to six latent models—are displayed in Table 8. The four profile model, depicted in Figure 2 and described in Table 9, reveals four latent small talk profiles determined by different constellations of the three small talk dimensions desribed in Study 1 (salutations, polite talk, and news updates). The four profiles are frequent small talkers (n=303), moderate small talkers (n=187), updaters (n=76), and low small talkers (n=14). Importantly, these profiles are quantitatively different—indicating that some people perform more small talk than others—as well as qualitatively different, showing that some groups of people have different proportions of each type of small talk. A graphical depiction of the four-profile solution is shown in Figure 2a, and a list of profile means and confidence intervals is listed in Table 9.

---Insert Table 8 about here---

---Insert Figure 2a about here---

---Insert Table 9 about here---

Frequent small talkers and moderate small talkers both display a small talk structure that is consistent with theoretical expectations, and the difference between the two profiles is that frequent small talkers engage in a higher volume of small talk overall than moderate small talkers. Given the role of small talk in conventional conversation, it

is not surprising that people engage in proportionally more salutations and polite talk than news updates. This is because almost all conversations start with salutations (Schegloff, 1986), so they should appear proportionally more often than other small talk because they not only precede socially-oriented exchanges, but are also a conventionally-accepted scripted introduction to conversations about task-related subjects and those that involve meaningful emotional support (Schegloff, 1986). Indeed, many interaction rituals only involve salutations, such as greeting a colleague walking down the hallway (Sailer, 2014) without stopping to have an extended chat. After salutations, polite talk (e.g., off-handed comments about the weather or another benign topic) should occur proportionally more often than news updates, because this type of conversation is scripted and can therefore be enacted with little effort (Beinstein, 1975). Finally, news update small talk should occur proportionately less often than salutations or polite talk, as it does with frequent and moderate small talkers. Because news update talk is comparatively less scripted and therefore requires mental energy, it may not appear in every conversation. This is especially true in conversations that are short, or in which the transitional small talk function is fulfilled by salutations or polite talk.

The other two profiles—updaters and low small talkers—showed a qualitatively different pattern than frequent and moderate small talkers. Specifically, while they had different volumes of small talk, with updaters having significantly more of each type of small talk than low small talkers, each group is characterized by statistically equivalent proportions of salutations, polite talk, and news updates (as judged by overlapping 95% confidence intervals of each of the three types of small talk within each class). With low small talkers this is less surprising, as people who do not engage in small talk often are

not likely to have any type of small talk frequently. Notably, this group was smallest profile, representing only 2% of the entire sample, which is consistent with extant research descriptions of small talk being ubiquitous.

Finally, the updaters category has a particularly unique structure. Given the logic describing the predictability of frequent and moderate small talkers, it is clear that updaters—by having as much news update talk as they have salutations and polite talk— are engaging in proportionally more news update talk than the other two categories that have an appreciable amount of small talk (frequent small talkers and moderate small talkers). Using the logic that news update small talk is less scripted and therefore requires more energy, the profile structure of updaters is surprising. Given these results, the answer to research question 3 is that there are discernable and theoretically meaningful small talk profiles.

With respect to the association between small talk motivations and profile membership, the results produced mixed evidence. Results of the aforementioned R3STEP procedure, depicted in Table 10, found a positive association between having relational motives for small talk and being in a higher-volume small talk profile. Given that the two highest volume profiles (frequent small talkers and moderate small talkers) have more salutations and polite talk than either updaters or low small talkers—and that members of each group have more salutations and polite talk than news update talk— Hypothesis 1 is supported. Contrary to my expectations, there was no statistically significant association between having impression management motives and being part of a given small talk profile. Therefore, Hypothesis 2 was not supported. Finally, the boredom alleviation motive was positively and significantly associated with membership

in the updaters category. Specifically, employees with high boredom alleviation motives are significantly more likely to be in the updaters profile as compared to the moderate small talker profile and the low small talker profile, although there is no significant difference in probabililty between being in the updaters profile or the frequent small talker profile based on boredom alleviation motives. Therefore, Hypothesis 3 was partially supported.

---Insert Table 10 about here---

With respect to employee outcomes, the results of the BCH procedure are displayed in Table 11. With respect to ego depletion, individuals in the updater profile have significantly higher ego depletion than frequent small talkers (p=.05), but there are not signficant differences in ego depletion between members of other small talk profiles. This is congruent with hypothesis 4, which proposed that membership in profiles with a relatively high proportion of unscripted (news update) small talk would be positively associated with ego depletion. Therefore, Hypothesis 4 is partially supported. Moreover, employees who are in higher-volume small talk profiles report performing more ICB than employees who are in small talk profiles with a lower volume of small talk. Therefore, Hypothesis 5 is supported.

---Insert Table 11 about here---

Given the results of Study 3, discussed in additional detail at the end of this chapter, I conducted a follow-up study for Study 4 to replicate and extend my findings. Given the inductive nature of LPA, replication studies are often performed in order to verify the profile structure found in the original study (Gabriel, Campbell, Djurdjevic, Johnson & Rosen, 2018). In addition, Study 4 uses supervisor-rated ICB and includes an

investigation of the association between small talk profiles and supervisor-rated task performance. The inclusion of supervisor-rated outcomes allows for greater confidence in the results because it prevents common method bias, or systematic differences in responses due to collecting both predictor and outcome variables from the same source (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee & Podsakoff, 2003). The methods and results of Study 4 are discussed in the following sections, followed by a discussion of the findings from studies 3 and 4.

Study 4 Methods

Sample and Procedure. Data were gathered from employees of ten small businesses across the United States that represented a variety of industries (e.g., social services, real estate management, food service, religious organization). Employees were recruited through their employers, and there were between 1 and 21 employees who participated from each company. Response rates within each company ranged from 20% to 100% (mean=58%) As in the previous studies, all participants resided in the United States, were at least 18 years of age, and worked in a context with other employees. In four companies, employees were given two surveys, separated by approximately one month, in which they were asked about their small talk behaviors and motivations, demographics, and personality characteristics in the first survey, and answered questions about their work–related attitudes in the second survey. Employees who completed both surveys were compensated $5.00 in the form of an online gift card to one of several major retailers. In the other six companies, participants answered all survey questions in a single survey. Participants from these companies were compensated $5.00 in the form of an online gift card to one of several major retailers. The final sample was 70 employees

(age: mean=37.99, s.d.=12.48; 22.9% male, 60% Caucasian). For participants who completed the survey(s), their direct supervisor was asked to answer questions about their task performance and interpersonal citizenship behaviors. In total, supervisors provided ratings for 48 employees in the study. Both employee- and supervisor-rated items were rated on a 7 point Likert scale.

 Measures and analysis. Participant surveys included the same validated measures used in Study 3, with the addition of measures used to evaluate supervisor-rated task performance and interpersonal citizenship behavior. The Cronbach alphas for each of the participant-rated scales were all acceptable, as determined by exceeding the commonly accepted minimum of .70 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994), indicating that each abbreviated subscale shows good inter-item reliability. Cronbach alphas, along with the scale means, standard deviations, and inter-scale correlations for Study 4, are listed in Table 12. Both task performance and interpersonal citizenship behavior were measured with three items each from their respective subscales in Williams and Anderson's (1991) multidimensional performance measure. The six items used were selected because they each had the three highest factor loadings on their respective subscales in Williams and Anderson's (1991) original research. An example of an item used in the task performance subscale is the extent to which the employee, "fulfills responsibilities specified in their job description", and an example item measuring ICB is the extent to which an employee, "helps others who have been absent". Cronbach's alpha for the task performance and ICB subscales were .74 and .88, respectively, both of which exceed the commonly accepted minimum of .70 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994), indicating that each abbreviated subscale shows good inter-rater reliability.

---Insert Table 12 about here---

   I used the same procedure in Study 4 as Study 3. Results of the LPA, in addition

to the association between latent profiles and both small talk motivations and outcomes,

are described in the following sections. Importantly, profile structures were determined

based on the full sample of participating employees, regardless of whether their

supervisors provided ratings of their performance. I also conducted a confirmatory factor

analysis before proceeding to the LPA to ensure that the established scales had correctly

captured their intended construct. Due to the relatively modest sample size, I conducted

two separate confirmatory factor analyses: one with small talk dimensions (loading on a

second-order latent small talk factor) and motivations, and one with small talk

dimensions (loading on a second-order latent small talk factor) and outcomes. This is

appropriate because the small talk motivations and outcomes are not analyzed in the same

model, and therefore each confirmatory factor analysis represents the full range of

variables in the R3STEP and BCH calculations, respectively. As noted in Table 13, both

hypothesized models fit the data better than alternative theoretically plausible models.

The hypothesized measurement model for small talk and the dependent variables had an

adequate fit according to the fit statistics referenced in Chapter 1 (χ^2=389.15, df=266,

CFI=.90, RMSEA=.08). The hypothesized measurement model for small talk behaviors

and motivations had nearly adequate fit statistics (χ^2=837.40, df=486, CFI=.84,

RMSEA=.10). Given that small sample sizes often makes it difficult to fit a measurement

model (Muthén & Muthén, 2017), and that the measures had appropriate fit statistics in

studies 1 and 3, I elected to retain the scales in Study 4 and I proceeded with the LPA.

---Insert Table 13 about here---

Study 4 Results

As in Study 3, a four profile structure best fit the data. Model fit statistics, using the same criteria described in Study 3, can be found in Table 8. While the number of profiles was the same, the characteristics of the latent profiles, summarized in Table 9 and depicted graphically in Figure 2b, were slightly different than the latent profiles identified in Study 3. Specifically, there is similarly one profile that has very high levels of small talk (i.e., frequent small talkers), one profile that has very low levels of small talk (i.e., low small talkers), and two categories that could be described as having moderate small talk. However, in Study 4, the frequent small talker profile had a different structure than the frequent small talker profile in Study 3. Frequent small talkers in Study 4 had approximately equal amounts of salutations, polite talk, and news updates, whereas frequent small talkers in Study 3 had significantly more salutations and polite talk than they had news updates. The other major difference between the small talk profiles identified in studies 3 and 4 is that both moderate profiles in Study 4 showed a theoretically-expected structure. In other words, in both cases, participants had significantly more scripted small talk than they had idiosyncratic small talk. The implications of these differences are discussed in detail in the following section.

---Insert Figure 2b about here---

With respect to small talk motivations, the findings in Study 4 echo those of Study 3. Results of the R3STEP procedure are listed alongside the results from Study 3 in Table 10. Specifically, there was generally a significant, positive association between relational small talk motives and membership in the "frequent small talker" small talk profile (which had a higher volume of small talk), which indicates that Hypothesis 1 was

also supported in Study 4. Also similar to Study 3, there was no significant association between impression management motives and small talk profile membership, therefore Hypothesis 2 was not supported Study 4. However, Study 4 differed from Study 3 in that boredom did not significantly predict membership in any small talk profile in Study 4. It is possible that this is due to the lack of a parallel updater category in Study 4, thereby rendering a replication of support for Hypothesis 3 untestable in this study. It is also possible that the lack of significant finding is due to relatively low statistical power, which is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5 of this dissertation.

Finally, with respect to the association between small talk profiles and employee outcomes, the results partially replicated the findings of Study 3. The full results of the BCH procedure are listed in Table 11. Similar to Study 3, there was a generally positive association between being in a high-volume small talk profile (e.g., frequent small talkers) and performing ICB, thereby replicating support for Hypothesis 5. This suggests that employees who perform frequent small talk are more likely to engage in citizenship behaviors, although the nature of this data does not allow for testing a causal relationship. However, unlike Study 3, the results of Study 4 did not find a significant association between ego depletion and membership in any small talk profile. Therefore, Hypothesis 4 was not supported in Study 4. Finally, there was no significant association between membership in a given small talk profile and supervisor-rated task performance. Therefore, Hypothesis 6 was not supported. I discuss possible explanations for these null findings in Chapter 5.

Supplemental Analyses

Although my initial analytic strategy suggested that person-centered analysis was

preferable to variable-centered analysis for the study of small talk, the results of studies 3 and 4 raise the possibility that the associations between small talk and outocmes of interest are better captured by a traditional variable centered analysis. This is because membership in higher quantity small talk profiles was uniformly associated with ICB, regardless of the structure of the profiles. Moreover, the initial analyses in studies 3 and 4 do not account for alternative potential explanations, such as an underlying personality variable that drives both small talk and ICB.

To address these possibilities, I conducted supplementary analyses to shed additional insight on the results of studies 3 and 4. Specifically, I used variable-centered hierarchical regression to determine the impact of each of the three small talk dimensions on ICB, ego depletion, and task performance for the same samples analyzed in studies 3 and 4. In these analyses I controlled for positive and negative affect using the 10-item PANAS scale (Thompson, 2007). All items ask participants to think about themselves and how they normally feel, and the measure is comprised of five traits that measure each type of affect. An example positive affect trait is, "determined," and an example negative affect trait is, "upset." I also controlled for the Big Five personality characteristics—extraversion, openness to experience, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and agreeableness—using Donnellan, Oswald, Baird, and Lucas's (2006) 20 item mini-IPIP measure. Items on the PANAS and Big Five scales were all rated on a 7-point Likert scale, with one being low values of the trait and seven being high values. Finally, I controlled for gender, which was coded as a dichotomous variable (1=women, 2=men. Participants were given an option to indicate an alternate gender affiliation, but no

participant chose that option). Inter-scale correlations and Cronbach's alpha values for these variables are displayed in Tables 14a and 14b.

---Insert Table 14 about here---

---Insert Table 15 about here---

The supplementary analyses, described in Tables 15a and 15b, largely support the results of the LPA. In the Study 3 sample, hierarchical regressions showed that both salutations and news update talk had positive associations with ICB after controlling for gender and a variety of personality traits. There were no significant associations between small talk and ego depletion in Study 3, nor between small talk dimensions and any outcome in Study 4, after controlling for gender and personality traits. However, the regressions in Study 4 did produce a statistically significant positive coefficient for the association between polite talk and task performance. Although the model overall was not significant at p<05, likely due to the modest sample size (n=48 after listwise deletion), the significant positive coefficient suggests that future research with a larger sample might find a significant association between small talk and task performance. The slightly different findings between the person-centered and variable-centered analyses underscore the need to continue examining small talk from multiple perspectives.

Studies 3 and 4 Discussion

Taken together, studies 3 and 4 provide valuable insight into the way that employees combine different types of small talk and the associated causes and effects of those profile structures. Specifically, both studies found that there are four types of latent small talk profiles that describe participants' behaviors. In both studies, these profiles included (1) a high-frequency profile characterized by relatively high levels of all three

types of small talk, (2) a low-frequency profile that was characterized by relatively low levels of all three types of small talk, and (3) two moderate-volume small talk profiles. Furthermore, results from both studies indicated that, in general, a greater volume of small talk is positively associated with the performance of ICB, regardless of whether the ICB is self-rated (Study 3) or supervisor-rated (Study 4). This finding provides important evidence of the potential benefits of small talk in the workplace, and suggests that it is not as trivial as it may appear. The finding relating to ICB also supports previous research on small talk, which proposes that it is related to socially-oriented outcomes (e.g., relationship quality, Malinowski, 1923). Additionally, the results from both studies indicate that there is a positive association between having relational motives for engaging in small talk and being in a profile characterized by a greater volume of small talk.

Alongside these replicated findings, there were some important findings in Study 3 that were not replicated in Study 4. Specifically, the updaters profile in Study 3—characterized by a moderate volume of small talk in equal proportions of salutations, polite talk, and news updates—was not replicated in Study 4. The updaters category is particularly important because of the positive association between ego depletion and membership in the updaters profile. This positive association supports the aforementioned theorizing that small talk, especially idiosyncratic small talk, can deplete cognitive resources. Therefore, the significant association of the updater profile with ego depletion suggests that employees who engage in proportionally more idiosyncratic small talk are likely to suffer a net loss in energy from their small talk behavior. Contrastingly, employees in the other three profiles, who either engage in proportionally more scripted

small talk than idiosyncratic small talk or rarely engage in small talk at all, do not seem to be significantly more depleted as a result of their small talk behavior. This supports the assertion of IRT that small talk may provide emotional energy, which could offset the effort expended by participants in the high and moderate small talk profiles in the course of engaging in small talk. The lack of replication in Study 4 may either be due to unstable profile structure or, more likely, to limitations in the data used for Study 4. These limitations, as well as future research to address them, are discussed in detail in Chapter 5.

The findings in Study 3 related to boredom and membership in the updater category provide insight into the ways that small talk motivations might alter the form of employees' small talk. Indeed, these findings suggest that employees who are bored engage in proportionally more idiosyncratic small talk than members of other profiles. Thinking about the way that small talk manifests in the workplace, this finding makes sense intuitively. Individuals who are seeking to alleviate boredom are likely using small talk to fill the time, either between tasks or while performing a cognitively underwhelming task. Unlike salutations or polite talk, idiosyncratic news update talk can be extended to occupy a significant amount of time, with participants adding additional details about their weekend plans, hobbies, upcoming vacations, and so on (Roy, 1959). Therefore, participants who are primarily seeking stimulation from small talk are likely to engage in systematically different proportions of each of the three small talk dimensions. Finally, it is possible that the largely non-significant findings related to impression management motives are due to an overly broad conceptualization of the category. As noted in Chapter 3, I intentionally distilled the qualitative data into the fewest categories

possible in an effort to best facilitate quantitative data collection. However, the non-significant results related to this motivation may indicate that I went too far in erring on the side of parsimony, and that the impression management motive is actually a multifaceted construct. There is a suggestion of this in Collins's (2004) work on IRT, in which he proposes that, "forced rituals appear to be especially draining when persons are impelled by their own motivation, rather than by external social pressure, to throw themselves enthusiastically into interaction rituals" (p. 53). In the case of workplace small talk, this observation suggests that people who initiate small talk for (self-imposed) utilitarian motives, such as networking, might have different behaviors and outcomes than people who make small talk as a protective response to adhere to social pressure or norms. Future research might fruitfully consider this distinction to better understand the implications of small talk motivations.

Conclusion

The results of studies 3 and 4 suggest that participants engage in various quantities of small talk, and that the proportions of each type of small talk vary between latent small talk profiles. Furthermore, there are consistent results across both studies showing a positive association between frequent small talk behavior and the performance of organizationally-desirable ICB. Other findings, particularly with respect to a unique profile called "updaters" and their propensity for ego depletion, were present in Study 3 but not replicated in Study 4. The moderate differences in profile structure, combined with unreplicated findings from Study 3, suggest several potential avenues for future research on the effects of workplace small talk. I address some of these possiblities in the supplemental analyses that follow this chapter, and I explore the implications of this

research, as well as additional details about promising avenues for future research, in the next chapter.

Table 6: Construct Correlations for Latent Profile Analysis (Study 3)

	Mean	S.D.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Salutations	5.678	1.165	(.885)							
2. Polite talk	5.473	1.280	.743	(.898)						
3. News updates	4.522	1.354	.470	.531	(.921)					
4. Relational motives	5.004	1.288	.433	.346	.408	(.953)				
5. Impression management	4.884	1.334	.256	.244	.261	.451	(.907)			
6. Boredom	3.164	1.573	-.086	.031	.085	-.146	.045	(.947)		
7. Ego depleption	3.406	1.637	-.157	-.059	.005	-.190	.079	.617	(.939)	
8. ICB	5.409	1.010	.534	.448	.397	.616	.354	-.152	-.153	(.890)

Notes:
ICB=Interpersonal citizenship behavior
n = 580
Values on the diagonal represent Cronbach's alpha for each construct
r>|.09| are significant at p<.01 (two-tailed); r>|.08| are significant at p<.05

Table 7: CFA Model Comparisons (Study 3)

	χ^2	df	CFI	TLI	SRMR	RMSEA	$\Delta\chi^2(df)$
Model 1: 9 factors	2868.360	927	.913	.907	.057	.060	
Model 2: 8 factors, REL & IMPRES combined	4097.200	932	.858	.850	.072	.077	1228.84(5)
Model 3: 8 factors, GREET & POLITE combined	3093.281	928	.903	.897	.054	.063	224.921(1)
Model 4: 7 factors, unidimensional ST	4376.403	930	.846	.836	.065	.080	1508.043(3)

$n = 580$. ST, small talk; REL, relational motives; IMPRES, impression management motives; GREET, salutations; POLITE, polite small talk. CFI, comparative fit index; TLI, Tucker-Lewis index; SRMR, standardized root mean square residual; RMSEA, root-mean-square error of approximation. All χ^2 and $\Delta\chi^2$ values are significant at p < .01. $\Delta\chi^2$ tests relative to Model 1

Table 8: Fit Statistics for Profile Structures (Studies 3 and 4)

No. of Profiles	LL	FP	AIC	BIC	SSA-BIC	LMR (p)	BLRT (p)	Entropy
Study 3								
2	-2624.751	10	5269.502	5313.133	5281.387	.024	<.001	.866
3	-2508.870	14	5045.741	5106.823	5062.378	.008	<.001	.857
4	-2446.817	18	4929.634	5008.169	4951.026	.003	<.001	.833
5	-2411.168	22	4866.336	4962.323	4892.481	.177	<.001	.851
6	-2382.664	26	4817.327	4930.766	4848.226	.003	<.001	.861
Study 4								
2	-336.059	10	692.118	714.603	683.104	.003	<.001	.981
3	-319.726	14	667.452	698.931	654.833	.019	<.001	,833
4	-310.750	18	657.500	697.973	641.275	.147	.010	.894
5	-304.332	22	652.663	702.130	632.833	.258	.110	.904
6	-299.296	26	650.593	709.054	627.157	.450	.250	.897

Note: LL log-likelihood; FP free parameters; AIC Akaike information criteria; BIC Bayesian information criteria; SSA–BIC sample-size adjusted BIC; LMR Lo, Mendell, and Rubin (2001) test; BLRT bootstrapped log-likelihood ratio tests.

Table 9: Descriptive Information per Latent Profile (Studies 3 and 4)

	% of sample	SALUTATIONS MEAN	SALUTATIONS 95% CI	POLITE TALK MEAN	POLITE TALK 95% CI	NEWS UPDATES MEAN	NEWS UPDATES 95% CI
Study 3 – Small talk profiles							
Low Small Talkers	2	1.835	[1.39,2.28]	1.887	[1.21,2.56]	1.781	[0.79,1.80]
Updaters	13	3.859	[3.59,4.12]	4.006	[3.77,4.25]	3.780	[3.51,4.05]
Moderate Small Talkers	32	5.576	[5.40,5.75]	4.889	[4.64,5.13]	4.044	[3.84,4.25]
Frequent Small Talkers	52	6.388	[6.31,6.47]	6.376	[6.25,6.49]	5.135	[4.94,5.33]
Study 4 – Small talk profiles							
Low Small Talkers	9	2.996	[2.09,3.90]	2.430	[1.42,3.44]	2.280	[1.53,3.03]
Moderate Small Talkers, Group B	27	5.634	[5.29,5.98]	4.661	[4.07,5.25]	2.376	[2.05,2.71]
Moderate Small Talkers, Group A	40	6.285	[6.07,6.51]	5.298	[4.85,5.75]	4.326	[4.03,4.62]
Frequent Small Talkers	24	6.289	[6.07,6.50]	6.458	[6.17,6.75]	6.463	[6.16,6.77]

Figure 2a: Study 3 Latent Small Talk Profiles
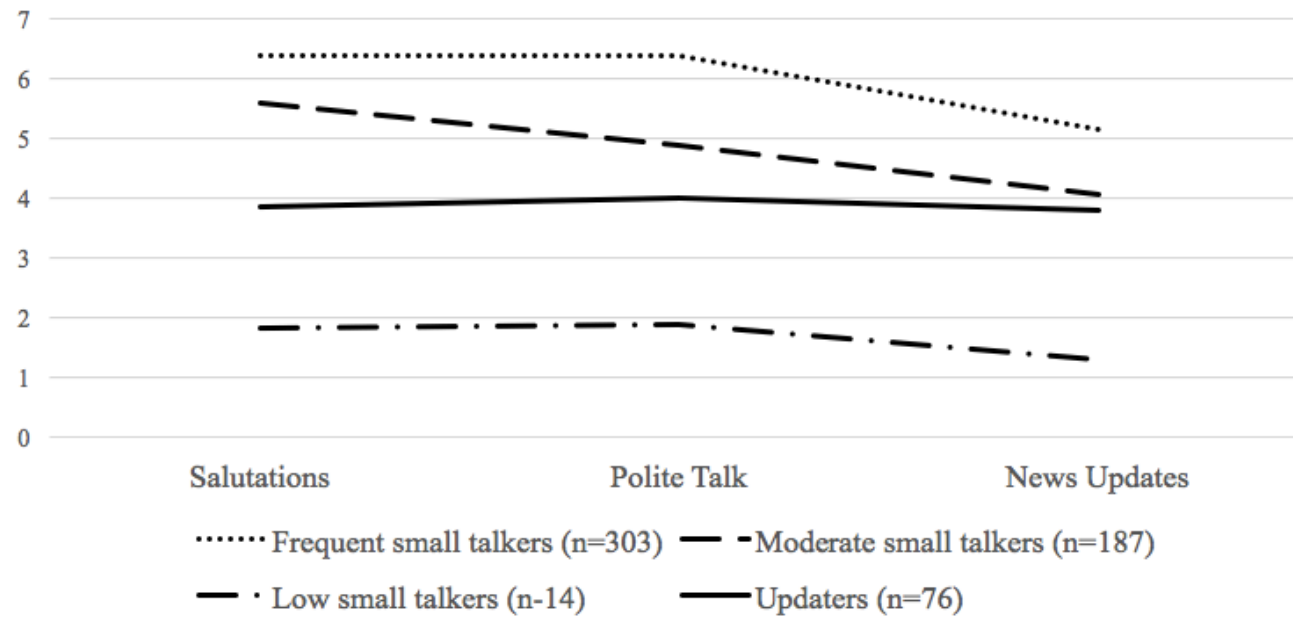
Figure 2b: Study 4 Latent Small Talk Profiles
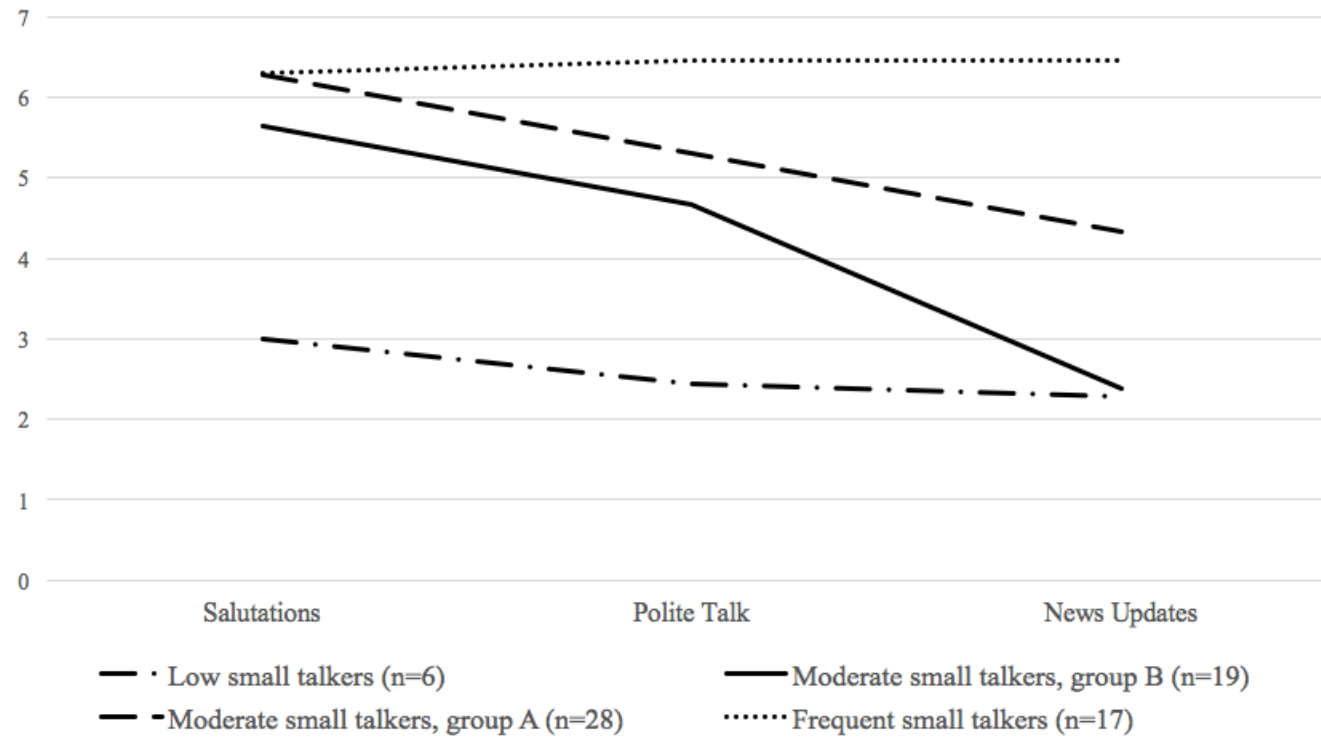
Table 10: Three-Step Results for Motivational Antecedents (R3STEP) (Studies 3 and 4)

Study/motive

Study 3	F v. L	F v. M	F v. U	M v. L	M v. U	L v. U
Relational	1.362***	.600**	.883***	.736**	.284*	-.479*
Boredom	.396*	.093	-.131	.303	-.224*	-.527**
Impression management	.465*	.014	.207	.451*	.193	.258

Study 4	F v. L	F v. MA	F v. MB	MA v. L	MA v. MB	L v. MB
Relational	2.146**	.607	1.094	1.539**	.487	1.052*
Boredom	1.116	.085	.324	1.030	.238	.792
Impression management	-.526	-.124	-.218	-.402	-.094	-.308

Note. All values are estimates from the R3STEP logistic regression analyses. In Study 3, n=580; in Study 4, n=69. Positive values indicate that higher values on the motive make a person more likely to be in the first small talk profile out of the two being compared; negative values indicate that higher values on the motive make a person more likely to be in the second small talk profile. F=frequent small talkers (studies 3 and 4); L=low small talkers (studies 3 and 4); M=moderate small talkers (Study 3); U=updaters (Study 3); MA= moderate small talkers, group A (Study 4), MB=moderate small talkers group B (Study 4).
*p < .05; ** p< .01; ***p<.001

Table 11: Three-Step Results for Distal Outcomes (BCH Procedure) (Studies 3 and 4)

Study/Outcome

Study 3	Freq (A)	Mod (B)	Upd (C)	Low (D)	Chi square
Ego depletion	3.218$_C$	3.510	3.896$_A$	3.424	15.629
ICB	5.871$_{B,C,D}$	5.196$_{A,C,D}$	4.440$_{A,B,D}$	3.634$_{A,B,C}$	182.669

Study 4	Freq (E)	Mod_A (F)	Mod_B (G)	Low (H)	Chi square
Ego depletion	3.396	3.597	3.933	3.654	.856
ICB	6.344$_{G,H}$	5.809$_H$	5.246$_E$	4.207$_{E,F}$	16.724
Task performance	6.288	5.764	6.044	6.172	2.845

Note: All analyses were run using the BCH procedure in MPlus. and values in the table represent mean values for each outcome within a latent profile. For Study 3, all variables are based on 580 observations. For Study 4, data for 70 participants were available for ego depletion, and data for 48 participants were available for ICB and task performance. Subscripts indicate profiles that are significantly different at p<.05. Freq=frequent small talk profile; Mod=moderate small talk profile (Study 3); Upd=updater small talk profile (Study 3); Low=low small talk profile; Mod_A= moderate small talkers, group A (Study 4), Mod_B=moderate small talkers group B (Study 4).

Table 12: Construct Correlations for Latent Profile Analysis (Study 4)

	Mean	S.D.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Salutations	5.836	1.093	(.830)								
2. Polite talk	5.186	1.475	.551**	(.877)							
3. News update	4.173	1.729	.433**	.619**	(.955)						
4. Boredom	2.243	1.324	.067	.214	.033	(.933)					
5. Relational motives	5.382	1.296	.320**	.302*	.351**	-.196	(.950)				
6. Impression management	4.446	1.582	.054	.110	.115	.276*	.398**	(.897)			
7. Ego deplepion	3.644	1.670	-.061	.058	-.077	.446**	-.183	.181	(.909)		
8. ICB	5.681	1.273	.364*	.344*	.451**	-.278	.493**	.313*	-.213	(.876)	
9. Task performance	6.007	.841	-.014	.157	.121	-.413**	.293*	-.096	-.442**	.442**	(.740)

Notes:

ICB=Interpersonal citizenship behavior

n = 49-70 (based on pairwise deletion)

Values on the diagonal represent Cronbach's alpha for each construct

*** are significant at p<.01 (two-tailed); * are significant at p<.05*

Table 13: CFA Model Comparisons (Study 4)

	χ^2	df	CFI	TLI	SRMR	RMSEA	$\Delta\chi^2(df)$
Confirmatory factor analysis with small talk dimensions and small talk motivations							
Model 1: 7 factors	837.40	486	.84	.84	.09	.10	
Model 2: 6 factors, REL & IMPRES combined	1018.63	485	.76	.74	.13	.13	181.23(1)
Model 3: 6 factors, GREET & POLITE combined	896.54	487	.82	.80	.09	.11	59.14(1)
Model 4: 4 factors, unidimensional ST	1041.40	489	.75	.73	.11	.13	204.00(3)
Confirmatory factor analysis with small talk dimensions and small talk outcomes							
Model 1: 7 factors	389.15	266	.90	.89	.08	.08	
Model 2: 6 factors, ICB & TASK combined	434.87	269	.86	.85	.10	.09	45.72(3)
Model 3: 6 factors, GREET & POLITE combined	435.06	269	.87	.85	.10	.09	45.91(3)
Model 4: 4 factors, unidimensional ST	590.95	269	.74	.71	.11	.13	201.80(3)

n = 49-70. ST, small talk; REL, relational motives; IMPRES, impression management motives; GREET, salutations; POLITE, polite small talk; ICB, interpersonal citizenship behaviors; EGO, ego depletion; TASK, task performance. CFI, comparative fit index; TLI, Tucker-Lewis index; SRMR, standardized root mean square residual; RMSEA, root-mean-square error of approximation. All χ^2 and $\Delta\chi^2$ values are significant at p < .01. $\Delta\chi^2$ tests relative to Model 1. Factors in hypothesized models (Model 1) are three dimensions of small talk modeled on a second-order latent small talk variable, and three motivations (outcomes)

Table 14a: Correlations for Supplementary Analyses (Study 3)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1. Salutations	(.885)												
2. Polite talk	0.743	(.898)											
3. News updates	0.47	0.531	(.921)										
4. ICB	0.534	0.448	0.397	(.890)									
5. Ego depletion	-0.157	-0.059	0.005	-0.153	(.939)								
6. PA	0.371	0.225	0.258	0.466	-0.301	(.872)							
7. NA	-0.176	-0.069	0.096	-0.102	0.578	-0.234	(.926)						
8. Extraversion	0.024	0.02	0.156	0.223	-0.24	0.256	-0.083	(.759)					
9. Agreeableness	0.332	0.268	0.188	0.519	-0.296	0.297	-0.234	0.337	(.781)				
10. Consc.	0.305	0.173	-0.009	0.263	-0.445	0.458	-0.524	0.089	0.336	(.701)			
11. Openness	0.371	0.274	0.023	0.305	-0.342	0.317	-0.393	0.211	0.476	0.452	(.694)		
12. Neuroticism	-0.199	-0.1	0.078	-0.177	0.553	-0.337	0.622	-0.168	-0.247	-0.518	-0.377	(.783)	
13. Sex	-0.155	-0.117	-0.057	-0.139	-0.007	-0.023	-0.005	0.074	-0.225	-0.082	-0.043	-0.081	1

Notes:

ICB=Interpersonal citizenship behavior; PA=positive affect; NA=negative affect; Consc.=conscientiousness
n = 580
Values on the diagonal represent Cronbach's alpha for each construct
Neuroticism is based on three items, as one of the original four items did not load well on the factor. All calculations are based on this three-item measure.
r>|.11| are significant at p<.01 (two-tailed); r>|.082| are significant at p<.05

Table 14b: Correlations for Supplementary Analyses (Study 4)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1. Salutations	(.830)												
2. Polite talk	0.551**	(.877)											
3. News updates	0.433**	0.619**	(.955)										
4. ICB	0.364*	0.344*	0.451**	(.876)									
5. Ego depletion	-0.061	0.058	-0.077	-0.213	(.909)								
6. Task performance	-0.014	0.157	0.121	0.442**	-0.442**	(.740)							
7. PA	0.139	-0.098	0.047	0.232	-0.449**	0.337*	(.874)						
8. NA	0.078	0.149	0.214	0.136	0.328**	-0.245	-0.388**	(.798)					
9. Extraversion	0.144	0.154	0.326**	0.434**	-0.203	0.345*	0.385**	-0.128	(.766)				
10. Agreeableness	0.197	0.076	0.228	0.355*	-0.141	0.127	0.280*	-0.103	0.389**	(.816)			
11. Consc.	0.021	0.035	0.057	0.23	-0.296*	0.384**	0.550**	-0.338**	0.131	0.105	(.777)		
12. Neuroticism	-0.156	0.028	0.118	0.061	0.294*	-0.084	-0.339**	0.627**	-0.175	-0.289*	-0.165	(.647)	
13. Sex	0.131	0.116	-0.198	-0.242	0.231	-0.043	-0.158	-0.018	-0.004	-0.133	-0.374**	-0.138	1

Notes:
ICB=Interpersonal citizenship behavior; PA=positive affect; NA=negative affect; Consc.=conscientiousness
n = 48-70 (pairwise deletion used)
Values on the diagonal represent Cronbach's alpha for each construct
Neuroticism is based on three items, as one of the original four items did not load well on the factor. All calculations are based on this three-item measure.
Openness to experience did not have a satisfactory reliability ($\propto$<.60), and thus was not included in these calculations
* p<.05, **p<.01

Table 15a: Supplementary Regression for Study 3

| | Dependent variable: ICB | | | | | | Ego depletion | | | | | |
| | Step 1 | | | Step 2 | | | Step 1 | | | Step 2 | | |
Variable	B	SE	P	B	SE	p	B	SE	p	B	SE	p
Positive affect	.325	.035	<.001	.225	.034	<.001	-.071	.054	.195	-069	.058	.230
Negative affect	.063	.032	.052	.049	.030	.101	.410	.050	<.001	.408	.051	<.001
Extraversion	-.004	.027	.884	.023	.025	.348	-.153	.042	<.001	-.143	.043	.001
Agreeableness	.336	.033	<.001	.278	.031	<.001	-.090	.051	.080	-.095	.052	.068
Conscientiousness	-.014	.041	.722	-.015	.037	.685	-.118	.063	.062	-.123	.063	.053
Openness	.025	.031	.433	-.024	.030	.420	-.005	.049	.916	-.022	.051	.659
Neuroticism	-.006	.035	.869	-.013	.032	.684	.297	.054	<.001	.303	.054	<.001
Gender	-.074	.069	.282	-.019	.063	.767	.001	.107	.993	.011	.108	.918
Salutations				.214	.043	<.001				.003	.073	.968
Polite talk				.060	.038	.112				.075	.064	.240
News updates				.076	.029	.009				-.042	.049	.391
R^2	.384			.491			.436			.438		
ΔR^2	.384**			.107**			.436**			.002		

Notes:
n=580.
** p <.01

Table 15b: Supplementary Regression for Study 4

Variable	Dependent variable: ICB						Ego depletion						Task performance					
	Step 1			Step 2			Step 1			Step 2			Step 1			Step 2		
	B	SE	P	B	SE	p	B	SE	p	B	SE	p	B	SE	p	B	SE	p
Positive affect	.044	.204	.831	.092	.208	.662	-.530	.239	.030	-.528	.258	.046	.038	.142	.788	.117	.145	.424
Negative affect	.457	.274	.103	.273	.279	.334	.202	.298	.500	.229	.316	.472	-.207	.191	.285	-.188	.194	.340
Extraversion	.356	.150	.023	.303	.156	.060	-.087	.165	.600	-.074	.179	.680	.204	.105	.058	.169	.109	.129
Agreeableness	.181	.170	.293	.100	.180	.582	.094	.193	.629	.103	.200	.609	-.024	.118	.837	.068	.125	.591
Conscientiousness	.197	.190	.306	.077	.192	.691	.047	.212	.827	.051	.224	.822	.218	.132	.107	.223	.134	.104
Neuroticism	-.092	.213	.666	-.035	.211	.869	.224	.210	.290	.218	.221	.328	.134	.148	.373	.103	.147	.488
Gender	-.488	.445	.279	-.686	.467	.150	.879	.479	.072	.875	.533	.106	.182	.310	.561	.263	.325	.424
Salutations				.225	.218	.308				-.034	.220	.877				-.284	.152	.069
Polite talk				.109	.183	.553				.003	.191	.989				.259	.127	.049
News updates				.055	.138	.695				-.027	.164	.872				-.061	.096	.529
R^2	.343			.425			.278			.279			.270			.359		
ΔR^2	.343*			.081			.278*			.001			.270			.090		

Notes:
n=48-69.
*p <.05; ** p <.01

CHAPTER 5
GENERAL DISCUSSION

Small talk is ubiquitous in the workplace, and extant literature suggests that it may have both positive and negative consequences for employees because it can be both energizing and draining. Although prior research has provided rich description of small talk at work, including waiting for meetings (Mirivel & Tracy, 2005), during mindless work activities (Roy, 1959), and during breaks (Fine, 1990), there has been little research to quantify the effects of workplace small talk on employees' attitudes and behaviors. This is among the first studies to empirically investigate small talk's effects in the workplace, and is the first to examine the link between workplace small talk and employee performance. Taken together, my dissertation makes two primary contributions to the literature on small talk, and its implications extend to make an additional contribution to the literature on IRT more broadly.

Theoretical Contributions

Scope of small talk. The findings of my first study suggest that there are three dimensions of small talk: salutations, polite talk, and news update talk. The first dimension, salutations, refers to the most basic level of phatic verbal exchange. If phatic communication is, "speech intended to form ties of union" (Malinowski, 1923), then salutations serve the minimum function of creating a connection between two people through mutual acknowledgement. Of the three dimensions of small talk, this is the most scripted, as there is relatively little room for socially-acceptable variation in participants' choice of salutations. The dimension of polite talk also aligns with Malinowski's (1923) original definition of phatic communication. Indeed, the archetypal polite talk—discussion of the weather—has been used to exemplify small talk in both academic and

practitioner literatures (e.g., Fine, 2005). This echoes Malinowski's (1923/1945) observation that small talk often involves "affirmations of some supremely obvious state of things" (p. 313), thereby underscoring the unimportance of content involved in polite talk, and in small talk more broadly. Finally, news updates represent the least scripted form of small talk. While the initiation of news update talk may be scripted, involving such questions as "How are you?", "How was your weekend?", and, "How is your family?" (Ventola, 1979), responses to questions, as well as the acknowledgement of those responses, can be quite idiosyncratic. This logic is consistent with recent research on marginalized identities in the workplace, which finds that even in conversation about seemingly neutral topics, such as recounting of weekend plans, participants may exert a great deal of effort to determine their responses (Lynch & Rodell, 2018; Roberts, 2005). These findings contradict Beinstein's (1975) assertion that small talk is so scripted that it can be had without investing any mental energy.

Moreover, I differentiate small talk from related constructs. With respect to gossip, whose inclusion in the category of small talk has been controversial in previous research (Schneider, 1987), I found that both positive and negative gossip are distinct from small talk. While both gossip and small talk can be characterized as non-task related conversation, small talk is theoretically distinct because it can be had with strangers and confidants alike, whereas gossip requires a level of trust and existing rapport. The theoretical distinction is supported by an empirical distinction, as gossip did not load on a higher-order small talk factor, which was comprised of salutations, polite talk, and news updates. Additionally, my findings support the distinction of friendship from small talk. This is an important distinction because there is anecdotal evidence that individuals often

confuse the personal information given in news update talk for attempts at building

friendship connections, especially for people who come from cultures where it is unusual

to share personal information with strangers (Meyer, 2014).

Finally, the results of studies 3 and 4 describe how employees systematically

differ in their combinations of salutations, polite talk, and news updates. This study

underscores the fact that it is not merely small talk dimensions—but the combination of

dimensions used by employees—that dictate outcomes of interest. Whereas this

realization has implications for the way small talk is studied, it also implies an important

descriptive contribution of the dissertation. Specifically, both studies 3 and 4 suggest that

small talk often varies in quantity, with scripted small talk often occurring more

frequently than idiosyncratic small talk. This realization may explain why previous

research has focused on the scripted nature of small talk, even though there are numerous

counterfactual examples that point to small talk's idiosyncrasy. Taken together, the

identification of three distinct small talk dimensions, combined with the distinction

between small talk and related constructs and description of its occurrence in somewhat

predictable patterns, firmly establishes the scope of small talk and enables continued

research on its relationship with work-related variables.

Association with employee outcomes. Studies 3 and 4 clearly demonstrate that

membership in profiles with a high volume of small talk is associated with an increase in

ICB. This was true for both self-rated (Study 3) and other-rated (Study 4) measures of

ICB, and is especially impressive given the relatively low statistical power in Study 4.

Furthermore, hierarchical regressions conducted as supplementary analyses to studies 3

and 4 largely supported the findings of the LPA, as higher volumes of small talk were

related to ICB in the Study 3 sample, even with the inclusion of several control variables. Although there were not parallel significant findings in the supplementary analyses of the Study 4 sample, the small sample size may have led to non-significant findings that obscured an actual relationship between small talk and ICB. Overall, my findings generally confirm descriptions of small talk in previous research of its function in "oiling the social (interpersonal) wheels" (e.g., Holmes, 2000b, 2003; Holmes & Fillary, 2000; Holmes & Marra, 2004). Of importance to organizations, this social lubrication does not merely improve coworker liking, but is associated with socially-oriented behaviors that are known to ultimately benefit the organization (Mossholder, Settoon & Henagan, 2005).

With respect to ego depletion, my results provide an important implication to address the tension between depicting small talk as being both energizing and draining. In Study 3, participants were most depleted in the category of small talk that had a moderate level of small talk overall and proportionally more less scripted talk than the other categories. This suggests that idiosyncratic small talk may be draining, as participants actively monitor their contributions to seemingly innocuous discussions about personal matters. The findings in Study 3 suggest that, in cases of disproportionately frequent idiosyncratic small talk, the detriments associated with cognitive work of engaging in small talk might outweigh any energizing benefit from enacting interaction rituals. Interestingly, this result was only evident in the LPA, as the Person correlations between news updates and ego depletion was non-significant in the Study 3 sample, and supplementary variable-centered analyses similarly found no significant relationship between news updates and ego depletion. This suggests that LPA may provide an

important complementary perspective on small talk that is not available through traditional variable-centered analyses. Contrastingly, the greatest number of participants in both studies 3 and 4 had significantly more scripted small talk than idiosyncratic small talk. This prevalence of a common small talk pattern may explain why the energizing, "effortless" (Beinstein, 1975) depiction of small talk has dominated the literatures of communication and sociology, with comparatively less attention given to the effortful forms of idiosyncratic small talk.

With respect to small talk's impact on task performance, my non-significant findings suggest the possibility of negative factors that could mitigate small talk's positive effects. For instance, it might be that any benefits gained through increased access to instrumental information or building rapport with colleagues are offset by disruptions or mental fatigue. Additionally, the nature of small talk as a relationship-building activity might be beneficial in certain contexts but not others. For instance, small talk might benefit task performance in knowledge-intensive industries, or in jobs where social capital is important to completing assigned tasks. However, small talk might not improve task performance in other jobs, such as those that require primarily solitary task completion. Finally, the supplementary analyses of the Study 4 sample suggest that the modest sample size of the study could have impacted the results of this study. Considering the small sample size and significant, positive coefficient between polite talk and task performance, it is possible that future research might find additional benefits of workplace small talk with respect to task performance. These potential explanations are important to understanding the full effects of workplace small talk, and should be investigated in greater detail in future research.

Implications for IRT. The results of studies 3 and 4 suggest a need to qualify the assumptions of IRT. While IRT proposes that successful interaction rituals produce solidarity and emotional energy for participants, Study 3 did not indicate a straightforward association between small talk and ego depletion, and Study 4 did not find any significant differences in ego depletion based on membership in a given small talk profile. This lack of clear relationship between small talk and energy suggests the presence of countervailing effects that mitigate the net energy gain IRT associates with successful interaction rituals. Specifically, both previous research on identity concealment (e.g., Lynch & Rodell, 2018) and the results of Study 3 suggest that idiosyncratic small talk, such as discussion about weekend plans and upcoming vacations, might require substantial energy. Depending on the balance of energy used to enact small talk and the energy gain that results from enacting this interaction ritual, my research suggests that some interaction rituals might not provide a net increase in energy even if they appear to be outwardly successful according to the criteria of IRT.

Importantly, the most consistent findings of my dissertation—namely, small talk's positive association with ICB in both person-centered and variable-centered analyses in Study 3—suggest that the solidarity-building component of interaction rituals might be more salient in the workplace than the hypothesized production of energy. This may be due to the countervailing impacts of small talk on energy, or the presence of more salient predictors of energy in a workplace context. Taken together, the largely absent relationship of small talk with energy suggests that there may be important contextual conditions of interaction rituals' impact that have yet to be explored.

Practical Implications

    Management strategy. One of the most straightforward changes that practitioners might make in response to these findings is to change their managers' attitudes toward small talk. For managers that presently view small talk as a distraction to be minimized, the current research suggests that it might promote helping behaviors if managers allow a modest level of small talk. While it is possible that small talk may take a few minutes away from time employees would otherwise spend on work, this reduction in productivity might be offset by benefits derived from increased ICB. As described in the following sections, future research on small talk at the group level could provide additional insight about the group-level benefits of ICB associated with workplace small talk. However, the results of Study 3, specifically, also suggest that some small talk might have negative effects. Employees who engage in a disproportionately large volume of idiosyncratic small talk may ultimately feel depleted, thereby draining energy that is necessary for the performance of their jobs. Ultimately, this study suggests that a moderate amount of small talk—especially scripted small talk such as salutations—may promote beneficial outcomes.

    Office and job design. Similar to the implication for modifying managers' tolerance of small talk, my research suggests that organizations should consider the utility of small talk when designing office space and formal interaction responsibilities. With respect to office space, although current research has found several drawbacks to fully open offices (Grant & Parker, 2009; Oldham & Brass, 1979), my research suggests it is important for employees to have an opportunity to see other people outside their private offices. This could take the form of common spaces (e.g., water coolers, shared copy

machines) where employees might have an opportunity to greet one another and exchange small talk (Fayard & Weeks, 2007). Importantly, the results of Study 3, which found that disproportionately high amounts of idiosyncratic small talk can be draining, support existing research that cautions against the use of completely open offices. My research suggests that, beyond what is known about open offices being distracting, the constant presence of coworkers in open offices may require employees to devote significant mental energy to participating in unscripted small talk, thereby draining them of energy to do their work.

With respect to job design, the importance of small talk should be of particular concern for those managing employees who work virtually. The results of Study 2 found that approximately one-third of employees engage in small talk because they are bored and need to "pass the time" with the coworkers in their environment. The implication of this finding—consistent with other research on the virtual workforce (Kirkman, Rosen, Gibson, Tesluk & McPherson, 2002)—is that employees who are not co-located are less likely to engage in small talk. The results of studies 3 and 4 suggest that a reduction of small talk might be accompanied by a reduction in ICB, which is an important consideration for managers who are weighing the costs and benefits of virtual work. Future small talk research should examine whether virtual small talk has the same association with ICB as the face-to-face small talk that I examined in this research.

Selection. Studies 3 and 4 demonstrate a consistent positive association between membership in a high-small talk profile and the performance of ICB, which could be used by interviewers to evaluate job applicants. Specifically, companies that value extra role helping behaviors might consider a candidate's engagement in small talk with the

interviewer as indication of their potential to perform ICB if hired. Although making small talk might not be part of the formal job description, interviewers who select partially based on small talk might choose an applicant that is capable of building a rapport with their colleagues that ultimately fosters ICB. Additionally, as I discuss in the following sections, there is also the possibility that both small talk and ICB are caused by an unobserved third variable, such as an other-oriented personality trait. Even if the latter explanation is true, considering an applicant's propensity for small talk might indicate their potential to go above and beyond to help future coworkers.

This implication is related to Swider and colleagues' (2014) study on small talk with interviewers, which found that some valid information about the applicant may be conveyed during small talk, although small talk may also bias the interviewer's perception of the candidate. Considering these results, my findings suggest that it is not just the information conveyed through small talk that may be helpful in selecting candidates, but also the propensity to engage in small talk itself. Such an implication suggests that even applicants who engage in inelegant small talk with interviewers, although potentially awkward, may have the potential to be "team players" if hired.

Diversity management. The need for cognitive resources to engage in unscripted small talk also has critical implications for diversity management. Extant research has already shown that the inability to engage in conventional small talk negatively affects certain marginalized groups, such as those who are non-native language speakers (Chun et al., 2012) or who have intellectual disabilities (Holmes, 2003). Moreover, the literature on concealable stigma suggests that even when individuals are able to successfully engage in small talk, they may have to exert extraordinary effort to manage and hide their

stigmatized identity (DeJordy, 2008; Hewlin, 2009; Lynch & Rodell, 2018; Roberts, 2005). To that end, managers should be aware that organizationally-sponsored social events, such as team building exercises, happy hours, and holiday parties, could serve to exacerbate the mental exhaustion or social exclusion of certain employees. Managers might prevent this unintended consequence by providing structured conversation or activities (e.g., trivia games at happy hour) to prevent employees from having to engage in potentially difficult news update talk with their colleagues.

Limitations

In considering the aforementioned contributions of this research, it is necessary to acknowledge a few limitations that provide opportunities for future research. First, because data on workplace small talk was gathered via self-reported survey, it is possible that participants neglected to report small talk that was automatic and therefore, not salient in their retrospection of workplace behavior. For instance, some employees may engage in very brief instances of salutations or polite talk, but the scriptedness of those conversations renders them almost imperceptible as employees find other conversations more salient. Future research could address this limitation by coding transcripts of actual conversations to measure small talk instead of using self-reported measures.

Second, this study did not account for alternative explanations for the association between small talk and employee outcomes, such as differences in personal attributes or previous interpersonal relationships. There are two particularly interesting alternative explanations that should be addressed in future research. First, the nature of a pre-existing relationship might account for an employee's propensity to engage in both small talk and ICB in the context of a given role relationship. If that is the case, employees who are

friends with their coworkers might make small talk as a form of relationship maintenance (Knutson & Ayres, 1986) and feel motivated to help them if required (Bowler & Brass, 2006). Second, it is possible that some employees engage in both small talk and ICB because they have an underlying personality trait associated with a preference for interpersonal interaction (e.g., extraversion). It could also be that these employees are more caring, and thus have a desire to inquire about coworkers' health and well-being, as well as help coworkers via the performance of ICB. It may be practically beneficial for selection practitioners if future research finds that small talk is an easily-identifiable marker for a desirable personality trait.

Finally, studies 3 and 4 relied primarily on cross-sectional data. Moreover, Study 4 had fewer responses than is ideal (Tein et al., 2013), although subsequent analyses revealed no significant differences in small talk behavior between those who finished the survey and those who did not. Future research might address these limitations in two ways. First, examining the association between small talk and ICB from the first encounter between two people would help determine whether small talk *causes* ICB, or whether they co-occur as the result of another variable. Second, future research should attempt to replicate the results of Study 4. Given the relatively low statistical power, research using a larger sample size might find additional significant associations beyond those reported in Study 4.

Future Research

As the aforementioned discussion suggests, there is ample opportunity for future research on workplace small talk. Indeed, this dissertation represents the tip of the iceberg in understanding how employees' seemingly trivial small talk interactions may

have an important influence on their attitudes and behavior. Particularly interesting future research questions involve a shift in level of analysis, the incorporation of different types of data, and the examination of failed small talk.

With respect to levels of analysis, future research could meaningfully examine the effects of small talk at both the dyadic and group levels. At the dyadic level, future research might investigate whether small talk with particular others (e.g., friends versus non-friends) has different effects. For instance, it may be that idiosyncratic small talk is more draining when made with unknown others, such as a member of a different department or an employee visiting from another location, than it would be when interacting with friends. This might be because friends already know about each other's personal details, and thus employees might not expend much cognitive labor to regulate themselves in unscripted small talk. On the other hand, scripted small talk might be more energizing when made with unknown others, as it represents the addition of an interpersonal connection that the employee previously lacked. Conversely, relationships with close friends are relatively cemented, and scripted small talk with friends might not add energy because employees are not forging a new social connection.

Additionally, attention to the group level of analysis might further illuminate the effects of workplace small talk. Future research could examine the moderating impact of a "climate for small talk", in which managers expect and reward employees' participation in small talk, on the association between small talk and employee outcomes. Similarly, consideration of small talk dispersion within a group might lead to interesting insights about the effects of small talk. For instance, it might be that employees who perform considerably more or less small talk than their peers see different outcomes than

employees who perform an average level of small talk within their group. Finally, future

research at the group level of analysis might examine group-level effects of small talk.

Specifically, the function of small talk in improving task-related conversation (J.

Coupland, 2000), combined with the present research's finding that small talk is

associated with an increase in ICB, suggests that groups that have more small talk might

perform better than groups where small talk is rare.

The use of other types of data might also extend future research on workplace

small talk. In addition to analyzing transcripts as opposed to using self-report small talk

measurements, the examination of other performance data might eliminate possible

alternative explanations of small talk's impact on ICB. Specifically, future research

should examine other types of performance data that are not based on supervisory ratings.

Because small talk is crucial in developing rapport between individuals (J. Coupland,

2000; Malinowski, 1923/1945), it may be that employees who have a lot of small talk are

viewed more favorably than their peers because they have developed a rapport with their

supervisors (Montoux & Porte, 1980). This rapport may subsequently cause a positive

bias on the part of supervisors evaluating employees' performance, as they are likely to

generalize their positive interpersonal attitude toward the employee to also view the

employee's performance more favorably (Asch, 1946).

Finally, an interesting question for future research involves the case of failed

small talk. In my dissertation I assume that small talk conforms to socially-sanctioned

expectations, and that participants do not make a gaffe or otherwise offend their

conversational partner. However, as intimated by the discussion of unsuccessful small

talk among employees with intellectual disabilities and those who are not native to the

country of their workplace, failed small talk may have serious repercussions for employees' social integration in their workplace. Future research should examine two types of potentially failed small talk. First, there is the case of obviously failed small talk, in which both participants know that small talk has not conformed to societal expectations. There is also the potential for asymmetrically successful small talk, in which one participant views the interaction as successful, whereas the other participant views it as unpleasant. Indeed, the qualitative data collected in Study 2 seems to suggest that the latter is relatively common, and thus future research should examine the effects of asymmetrically successful small talk for both the satisfied and unsatisfied participant.

Conclusion

This research suggests that workplace small talk—although seemingly superficial—has important implications for employees' attitudes and behaviors. The four complementary studies in this dissertation suggest that small talk has multiple dimensions that vary based on the extent to which they are scripted, and that different combinations of small talk dimensions influence the degree to which small talk affects employee outcomes. Consistent with an interdisciplinary view of small talk, the present research finds that small talk can have both positive and negative effects in the workplace, and that it has a consistently positive association with ICB. Beyond its implications for small talk, the findings of my research extend IRT by highlighting the fact that even seemingly scripted interactions might require more energy to enact than they produce. In light of these findings, it is clear that there is nothing "small" about the effects of small talk in the workplace.

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