Original Research Article

Assessing perceived prevalence of deception in Organizational Communication

Abstract

Manipulations of crucial information during interaction in organization is deception with the organization too as it impacts the overall productivity and progress of the organization. The current study was an attempt to study the perceived prevalence of organizational deception using IMT. A questionnaire was constructed in two parts for direct and indirect analysis to elicit responses regarding prevalence of deception. The study concluded that faculty members use deception for different motives which may carry serious consequences in the organizations. It is further inferred that 'self benefit' is the major motive of deception followed by 'others' benefit' while 'harming others' came out to be least prevalent motive of violation of messages. The study is one of the initial steps towards using IMT theory for studying prevalence of deception. Looking into the vast scope of research in this area, the researchers can further probe deception in different interpersonal situations.

Key Words: Perceived prevalence, deception, Organizational Communication

Introduction

Communication is a vital and integral part of the health and well-being of any organization. It is said to be lifeblood of the organization as it is involved in just about everything an organization does. When all members of the organization effectively exchange information, it improves workflow and overall productivity. On the contrary, poor communication leads to confusion and ambiguity which results in misunderstandings, negative relationships and tensed atmosphere. In such situations, productivity of the organization is reduced (Hubbell *et al* 2005, Morison 2008).

The problem becomes more complex and more frustrating when there is intentional

distortion of information. In such situations, people either refuse to exchange the crucial information or manipulate the actual information via falsification, half truth, concealment and escape (Metts and Chronis 1986). Such intentional manipulation of information is called deception (McCornack, 1992, McCornack et al 1992, Hubell et al 2005, Lindsey 2008; Connelly 2012, Mittal and Randhawa 2014). According to Vrij (2000), deception is a successful or unsuccessful deliberate attempt, without warning, to create in the other a belief which is considered to be false by the communicator. Buller and Burgoon (1996) referred deception as 'a very common form of information management in human interaction.' They further elaborated that it is different from lying as lying is said to include only outright fabrications or falsification. Deception on the other hand can take many forms including concealment, omissions, exaggerations, half truths, misdirection and even tricking or bluffing.

Deception is a phenomenon that occurs in all communication contexts. It is part of everyday conversation (De Paulo *et al* 1996, Robinson *et al* 1998 Hancock *et al* 2004 Serota *et al* (2010)). In fact, some scholars argue that lying is a fact of social life rather than an extraordinary or unusual event (Kashy & Depaulo 1998).

Deception during interpersonal communication in an organization is also a well known phenomenon. Manipulations of crucial information or covert misrepresentations of information during interactions amongst faculty members is deception not only with fellow colleagues but also with the organization, due to impact on the overall productivity and progress of the organization. Deception in organizations is a context which has received an increased amount of attention in the recent years (Grover, 1997; Hubell *et al,* 2005)

To study such deception during communication McCornack (1992) created

'Information Manipulation Theory (IMT)' using Grice's four Conversational Maxims (CM). The principle claim of the theory is that messages are commonly thought of as deceptive if these covertly violate any of the four CMs (quantity, quality, relevance and manner). According to the theory, the violation of quality involves falsification of information, the violation of quantity involves omission, and the violation of relevance involves evasion and the violation of manner involves equivocation. McCornack further elaborated that deceptive messages are deceptive in that, although they deviate from the principles underlying conversational maxims, yet the departure remains unveiled. The listener is misled by his belief that speaker is behaving in cooperative manner. Empirical test by McCornack *et al* (1992) and many subsequent studies across countries and cultures confirmed that violation of four Grice's Maxims can be regarded as deception (Murai 1998, Lapinski 1995, Hubbell *et al* 2005, Dunleavy et al (2010) and Mittal and Randhawa 2014). However, Yeung et al (1999) conducted a study in Hong Kong in China and interpreted that 'Quality' and 'Relevance' violations were perceived as deception where as quantity and manner violation were not considered so.

To ascertain the type of dimension along which deception occur more frequently as per IMT theory, Levine *et al* (2002) studied the prevalence of different types of message violation among undergraduate students, 66 per cent of whom were Asians. The participants were provided with a situation and were asked to imagine themselves in the situation. The participants wrote exactly what they will say in the situation. The generated messages were than analyzed by experts on the basis of IMT. The results suggested that violation of quantity was most common which is perhaps not surprising as it is easiest and safest way to deceive. Corroborating this evidence, Lindsey *et al* (2008) in his study on power and deception at work place revealed that approximately

45 per cent of employees reported that they use deception at work place.

However, employees adopt various deceptive ways to avoid sharing information. Connelly *et al* (2012) in his study on "knowledge hiding in organizations revealed that knowledge hiding in organizations prevails in the form of evasive hiding, rationalized hiding and playing dumb.

Various other research studies Barrick and Mount (1996) and Deluga (1991) DePaulo *et al* (1991), Dunbar's (2004), Aquino and Becker (2005), Fanelli (2009) also supports that deception prevails in organizations, although in different forms. The empirical evidence proves the fact that the deception is prevalent at workplace and there could be dimension wise differences in different cultural contexts. Hence the current study tested hypothesis that 'there are significant differences in prevalence of deception along Quantity, Quality, Relevance and Manner dimensions of conversation are concerned'

Knowledge Gap:

In spite of widespread prevalence of deception in organizations across cultures, communities and organizations, very little empirical evidence is available about this phenomenon and thus, there is need for research in this area (Lindsey *et al* 2008). The scholars came across some studies which support the prevalence of deception in the form of lies (Quality violation) across cultures and communities, worldwide. But there were very few studies that explained other forms of deception like 'Quantity', 'Relevance' and 'Manner'**.** Consequently, there is no substantial evidence and antecedents of specific form of deception taking place in organizational communication which impacts and impairs the productivity and outcomes of organization. The current study was a step in this direction to study the perceived prevalence of organizational deception using IMT.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The study has been conducted at Punjab Agricultural University, Ludhiana in India to examine how information gets manipulated amongst colleagues in an organizational context. In other words, it captures the perception of academicians in relation to percent prevalence of deception along four dimensions i.e. Quantity, Quality, Relevance and Manner during discourse production.

From the available sampling frame of 520 faculty members, two separate lists of serving male and female faculty were obtained. From these lists, equal number of both gender were selected through systematic random sampling technique to obtain a sample of 100 faculty members. The data was collected through a specifically constructed Questionnaire using a personal contact approach.

Development of research instrument

A questionnaire was constructed in two parts for direct and indirect analysis to elicit responses regarding prevalence of deception.

The first part of the questionnaire (**indirect analysis**) contained nine deception provoking situations. Based on motives, these nine situations were further divided into three subheads i.e. 'For self benefit', 'For others benefit' and 'To harm others'. This classification was done on the bases of evidences from various studies to develop the premise that people always deceive with some motive in mind (De Paulo *et al* (1991), Kim *et al*, 1999; Vrij, 2000; Holstrom, 1979; Lindsey *et al,* 2008 and Levine *et al*, 2002). Further discussions were held with experts to establish the validity of occurrence of such situations in different organizations. Each of the situation was followed by four types of deceptive responses i.e. one for each dimension of

'Quantity', 'Quality', 'Relevance' and 'Manner'. The respondents rated the prevalence of all the four types of responses along a five point Likert scale i.e. Very frequently, Frequently, Sometimes, Rarely, Never with scores 5,4,3,2 and 1 respectively. (See annexure I)

The second part of the questionnaire, **direct analysis** was attempted to study perceived prevalence of deception. A list of 40 positive and negative statements which could contribute towards studying the phenomenon of deception were framed based on four different dimensions of Information Manipulation Theory (i.e. quantity violation, quality violation, relevance violation and manner violation). These statements were scrutinized by 6 judges for content validity and finally 28 statements were incorporated in the questionnaire. The reliability of the statements was tested by split half method for which Correlation Coefficient (r) was calculated to be 0.868, 0.764, 0.897 and 0.941 for 'Quantity', 'Quality', 'Relevance' and 'Manner' violations, respectively.

The respondents were asked to give the extent (Varying from 'very frequently' to 'not at all' on a five point likert scale) to which the phenomenon exists in their institution during interpersonal communication. The Score pattern ranged from 5 to 1 for positive statements and reversed in case of negative statement in such a way that high weight age was given to prevalence of deception.

RESULTS

PREVALENCE OF DECEPTION (Indirect technique)

Table 1 presents the data regarding perceived prevalence of deception for different motives i.e. self benefit, others' benefit and harming others. Self Benefit motive

included situations referred to those situations in which faculty could deceive their colleagues for their own benefit. The results revealed that, in respect **of 'self benefit' motive**, the maximum violation takes place on 'Quantity' parameter (4.20), followed by violation of 'Manner' (3.23), 'Relevance' (2.61) and 'Quality' (2.50). The results were further analyzed using Kruskal wallis test to test the significance of the difference. 'Quantity' violation was found significantly more prevalent in organizations as compared to 'Quality', 'Relevance' and 'Manner' violation ($\chi^2 =$ 43.79, $p<0.01$).

The mean score of deception for **other's benefit** showed that majority of the faculty violate on 'Quantity' parameter (3.75), followed by 'Relevance' (2.60), 'Manner, (2.44) and 'Quality' (2.16). The difference of prevalence of deception along different parameters were explored and found significant, statistically ($\chi^2 =$ 56.26, $p<0.01$).

Further it is evident from the table that like 'Self Benefit' and 'Other's Benefit' **for 'Harming others'** also, 'Quantity' violation (3.25) was found to be significantly different from 'Quality' (2.40), 'Relevance' (2.25) and 'Manner' (1.50). ($\chi^2 =$ 60.96, $p<0.01$).

Overall Prevalence of deception:

Further the data in table I, illustrated that **the overall prevalence of deception** along IMT dimensions takes place more along 'Quantity' dimension followed by 'Relevance', 'Manner', and 'Quality' in that order. Statistically 'Quantity' (3.73) was found to be significantly different than 'Quality' (2.35), 'Relevance' (2.49) and 'Manner' (2.39) when Kruskal Wallis test was applied. ($\chi^2 =$ 130.65, $p<0.01$).

Further perusal of the data revealed that 'self benefit' with a mean value of 3.13, is the major motive for deception followed by 'others' benefit' (2.74) and

'harming others' (2.35). It was found significant statistically ($\chi^2 = 25.3$, $p<0.01$). The results are in line with De Paulo *et al* (1991), Kim *et al* (1999), Vrij (2000) Holstrom (1979), and Levine *et al* (2002) who reported that self benefit was the major motive for deception followed by benefitting others. However, Lindsey *et al* (2008) argued that colleagues in workplace use deception more for others' benefit rather than self benefit.

PREVALENCE OF DECEPTION (DIRECT ANALYSIS)

For the purpose of direct analysis, the respondents were not given any specific situation but the phenomenon was captured based on 28 statements specific along four different dimensions of IMT. The faculty was asked to rate each statement on frequency of its occurrence in their organization. The discussion below corresponds to its results.

Extent of 'Quantity' violation

A perusal of table 2 indicates that maximum mean score was calculated for 'provide truthful information but hide critical information (4.04), followed by hiding the significant details (3.77) and not sharing the vital information (3.76). The overall mean value (3.69) reveals that faculty frequently violates messages on 'Quantity' parameter to deceive their fellow colleagues. This is perhaps owing to the reason that it is safest way to deceive others.

Extent of 'Quality' violation

The table 3 shows that the mean value of almost all the statements lie near 2.50. Overall, maximum faculty believed that people violate on quality parameter by providing the insignificant details but hiding the actual facts (2.66), closely followed by 'tactfully provide distorted information' (2.65). The overall mean for

'Quality' was found to be 2.37 which meant that, respondents opined that faculty tells lies to avoid sharing of the information which they have, although rarely.

Extent of 'Relevance' violation

A look at the mean values in table 4 for all the 'relevance specific' statement show that 'sending to another person' for information is most widely used practice to avoid sharing information (3.06), followed by telling irrelevant tales (2.80) but avoiding by changing the topic got least mean score value (2.30). Overall mean value 2.55 for 'Relevance' violation depicts that faculty 'sometimes' violates the information by giving irrelevant response when information is sought by their colleagues.

Extent of 'Manner' violation

Amongst all statements, maximum mean score was for 'not telling exactly what you want'(2.67), followed by managing to answer without actually answering (2.51). Over all mean for 'Manner' dimension was calculated to be 2.38 which depicts that people deceive their colleagues by providing vague and ambiguous information having double meaning.

Table 5: Violation of messages on 'Manner' parameter of Information Manipulation Theory by faculty to avoid sharing of information

n= 100

Manner manipulation specific statements	**Extent of prevalence**					$\bar{\chi}$	σ
	Very	**Frequently**	**sometimes**	**rarely**	**Not at all**		

Provide vague information	2	11	35	29	23	**2.42**	1.00
Tell exactly what you want.	4	14	35	37	10	**2.67**	0.95
Provide information with multiple meaning	1	5	27	36	31	**2.11**	0.91
Be evasive in answering	1	6	30	34	29	**2.18**	0.93
Give cold impression	1	8	39	32	20	**2.41**	0.91
Manage to answer without actually answering	5	8	35	35	17	**2.51**	1.01
Pretend to misunderstand your question.	5	8	29	34	24	**2.39**	1.07
Overall Mean	**2.38**						

Overall deception on different parameters of IMT by faculty

Table 6 compares use of different parameters of IMT. It indicates that, faculty violates the messages on 'Quantity' parameter, the most (3.69), followed by 'Relevancy' parameter (2.55), 'Manner' parameter (2.38) and 'Quality' parameter (2.37) in that descending order. When Kruskal Wallis test was applied to explore the difference between different parameters, the prevalence of deception on 'Quantity' parameter was found to be significantly different from other parameters ($\chi^2 = 87.7$, $p<0.01$). Hence, it can be inferred that faculty violate messages most often on 'Quantity' parameter when colleagues seek some information, perhaps owing to the reason that sharing incomplete information is safest over other forms of deception in case deception is detected. This was followed by providing irrelevant and ambiguous

information but faculty hesitates to lie to their fellow colleagues.

Combined Analysis of prevalence of deception (for direct and Indirect analysis)

The pooled data pertaining to prevalence of deception in organization is presented in Table 7. It is evident from the table that in both direct as well as indirect analysis, deception is most widely prevalent on 'Quantity' parameter. It clearly indicates that faculty frequently provides incomplete information to their fellow colleagues ($\bar{\chi}$=3.51). In other words, they don't reveal complete information but reveal part of it to save their skin in case truth is unveiled in future. This was followed by 'Relevance' (2.52) dimension which depicts that if the faculty has to deceive their colleagues then they prefer to provide incomplete information followed by providing irrelevant information rather than telling lies or giving ambiguous messages which may include double meaning. Statistically, the mean for prevalence of deception along different parameters of information manipulation was found to be highly significant. Hence, the hypothesis that 'there are significant differences as far as prevalence of violation of Quantity, Quality, Relevance and Manner dimensions of conversation are concerned' is accepted. Overall deception mean score was found to be 2.74 which shows that faculty use deception while communicating with colleagues. In line with this, Hubbel *et al* (2005), Lindsey *et al* (2008), Dunbar (2004), Fulk and Mani (1986), Grover (1997) and Deluga (1991) also stated that deception is prevalent in organizations.

Overall 'Quantity' violation was ranked first while 'Quality' violation was ranked lowest on the basis of mean value. It is flattering because deception on 'Quantity' is comparatively more acceptable as compared to 'Quality' violation.

Dunleavy et al (2010) generalized that deception is always frowned upon in the work place and if it is in the form of omitting information, then it is acceptable but if distortion of information is not acceptable. People who withheld information are seen as more acceptable. i.e. higher in character than those who distort the information.

Discussion

Colleagues can be great allies to one another in the workplace and the climate of the organization to a large extent depends upon flow of information among them. It is important that employees observe sanctity of sharing information so that message are received and interpreted correctly. Deception at work place is detrimental to the progress and productivity of the organization.

Overall, faculty did not deny deception and admitted that it happens under their roof in the sense that colleagues hide their knowledge from their colleagues. The results shin that deceptive messages violating Grice's (1989) conversational maxims were in practice in organization. Overall it can be concluded that in the organizational context of PAU, deception is of moderate occurrence. However, to offer this conclusion is not to state that the academic organization is exploitive, rather this work offers food for thought for improving organizational effectiveness through honest interpersonal communication. The study concluded that faculty members use deception for different motives which may carry serious consequences in the organizations. It is further inferred that 'self benefit' is the major motive of deception followed by 'others' benefit' while 'harming others' came out to be least prevalent motive of violation of messages.

On the whole, Quantity' emerged to be the most frequently used form of Information Manipulation which is considered least deceptive form of Information manipulation as evidenced by various previous studies (McCornack *et al*, 2002; Dunleavy *et al*, 2010 Mittal and Randhawa, 2014). The 'Quanity' violation which is perceived to be the least deceptive form of information manipulation was the most widely prevalent form of deception in the organization. On the other hand, 'Quality' violation i.e. falsification and fabrication is perceived to be most deceptive form of information manipulation and is least prevalent form of deception in the organization. Hence, it is concluded that sharing less amount of information is a preferred way of information manipulation over more deceptive behavior like telling complete lies, providing irrelevant or ambiguous information by the faculty. It means that faculty perceives omitting information as a useful strategy in organizational discourse.

The study is one of the initial steps towards using IMT theory for studying prevalence of deception. Looking into the vast scope of research in this area, the researchers can further probe deception in different interpersonal situations such as parent-children relationship, student-teacher relationships, spousal relationships and peer group/ friend group relationships using IMT theory.

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Annexure I

Self benefit Situation:

At 9:30 a m, your colleague was assigned work by Head of the department to compile a report by 4:00 pm. The work was to be done exclusively by her/him but s/he involves you without the consent of HOD by saying you:

- ✓ This report is to be submitted by 4.00 pm. (Quantity Violation)
- ✓ We both have to prepare this report. (Quality Violation)
- ✓ I have many date bound projects. (Relevance Violation)
- ✓ It won't take much time. (Manner Violation)

Others' Benefit Situation:

Your colleague 'Neeraj' has gone to market for some personal work during lunch hours (1.00 - 1.30 pm) with intension to extend it to 3.00 pm without applying for a short leave. S/he takes Kamal(her colleague) into confidence for this purpose. As Kamal share office space with Neeraj, HOD enquires from Kamal about Neeraj's whereabouts at 2:15 pm (when lunch break is over). What would be kamal's response?

- ✓ S/he has gone to market availing the lunch break. (Quantity Violation)
- ✓ S/he has gone for some official work. (Quality Violation)
- ✓ Is there anything, I could do for you. (Relevance Violation)
- ✓ She has gone out for some work. (Manner Violation)

Harming others Situation:

Your college timing is from 9:00 am to 5:00 pm. One of your departmental colleagues, Sandeep went home at 4:00 pm due to ill health; otherwise she is quite regular to her duty. It happens that at around 4:45 pm, the Dean of your college calls her owing to some work assignment. Raj, another colleague deliberately uses this opportunity to harm Neeraj. She tells the Dean:

- ✓ S/he went home early. (Quantity Violation)
- ✓ S/he is in the habit of going early. (Quality Violation)
- ✓ People here seldom observe office hours. (Relevance Violation)
- ✓ S/he left in the early hours (along with expressions which shows s/he has certainly violated the principles). (Manner Violation)

Table 1: Prevalence of deception along IMT dimensions as perceived by faculty(Indirect analysis) n= 100

Message Dimensions as per IMT	**Self Benefit**				**Others' Benefit**				**Harming Others**				**Overall violation**			**KruskalWallis** χ^2
	$\bar{\chi}$	σ	Rank	χ^2	$\bar{\chi}$	σ	Rank	χ^2	$\bar{\chi}$	σ	Rank	χ^2	Overall $\bar{\chi}$	σ	Rank	
Quantity	4.20	0.25	**1**	43.79**	3.75	0.80	**1**	56.26**	3.25	0.32	**1**	60.96**	3.73	0.44	**1**	130.65**
Quality	2.50	0.30	**4**		2.16	0.31	**4**		2.40	0.69	**2**		2.35	0.50	**4**	
Relevance	2.61	0.26	**3**		2.60	0.31	**2**		2.25	0.32	**3**		2.49	0.40	**2**	
Manner	3.23	0.42	**2**		2.44	0.86	**3**		1.50	0.59	**4**		2.39	0.52	**3**	
Overall mean	**3.13**				**2.74**				**2.35**				2.74			
Motive rank	1				2				3							
χ^2	25.3**															

✓ ** p<0.01, Range- 1(Honest) to 5 (Deceptive)

Table 2: Extent of violation of messages on 'Quantity' parameter of Information Manipulation Theory by faculty

n=100

Quantity manipulation specific statements	Extent of prevalence					$\bar{\chi}$	σ
	Very frequently	Frequently	sometimes	rarely	Not at all		
Provide complete information.	4	8	35	46	5	**3.42**	0.87
Disclose the significant details	4	3	26	46	21	**3.77**	0.95
Share partially information	22	40	29	8	1	**3.74**	0.92
Conceal the vital information	30	32	25	10	3	**3.76**	1.08
Give bare minimum information.	19	28	34	13	6	**3.41**	1.12
Provide truthful information but hide critical information	26	54	15	4	0	**4.04**	0.76
Overall Mean	**3.69**						

Table 3: Extent of violation of messages on 'Quality' parameters of Information Manipulation Theory n=100

Quality manipulation specific statements	Extent of prevalence					$\bar{\chi}$	σ
	Very frequently	Frequently	sometimes	rarely	Not at all		
Provide authentic/ correct information	17	55	20	07	01	**2.21**	0.83
Tactfully provide distorted information	1	12	36	29	22	**2.65**	1.06
Give you truthful information.	14	41	28	16	1	**2.51**	0.94
Provide wrong information	0	3	15	36	46	**1.67**	0.84
Significantly change the message content before sharing	3	14	35	34	14	**2.60**	0.97
Provide insignificant details but hide the actual facts	8	13	31	31	17	**2.66**	1.13
Alter the critical information	3	9	32	28	28	**2.33**	1.05
Share fabricated information	6	9	35	28	22	**2.53**	1.09
Overall Mean	**2.37**						

Table 4: Extent of violation of messages on 'Relevance' parameter of

Information Manipulation Theory by faculty n=100

Relevance manipulation specific statements	Extent of prevalence					$\bar{\chi}$	σ
	Very frequently	Frequentl	sometimes	rarely	Not at all		
Give situationally relevant information	0	8	42	39	11	**2.49**	0.77
Divert you from the main topic	5	6	29	34	26	**2.32**	1.06
Avoid by changing the topic.	0	9	34	33	24	**2.30**	0.92
Give impertinent response to the question asked.	9	16	50	19	6	**3.06**	0.94
Provide information irrelevant to the situation	2	11	44	31	12	**2.63**	0.88
Reverse the normal course of conversation	1	7	31	37	24	**2.27**	0.92
Tell irrelevant tales	9	11	44	20	16	**2.80**	1.10
Overall Mean	**2.55**						

Table 5: Violation of messages on 'Manner' parameter of Information Manipulation Theory by faculty to avoid sharing of information

n= 100

	Extent of prevalence	$\bar{\chi}$	

Manner manipulation specific statements	**Very**	**Frequently**	**sometimes**	**rarely**	**Not at all**		σ
Provide vague information	2	11	35	29	23	**2.42**	1.00
Tell exactly what you want.	4	14	35	37	10	**2.67**	0.95
Provide information with multiple meaning	1	5	27	36	31	**2.11**	0.91
Be evasive in answering	1	6	30	34	29	**2.18**	0.93
Give cold impression	1	8	39	32	20	**2.41**	0.91
Manage to answer without actually answering	5	8	35	35	17	**2.51**	1.01
Pretend to misunderstand your question.	5	8	29	34	24	**2.39**	1.07
Overall Mean	**2.38**						

Table 6: Overall deception on different parameters of IMT by faculty (direct analysis)

IMT Parameters	**Average Deception** $\bar{\chi}$	**SD**	**Ranking**	χ^2
Quantity	3.69	0.27	I	87.7**

Quality	2.37	0.27	IV	
Relevance	2.55	0.29	II	
Manner	2.38	0.19	III	
Overall Violation Mean	2.55			

** p< 0.01, Range- 1(honest) to 5 (deceptive)

Table 7 Overall prevalence of deception based on direct and indirect analysis.

Sr. No.	Parameters	Indirect analysis	Direct analysis	Overall Mean	Rank	χ^2
1	Quantity	3.73	3.69	3.71	I	216.85**
2	Quality	2.35	2.37	2.36	IV	
3	Relevance	2.49	2.55	2.52	II	
4	Manner	2.39	2.38	2.385	III	
Combined Violation Mean		2.74	2.56	2.74		

** p< 0.01, Range- 1(honest) to 5 (deceptive)