

Self-Isolation of Lone Wolf Salespeople: From Failed Social Learning to Positive Organizational Outcomes

Frankie J. Weinberg
David A. Locander
William B. Locander
Jay P. Mulki

Lone wolf tendency is “a psychological state in which one prefers to work alone when making decisions and setting/accomplishing priorities and goals” (Dixon et al., 2003, p. 205). Dixon et al. (2003) suggest that lone wolves have little regard for others’ ideas, view others as less effective, and consequently have little patience for group process. This form of isolation is a frequently cited concern in sales and management literature (Mulki et al., 2008), particularly as many organizations are increasingly moving toward a team selling model requiring frequent interaction and communication between intra- and inter-functional members. Sales force literature explains that lone wolves may not display the helping behaviors expected by teammates and thereby may negatively affect the attitudes and behaviors of others on the sales team (Mulki et al., 2008). Accordingly, most research has tended to focus on the problematic aspects of lone wolf tendencies. Of the few studies that have examined lone wolf tendencies in the workplace, most have focused on consequences of lone wolf tendencies rather than on the conditions that may drive an individual toward these isolationist tendencies. As a consequence, we still know very little about what brings about lone wolf tendencies in the workplace. Further, we have yet to be informed as to whether lone wolf tendencies have positive workplace outcomes under certain circumstances. Thus, the contributions of this study are twofold: First, we take a social learning approach to lone-wolf tendencies by examining the relationships between mentoring and social comparison and LWT. Second, we examine manifestations of these tendencies and predict that lone wolfism can bring about positive outcomes including job involvement and perceptions of performance through mechanisms associated with perfectionism.

Much human behavior is learned through observation and guidance by others. This social form of learning allows a person to develop behavioral attributions that later guide in displaying those actions when the appropriate context arises (Bandura, 1977). It is through observational learning that new internal mental states are formed. People learn by imitating the actions of others, which leads to the cognition and information processing upon which social behavior relies (Bandura, 1977). While learning through social means has been shown to have a major influence on human development, approaches to the social learning aspects of workplace behavior have only emerged within the last few decades (Lent et al. 1994). Lankau & Scandura (2002, p. 780) describe two types of personal learning at work: relational and skill development. These authors define *relational job learning* as “increased understanding about the interdependence or connectedness of one’s job to others,” and define *personal skill development* as “acquisition of new skills and abilities that enable better working relationships.” Both of these forms of personal learning involve a social component. The former involves the concept of interdependent work while that latter involves the development of relationship-building skills. We believe that, although lone wolves may have the capacity to learn a variety of skills and abilities, these individuals’ preferences for isolated work experiences come about from failed

social learning experiences which reduce their capacity to develop socially-defined personal learning objectives.

According to Wenger (2000), social learning systems provide a mechanism through which to expand one's boundaries of community outside of oneself: "Learning from our interaction with others ... is ... a matter of opening up our identities to others in ways of being in the world" (p. 239). Wenger explains that social learning systems allow us to develop our own personal identities by bridging experiences across communities of learning. This suggests that those individuals who have experienced low levels of social learning may be less likely to develop identities inclusive of others in a broader community. Social learning experiences, including the receipt of career development support and comparing oneself to analogous others, provide a social depth to one's identity. From this, it stands to reason that one's identity may be considered "a lived experience of belonging (or not belonging)" (Wenger, 2000, p. 239), and that a lone wolf's identity would lack this level of social depth. Social exchange theory suggests that an individual's perceived lack of organizational support is likely to create a feeling of little obligation to the organization (Wayne, Shore, and Liden, 1997), and create a perception of isolation associated with lone wolfism (Mulki et al., 2008). For these reasons, we expect that when an individual takes little away from social learning opportunities, he/she will likely tend to display lone wolf tendencies. In the following sections, we investigate this relationship by examining two forms of social learning common in the workplace: Social comparison and career development mentoring. We anticipate that a lack of social comparison may be related to what Mulki et al. (2008) term colleague isolation, whereas a lack of career development will relate to an individual's isolation from the company. From this reasoning, we derive our first set of hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: There will be a negative relationship between social comparison and lone wolf tendencies.

Hypothesis 2: There will be a negative relationship between the receipt of career development mentoring and lone wolf tendencies.

Low levels of social learning may lead lone wolves be unclear as to their role in the organization (Lankau & Scandura, 2002), particularly as it may relate to interdependence with other organizational members. Accordingly, they will be likely to set their own goals rather than attempt to achieve goals that are set by the organization. Goal setting theory suggests that people are considerably more motivated toward goals that they take part in developing. Thus, it follows that lone wolves, having taken on the burden of setting and managing their own goals, would fiercely advance upon those goals with rigor and an eye toward perfectionism. The tendency of lone wolves to highly value their own work is likely to be manifested in high levels of perfectionism and this pursuit of perfection is expected to positively affect these individuals' involvement in their jobs. Given that job involvement has been meta-analytically related to job and work attitudes (Brown, 1996), we posit the following set of hypotheses:

Hypothesis 3: There will be a positive relationship between lone wolf tendencies and perfectionism.

Hypothesis 4: There will be a positive relationship between perfectionism and job involvement.

Hypothesis 5: There will be a positive relationship between job involvement and perceptions of one's job performance.

Method

Hypotheses were tested using responses salespeople from two industry segments. The first set of responses was collected from 162 business-to-business salespeople gathered for a corporate training program. These salespeople represent a company that sells to surgeons and hospitals. The questionnaire was distributed at the meeting by one of the researchers who briefly explained the project and guaranteed confidentiality of individual responses. A total of 154 completed questionnaires were collected representing a 95% response rate. The second set of responses was collected from professional real estate agents gathered at a training seminar. The same questionnaire was used with an introduction from the researcher explaining the purpose of the project along with guarantee of anonymity of responses. A total of 128 surveys were completed representing 56% response rate for this sample. Three incomplete surveys were discarded and 279 responses were coded for analysis. Sixty five percent of the respondents were male. Respondents' tenure with their present firm ranged from 1 to 50 ($\mu = 8.28$, $\sigma = 8.62$) years and the total work experience ranged from 1 to 57 ($\mu = 20.39$, $\sigma = 13.72$) years. Respondent's age ranged from 23 years to 84 years with a mean age of 45.26 years ($\sigma = 13.69$).

All latent constructs were measured with well-established and previously used instruments. Scandura's (1992) mentoring scale has been widely used in organizational literature and we used 6 items of the career development sub scale. The lone wolf scale developed by Dixon, Gassenheimer and Barr (2003) was used to measure salesperson's lone wolf tendencies. Piercy, Craven and Lane's (2001) scale was used for measuring salesperson's job performance. From Frost's (1990)'s perfectionism scale, four high loading items representing 'concern over mistakes' sub-scale were chosen. Job involvement was measured with shorter version of Suján's (1986) scale. Social comparison is of interest to salespeople with Lone wolf tendencies who are known to be performance-focused. Four items representing the concern over mistake sub-dimension of the social comparison scale developed by Gibbons and Buunk (1999) were used to measure salesperson's concern about other's opinions. All the scale items used were Likert type scale with scores ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (Strongly agree).

Results and Discussion

The means, standard deviations, reliabilities, and correlations for all variables are shown in Table 1. All measurement instruments had acceptable reliabilities.

Table 1:
Correlations and Descriptive Statistics

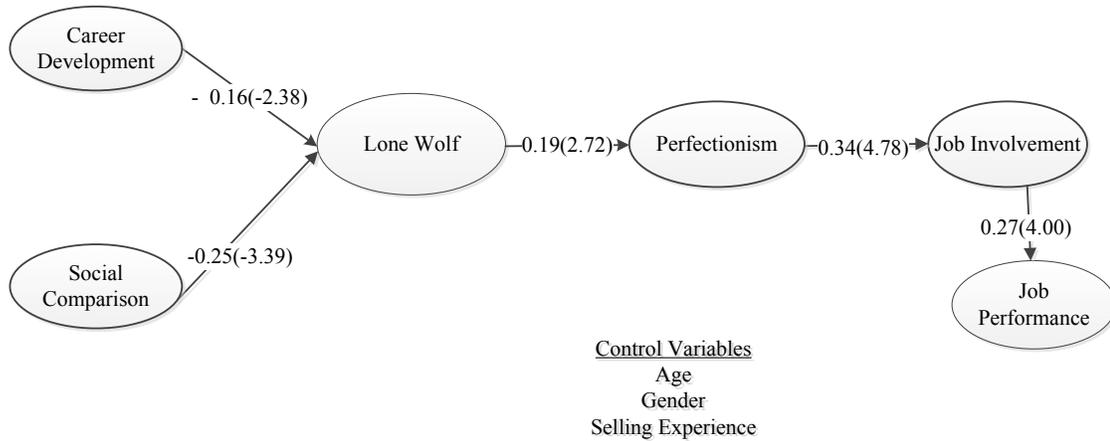
Figure 1 displays the model used to study lone wolf tendencies from a social learning

		OPN	CRD	LWT	PERFT	JOBI	JOBP	AGE	EXP
OPN	Social Comparison - Opinion	(0.82)							
CRD	Mentoring- Career Development	0.12	(0.91)						
LWT	Lone Wolf Tendency	-0.26	-0.18	(0.83)					
PERFT	Perfectionism	0.04	-0.01	0.19	(0.82)				
JOBI	Job Involvement	0.10	0.14*	0.00	0.35	(0.87)			
JOBP	Job Performance	-0.06	0.08	0.02	0.00	0.18	(0.89)		
AGE	Age	-0.17	-	0.14*	-0.22	-0.21	0.17	(1.00)	
EXP	Selling Experience	-0.20	-0.20	0.11	-0.10	-0.13	0.17	0.55	(1.00)
GEN	GENDER (Male =1)	0.10	0.07	-0.12	0.15*	0.17	0.04	-0.11	-0.01
	Mean	3.86	5.02	3.04	3.20	3.64	5.32	45.26	8.28
	Standard Deviation	0.64	1.48	1.47	1.58	1.64	1.07	13.69	8.62
	Average Variance Extracted	0.55	0.70	0.57	0.62	0.71	0.58		
Bold Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). *Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).									
Cronbach's alpha on the diagonal in parentheses									

perspective. The model also shows that one's need for perfection mediates the relationship between lone wolf tendencies and job involvement. The measurement model indicated adequate fit indices for the data: $\chi^2 = 653.935$, $df = 335$, $p < .01$; root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = .055, $CI_{90\%} = .048$ to 0.062 ; comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.92; Turner-Lewis Index (TLI) = 0.91. It was found that fit indices can be improved by deleting low loading items. We removed one low loading item from lone wolf tendency and two items from job performance. The CFA results for the revised model showed acceptable fit indices. $\chi^2 = 508.025$, $df = 279$, $p < .01$; RMSEA = .054, $CI_{90\%} = .047$ to $.062$; CFI = 0.94, TLI = 0.93. Reliability was assessed with Cronbach's alpha and found to be in the acceptable range providing evidence of adequate reliability (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988). Average variance extracted statistics (r_v) were in the acceptable range (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). Fornell and Larcker's (1981) approach was used to assess discriminant validity. A test of confidence intervals of factor correlations showed that none of the 95% confidence intervals of the factor correlations included one. In addition, the average variance extracted for each of the factors is greater than the squared correlations for all pairs of factors.

Figure 1:

Model Results



Results of the structural model shown in Figure 1 indicate an acceptable fit with the data, with the 90% confidence interval of the RMSEA below 0.08 and the other fit indexes above 0.90 (McDonald & Ho, 2002). $\chi^2 = 660.164$, $df = 354$, $p < .01$; RMSEA = 0.055, $CI_{90\%} = 0.052$ to 0.057; CFI = 0.91; TLI = 0.90. Moreover, all of the stated hypotheses were supported by the results which show that lone wolf tendencies were predicted by respondents' perception of career development mentoring ($\beta = -0.16$, $t = -2.38$) as well as social comparison ($\beta = -0.25$, $t = -3.39$). Salesperson's lone wolf tendency was positively related ($\beta = 0.19$, $t = 2.72$) to perfectionism. Job involvement was predicted ($\beta = 0.34$, $t = 4.78$) by perfectionism. Job performance had a positive relationship ($\beta = 0.27$, $t = 4.00$) with job involvement.

Our study expands current knowledge about lone wolf tendencies in the workplace. By providing evidence of social learning antecedents to lone wolf tendencies and empirically supporting the proposition that lone wolf tendencies have a positive relationship with job involvement and job performance via a perfectionism mechanism, we have added clarity to the nomological network of the lone wolf construct. We hope that this study encourages future conceptual and empirical investigations of lone wolf tendencies in the workplace.

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