*Argument 11*

*The following appeared in a memo from a vice president of Alta Manufacturing.*

*"During the past year, Alta Manufacturing had thirty percent more on-the-job accidents than*

*nearby Panoply Industries, where the work shifts are one hour shorter than ours. Experts*

*believe that a significant contributing factor in many on-the-job accidents is fatigue and sleep*

*deprivation among workers. Therefore, to reduce the number of on-the-job accidents at Alta*

*and thereby increase productivity, we should shorten each of our three work shifts by one hour*

*so that our employees will get adequate amounts of sleep."*

This editorial recommends that Alta Manufacturing reduce its work shifts by one hour each in

order to reduce its on-the-job accident rate and thereby increase Alta's productivity. To support

this recommendation the author points out that last year the number of accidents at Alta was

30% greater than at Panoply Industries, where work shifts were one hour shorter. The author

also cites certain experts who believe that many on-the-job accidents are caused by fatigue

and sleep deprivation. I find this the argument unconvincing for several reasons.

First and foremost, the author provides absolutely no evidence that overall worker

productivity is attributable in part to the number of on-the-job accidents. Although common

sense informs me that such a relationship exists, the author must provide some evidence of

this cause-and-effect relationship before I can accept the author's final conclusion that the

proposed course of action would in fact increase Alta's productivity.

Secondly, the author assumes that some accidents at Alta are caused by fatigue or sleep

deprivation. However, the author overlooks other possible causes, such as inadequate

equipment maintenance or worker training, or the inherent hazards of Alta's manufacturing

processes. By the same token, Panoply's comparatively low accident rate might be attributable

not to the length of its work shifts but rather to other factors, such as superior equipment

maintenance or worker training. In other words, without ruling out alternative causes of

on-the-job accidents at both companies, the author cannot justifmbly conclude that merely by

emulating Panoply's work-shift policy Alta would reduce the number of such accidents.

Thirdly, even assuming that Alta's workers are fatigued or sleep-deprived, and that this is the

cause of some of Alta's on-the-job accidents, in order to accept the author's solution to this

problem we must assume that Alta's workers would use the additional hour of free time to

sleep or rest. However, the author provides no evidence that they would use the time in this

manner. It is entirely possible that Alta's workers would use that extra hour to engage in some

other fatiguing activity. Without ruling out this possibility the author cannot convincingly

conclude that reducing Alta's work shifts by one hour would reduce Alta's accident rate.

Finally, a series of problems with the argument arise from the scant statistical information on

which it relies. In comparing the number of accidents at Alta and Panoply, the author fails to

consider that the per-worker accident rate might reveal that Alta is actually safer than Panoply,

depending on the total number of workers at each company. Second, perhaps accident rates

at the two companies last year were aberrations, and during other years Alta's accident rate

was no greater, or even lower, than Panoply's rate. Or perhaps Panoply is not representative

of industrial companies generally, and that other companies with shorter work shifts have even

higher accident rates. In short, since the argument relies on very limited statistical information I

cannot take the author's recommendation seriously.

In conclusion, the recommendation for emulating Panoply's work-shift policy is not well

supported. To convince me that shorter work shifts would reduce Alta's on-the-job accident

rate, the author must provide clear evidence that work-shift length is responsible for some of

Alta's accidents. The author must also supply evidence to support her final conclusion that a

lower accident rate would in fact increase overall worker productivity.