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Relational Outcomes of Multicommunicating: Integrating Incivility and Social Exchange Perspectives

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New communication technologies, increased virtual communication, and the intense pressure for managers and employees to be continually available and "online" are giving rise to a new and emerging workplace behavior: *multicommunicating* (MC), or the managing of multiple conversations at the same time. Whereas researchers in psychology and management have studied the phenomenon of multitasking, few have examined multitasking where one juggles not just multiple tasks but multiple people and often multiple media at the same time. We use the spiral theory of incivility to investigate the relational outcomes of MC from the perspective of the communication partners being juggled. Our research extends this theory by further exploring the starting point of the spiral and—through the application of social exchange theory—suggesting several antecedents to incivility that are important in the context of MC. Employing a survey methodology, both qualitative and quantitative data were collected to test the theory ($n = 324$) and were analyzed using qualitative thematic analysis and structural equation modeling. The results suggest several factors influencing the partner's perceptions of focal individual incivility during MC, including who initiates the conversation, whether one of the conversations being juggled is useful to the other conversation, the focal individual's performance during the conversation, whether the focal individual is more accessible to the partner, and whether the partner is certain of or only suspects the existence of the other conversation. Further, partners' perceptions of these factors are influenced by their individual orientations toward MC. Finally, the partners' perceptions of the focal individual's incivility influence their interpersonal trust in the focal individual.

Key words: multicommunicating; incivility; social exchange theory; media; structural equation modeling
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Introduction

Organizations seeking to improve performance look to multitasking as a potential tool to increase efficiency. New communication technologies (Jett and George 2003, Rennecker and Godwin 2005, Reinsch et al. 2008), increased virtual work (Morello 2005), and the intense pressure for workers to be continually available and "online" means that they are not only managing multiple tasks at the same time, but often managing multiple people and conversations at the same time. In today's workplace, it is common to see a manager checking her BlackBerry during a meeting or an employee on the telephone with a client while typing an instant message. Although there is ample research on multitasking's impacts on task performance (Haigney and Westerman 2001, Pashler 1994, Rogers and Monsell 1995), few studies have examined multitasking's impact on social outcomes such as perceptions of incivility and trust. The present work examines a specific type of multitasking that occurs in a social context: *multicommunicating* (MC), where employees manage multiple conversations at the same time (Reinsch et al. 2008).[1] Further, this research focuses on MC that occurs in a work environment.

Researchers in organization behavior, information systems, and human–computer interaction have documented the practice of managing multiple conversations at the same time (e.g., Bélanger and Watson-Manheim 2006, Cameron and Webster 2005, Nardi and Whittaker 2002, Reinsch et al. 2008). Based on concepts in anthropology (Hall 1959) and time management (Bluedorn et al. 1999), Reinsch et al. (2008) define *multicommunicating* as conversations that demonstrate a pattern of interleaved speaking turns.

Progress has been made in describing the types of MC that occur in the workplace and the media pairs that are used to support multiple simultaneous conversations (Bélanger and Watson-Manheim 2006, Rennecker and Godwin 2005, Woerner et al. 2004). Research has also examined some antecedents of this behavior including message equivocality, hierarchical status (Turner and Reinsch 2007), and an individual's polychronic communication orientation (Turner and Reinsch 2004). Task or performance outcomes of this behavior have also received attention: it has been hypothesized that MC may mediate the relationship between instant messaging use and productivity (Rennecker and Godwin 2005).

Although it is recognized that communication has both task and relational dimensions (Te'eni 2001), the relational implications of MC have received less attention. MC may at times be considered rude or inappropriate, and workplace norms may shape these reactions (Reinsch et al. 2008). In addition, stories have been recounted where employees explicitly asked that others not engage in this behavior (Rennecker et al. 2006). However, no research to date has conducted an in-depth empirical investigation of the relational reactions to MC in the workplace and the factors that influence those reactions.

The present work attempts to fill this gap by examining the relational outcomes of MC in the workplace. More specifically, it examines the relational side of this problem by focusing on perceived incivility as an explanatory mechanism between MC and trust. To do so, we draw on both Andersson and Pearson's (1999) theory of the spiral of workplace incivility and social exchange theory (Blau 1964).

Perceived incivility is the feeling that someone is being rude, discourteous, and displaying a lack of regard for others (Andersson and Pearson 1999). Incivility will be examined from the perspective of a *communication partner*, or a person who is engaged in a conversation with someone (termed the *focal individual*) who is managing multiple conversations at the same time. Incivility is particularly appropriate for capturing partners' perceptions of MC, as incivility is "primarily concerned with the target's perspective and reactions" (Penney and Spector 2005, p. 779). However, not all MC results in increased incivility. Multicommunicating may be seen in a favorable light and may be perceived as a "sign of diligence and efficiency" (CNN.com International 2005). The exact nature of the relationship between MC and incivility is unclear, suggesting the need for further research. Thus, one of the questions our research attempts to answer is this: How are the partner's perceptions of incivility affected by an MC episode?

Although workplace incivility occurs frequently and is often harmful, it is poorly understood (Estes and Wang 2008, Pearson and Porath 2005) and has received little empirical attention (Lim et al. 2008, Montgomery et al. 2004, Penney and Spector 2005). Most empirical research has examined its outcomes (e.g., Lim et al. 2008, Pearson et al. 2001) rather than its influences (for an exception, see Blau and Andersson 2005), and calls have been made to further study its antecedents (Andersson and Pearson 1999). Thus, our application of this theory to MC requires extending it by expanding and further exploring the starting point of the process—the movement from a potentially uncivil act to perceptions of incivility—and by examining the role MC plays in the development of incivility. We do this by investigating the context-specific factors that trigger this movement to perceived incivility during an MC episode. We draw on social exchange theory (SET) to better understanding how various factors influence incivility and subsequently affect other relational variables such as trust. This extended theory is useful for explaining the relational outcomes of MC as well as the development of incivility in other contexts.

In addition to the theoretical and empirical contributions previously outlined, we further extend the literature on workplace incivility by developing a measure of perceived communication incivility and by demonstrating that affective trust is an outcome of perceived incivility. The present study also provides implications for general multitasking, suggesting that multitasking cannot only influence the performance of tasks but can have relational effects when a task is performed in a social environment.

Model Development

In this research, we examine incivility as a relational outcome of MC episodes and consider its antecedents. We extend the predominant theory of incivility in the workplace, the spiral model (Andersson and Pearson 1999). We propose that incivility acts as an indicator or barometer of the MC exchange, showing us when the partner feels it is out of balance. Certain factors during MC will lead to a more imbalanced exchange, raising the incivility level. By watching for the factors that influence this barometer, we can see if the process moves beyond only a potentially uncivil act to engender perceptions of incivility in the partner—Andersson and Pearson's "starting point." Further, when the level of perceived incivility is high, SET suggests that the partner's trust in the focal would erode.

Incivility

Workplace incivility is a "low-intensity deviant behavior with ambiguous intent to harm" (Andersson and Pearson 1999, p. 457). It is considered a mild form of workplace mistreatment but one that can spiral into more serious behaviors. Uncivil behaviors may include being ignored, excluded, or addressed in unprofessional terms (Cortina et al. 2001) and are associated with reduced task performance and decreased helpfulness (Porath and Erez 2007), decreased job satisfaction and increased job withdrawal (Cortina et al. 2001), lowered organizational commitment and increased employee turnover (Pearson et al. 2000), increased counterproductive work behaviors (Penney and Spector 2005), as well as increased depression and mental and physical health symptoms (Lim et al. 2008).

Multicommunicating by the focal may engender perceptions of incivility. For example, the partner may perceive incivility if they feel they are being ignored. As with uncivil acts, in MC the intent to harm is ambiguous: in fact, the intent is often not to disrespect the

partner but to increase work productivity or respond to competing work demands. However, the attention of the focal is split between multiple partners, and this split attention may be interpreted by a partner as a sign of disinterest (Spence 2002). While participating in a conversation, "interruptions and inattentiveness may convey disrespect" (Goffman 1967, p. 36) and a lack of attention may be the "ultimate insult" (Roloff 1981, p. 23). MC may sometimes be regarded as a rude behavior (Reinsch et al. 2008), and in particular the use of cell phones in formal settings such as meetings has been criticized (Johnson and Indvik 2001, Phillips and Smith 2003). Thus, incivility is an important relational outcome in the context of MC.

Andersson and Pearson's (1999) spiral model of incivility adds to our understanding of the relational side of MC. It focuses on the starting and tipping points of incivility. The starting point of the spiral is the movement from the uncivil behavior to an individual perceiving that act as uncivil. This movement—whether or not we judge the behavior as uncivil—depends on the norms of the situation (Johnson and Indvik 2001) and is a reaction to a "breach of norms for mutual respect" (Andersson and Pearson 1999, p. 458). The incivility spiral explains how perceived incivility can potentially spiral into increasingly intense behaviors; however, the theory provides little explanation of the starting point, or the movement from the potentially uncivil act to perceptions of incivility.

Considering that uncivil behaviors often have an ambiguous intent, it is important to expand upon this starting point and study what engenders perceptions of incivility. Indeed, Andersson and Pearson's (1999) work acknowledges this gap and calls for research into its antecedents. Further, the incivility spiral theory offers little insight into how and why various factors influence perceptions of incivility. Thus, there is an opportunity to extend the current theory of workplace incivility and the mechanisms that influence incivility. We draw on SET as a framework with which to better understand the mechanisms through which various factors specific to MC influence the partner's perceptions of incivility.

Social Exchange Theory

Social exchange theory—one of the "most influential conceptual paradigms for understanding workplace behavior"—exists in many forms and encompasses many key concepts such as exchange rules, norms, reciprocity, cost-benefit analysis, and comparative analysis (Cropanzano and Mitchell 2005, p. 874). It is not a theory per se but a "frame of reference within which many theories . . . can speak to one another" (Emerson 1976, p. 336). Social exchange is particularly appropriate for studying the effects of a specific context (Blau 1964) and will be used to better understand and predict how various factors influence whether MC is perceived as uncivil by the partner.

SET views social behavior as "an exchange of goods, material goods but also non-material ones, such as the symbols of approval or prestige. Persons that give much to others try to get much from them, and persons that get much from others are under pressure to give much to them" (Homans 1958, p. 606). Social exchange researchers have investigated the bidirectional flow of valued behaviors between exchange partners (Cropanzano and Mitchell 2005).[2] Social resources that are exchanged include such things as advice, assistance, compliance, attention, regard, gratitude, admiration, social approval, affection, and respect (Blau 1964). During interactions, exchanges of social resources may occur only in the background, but often they are the exchanges that are the most significant (Blau 1964).

These exchanges are guided by rules and norms of exchange that describe how one ought to behave in a particular situation (Cropanzano and Mitchell 2005). An exchange rule is "a normative definition of the situation that forms among or is adopted by the participants in an exchange relation" (Emerson 1976, p. 352). Several exchange rules exist such as reciprocity, rationality, altruism, competition, group gain, and status consistency (Gouldner 1960, Meeker 1971).

According to SET, the exchange transaction can be conceptualized in terms of costs and benefits, or debits and credits (Blau 1964, Homans 1958, Kramer 2005, Roloff 1981, Thibaut and Kelley 1959). Costs are the *aversive stimuli* and benefits are the *rewards* experienced during the social transaction (Homans 1958). Individuals are more likely to engage in social exchanges or interactions when they believe that the benefits either outweigh or equal the costs. Within the rules or norms that guide the exchange, individuals perform a cost-benefit analysis to assess the overall worth of the social transaction to them. SET does not suggest that these costs and benefits are explicitly calculated but unintentionally and unconsciously taken into account (Blau 1964). When these calculations show a balance or when the costs and benefits are in equilibrium, individuals consider it a fair exchange (Cropanzano and Mitchell 2005). The costs and benefits can also be out of balance, favoring one exchange partner over the other.

Applying Social Exchange Theory to the Multicommunicating–Incivility Relationship

There are some parallels between incivility and SET that make SET an appropriate basis for examining incivility. Both focus on social interactions or events that involve two or more parties and have the potential to influence future relationships (Andersson and Pearson 1999, Blau 1964). The cost-benefit approach of SET has been reflected in some incivility research that suggests that "people tend to take a win/lose posture" toward uncivil encounters (Pearson et al. 2001, p. 1405). Both theories recognize the importance of norms, which provide

guidelines for how we should behave in a specific situation (Andersson and Pearson 1999, Cropanzano and Mitchell 2005).

Goffman's (1967) work suggests that there are certain norms and rules of face-to-face communication. For example, Goffman suggests that individuals in a conversation should give their attention to the speaker, regulate lulls and interruptions, minimize interference from messages not central to the official flow of the conversation, and "restrict their involvement in matters external to the encounter" (Goffman 1967, p. 35). It has been proposed that these norms and rules can be applied to mediated communication (Eaton 2009, Licoppe 2004, Ling 2008), but little is known about how these rules and norms apply to MC. What conditions of the situation increase the acceptability of MC, thereby reducing the partner's perceptions of incivility? What situation-specific conditions decrease the acceptability of the behavior and increase perceived incivility? Multicommunicating is socially permissible for whom and under what conditions?

The incivility spiral theory does not speak directly to these questions. However, we can draw on SET to better understand the effect of various MC-specific conditions on incivility. SET would suggest that partners who feel that the exchange is balanced and fair perceive the focal as civil and respectful, thus supporting a relationship between successful exchanges and decreases in incivility. In contrast, partners who think that the focal is getting more than he or she provides may feel insulted and feel that the focal is acting disrespectfully and with a lack of regard (Blau 1964, Homans 1958), increasing incivility.

In the context of MC, factors specific to the situation include the conversation initiator, the focal individual's accessibility, conversational leveraging, multicommunicating performance, the partner's polychronic communication orientation, workplace norms, the partner's awareness of the other conversation, the communication media employed, and the partner's propensity to trust. As described next, these factors are suggested by various literatures (for example, the literature on media fit) and from workplace observations of this behavior. In particular, the hypotheses focus on those constructs that are new,[3] not previously tested in this context, and where the relationship is not immediately evident. The partner's perceptions of incivility are examined at the level of the MC *episode*, a communication occurrence where conversations show a pattern of interleaved speaking turns. Although MC can involve three or more conversations, our research on this emerging topic will focus—for simplicity's sake—on instances of MC where two conversations overlap. SET and its related concepts allow us to understand how each factor influences the partner's perceptions of incivility.

Partner- vs. Focal-Initiated Conversations. The focal is the person who is managing multiple conversations at the same time, that is, the person who is engaged in MC. However, this does not necessarily mean that it was the focal who initiated each of the conversations. Whether a conversation in an MC episode is partner- or focal-initiated may influence the partner's perception of incivility. The social exchange rule of reciprocity, "probably the best known exchange rule" in SET (Cropanzano and Mitchell 2005, p. 875), helps to explain this relationship. Reciprocity or repayment in kind proposes that people should help those who help them (Gouldner 1960); that is, it suggests the "exchange of roughly equivalent values in which the actions of each party are contingent on the prior actions of the others in such a way that good is returned for good, and bad for bad" (Keohane 1986, p. 8). Thus, we would expect communicators to follow this rule when MC. However, the perspectives, needs, and functions of the sender and receiver may differ (Rudy 1996, Straub and Karahanna 1998, Te'eni 2001).

The sender or initiator of each MC conversation is asking for a favor—the time and attention of the receiver. When initiators request the time and attention of receivers, the norm of reciprocity suggests that they should also provide their time and undivided attention in exchange. However, when MC conversations are focal-initiated, the focal has requested the time and attention of the partner but is not willing to fully reciprocate with his or her own time and undivided attention. The focal is violating the norm of reciprocity by requesting more than he or she is willing to give in exchange. The partner may perceive this as an unfair or unbalanced exchange and will consider that the focal is acting disrespectfully and with a lack of regard (Blau 1964, Homans 1958), increasing the partner's perceptions of the focal individual's incivility.

If conversations are partner-initiated, the partner is requesting the time and attention of the focal. The timing and nature of the communication is not of the focal individual's own choosing, and the reciprocity exchange rule does not require the focal to devote *all* of his or her attention to the conversation. As the norm of reciprocity has not been violated by the focal, the partner may feel that the balance of the exchange is fair and will not react negatively to the focal individual's MC. Therefore,

HYPOTHESIS 1 (H1). *Conversations in the focal individual's MC episode that are partner-initiated will result in lower partner perceptions of incivility than will conversations that are focal-initiated.*

Conversational Leveraging. One possible benefit of MC for the partner is conversational leveraging, or using information gathered in one conversation to serve or enhance another separate conversation that is occurring at the same time (for example, using instant messaging to gather information from an employee on the technical

feasibility of a proposed solution to a problem while in a face-to-face meeting regarding that problem). Conversational leveraging is useful as it can enable on-demand access to time-critical information and can add value to an existing conversation by solving a problem or resolving an issue in real time.

Compared with two independent or unrelated conversations, conversational leveraging increases the usefulness of the MC and can be a direct benefit for those engaged in these conversations. As stated previously, SET proposes that the exchange transaction can be conceptualized in terms of costs and benefits. Individuals who believe the exchange to be just or advantageous tend to have more positive reactions (Cook and Rice 2003). All else being equal, any increase in benefits will lead to a more favorable exchange and more favorable partner perceptions of the focal during MC. Thus, conversational leveraging will influence the partner's perceptions of the focal individual's incivility.

HYPOTHESIS 2 (H2). *Partners who perceive higher conversational leveraging during the MC episode will have lower perceptions of incivility than partners who perceive lower conversational leveraging.*

Multicommunicating Performance. The focal individual's performance is important during a MC episode. The focal can sometimes juggle both conversations very well; however, the multitasking literature in psychology suggests that we are not always good at splitting our attention between two tasks at the same time (Pashler 1994). For instance, the importance of performance was highlighted in a conversation with a CEO who stated that "it doesn't bother me at all" when employees are checking and responding to e-mails while in a meeting with him, as long as their attention to and performance in the meeting are not affected. Poor focal MC performance may include errors, confusion, need for repetition, delays in responding, and reduced participation in one or both of the conversations (Cameron and Webster 2007).

The influence of the focal individual's MC performance on incivility can be conceptualized in terms of the direct costs of the exchange. This is because individuals react more strongly to imbalances or unfair exchanges that are not in their favor (Cook and Rice 2003). Individuals who perceive that the exchange is unjust can become disappointed or angry, act less friendly toward the exchange partner, withhold their social approval, and generally perceive the partner less favorably (Blau 1964, Homans 1958). These performance problems are direct costs for the partner, impeding progress of the conversation or tasks at hand. All else being equal, this increase in direct costs for the partner will lead to a less favorable exchange calculation, increasing perceptions of incivility.

HYPOTHESIS 3 (H3). *Partners who perceive lower focal individual performance during the MC episode will have higher perceptions of focal individual incivility than partners who perceive higher focal individual performance.*

Focal Individual Accessibility. Often MC occurs as a direct result of the focal trying to be constantly accessible, "online," or reachable for coworkers, clients, bosses, and family members. That is, the focal tries to remain accessible even when he or she is already engaged in an existing conversation. The accessibility of the focal—being accessible or reachable so that a partner may start a conversation—may influence incivility through the social exchange concept of comparative analysis. This analysis occurs when the costs and benefits of the situation are compared against any available alternatives (Thibaut and Kelley 1959).

When conducting a comparative analysis during MC, the partner compares the costs and benefits associated with the MC episode to the costs and benefits if that episode had not occurred. MC may be perceived more positively by the partner than the alternative: waiting until the focal has finished an existing conversation. That is, quick access to the focal may help the partner complete work tasks in a more timely manner (Rennecker and Godwin 2005). Thus, the increased accessibility of the focal creates an exchange that is viewed as more favorable by the partner compared with the alternative. The partner is less likely to perceive the focal in negative way, decreasing perceptions of incivility.

HYPOTHESIS 4 (H4). *Partners who perceive higher accessibility of the focal individual as a result of a MC episode will have lower perceptions of incivility than partners who perceive lower accessibility.*

Partner's Polychronic Communication Orientation. Partners' perceptions of incivility may be influenced by their views of communication-based exchange rules. As described earlier, Goffman (1967) suggested the communication norm of giving attention to the speaker, regulating lulls and interruptions, and restricting involvement in other matters. However, even though a particular norm may be generally accepted, there can be individual differences in how the norm is interpreted and applied (Cropanzano and Mitchell 2005). One such individual difference is polychromic communication orientation (PCO).

Research has demonstrated that individuals exhibit different personal orientations regarding MC (Turner and Reinsch 2004) and that these differences can be captured by examining their PCO, or "the cluster of values, beliefs, and attitudes that predispose a person to engage in polychronic communication and to regard polychronic communication as a good thing" (Turner and Reinsch 2004, p. 7). We propose that partners who have low PCO (i.e., they generally believe that MC is an unacceptable behavior) will prescribe to the rules outlined

by Goffman (1967) and will expect focal individuals to give their full attention to one conversation at a time. For these partners, a focal individual's MC will be perceived as a violation of these norms and their behavior will be seen as disrespectful and rude. However, partners with high PCO will feel that no exchange rule has been broken and will have a more positive opinion of the focal. Therefore, we propose the following.

HYPOTHESIS 5 (H5). *Partners who have lower PCO will have higher perceptions of the focal individual's incivility when MC than will partners who have higher PCO.*

Awareness. Incivility may be influenced by partner awareness of the other conversation. Although SET suggests that the cost-benefit analysis of an exchange occurs unconsciously, it cannot occur for events for which we are completely unaware. Partners are not always fully aware that the focal is participating in multiple conversations at the same time (Reinsch et al. 2008). A partner's awareness of the other conversation may be minimized when the focal tries to be discrete about the MC behavior. Turner and Tinsley (2002) propose that partners are more satisfied if the other communication is hidden from them. This is because a partner who is completely unaware of the other conversation does not perform a cost-benefit analysis of the MC situation. Thus, he or she will have lower perceptions of the focal individual's incivility than a partner who is aware. This is akin to the common saying "what you don't know can't hurt you," and partners who are aware of the focal individual's other conversation may have lower perceptions of the focal individual's incivility than partners who are unaware.[4]

Not only can partners be aware or unaware, they may *suspect* another conversation (because the focal appears to be distracted or not fully attentive). Some social exchange researchers suggest that we should consider attributions when investigating the social exchange process (Cooke and Rice 2003, Lawler and Thye 1999). This process may generate social attributions, which have effects on the future relationship of those in the exchange (Lawler and Thye 1999). Applying the notions of attributional theory, the partners who are completely aware of the other conversation will have an explanation for any lack of attention on the part of the focal. Thus, they will be less likely to attribute the focal individual's behavior to any personal or deliberate insult. However, for partners who suspect that something is occurring, an exchange rule of undivided attention has been broken and the partner may not understand why. Attributional theory further suggests that when we are in ambiguous situations, we generally blame the individual rather than taking situational factors into account (Jones and Harris 1967, Ross 1977). Thus, partners who only suspect that something is occurring may blame the focal, assuming that the fluctuating levels of attention is a deliberate and intentional insult. Accordingly, we propose the following.

HYPOTHESIS 6 (H6). *Partners who are aware of the focal individual's other conversation will have lower perceptions of the focal individual's incivility than partners who only suspect the existence of a second conversation.*

Media. The partner's awareness of the other conversation may in turn be affected by particular characteristics of the communication media used in each conversation. During MC, it is not the characteristics of one particular medium that matters but how the multiple characteristics of the *two* media used work together. Media pairs that contain the correct combination of characteristics, as indicated by the *media fit* of the media pair, should help focal individuals compartmentalize or hide their multiple conversations from their partners. Earlier work on MC called it "silent interactivity" (Rennecker and Godwin 2005) and described it as the ability to mask or compartmentalize conversations (Turner and Tinsley 2002).

We suggest that media fit is higher when communication media provide limited sensory information that allow the focal to hide the existence of one conversation from the other partner. Potential media characteristics related to limited sensory information include invisibility, limited audibility, delayability, reviewability, and revisability. A medium with invisibility (e.g., telephone, e-mail, or instant messaging) does not allow visual cues to be exchanged during the interaction, and using two media with invisibility makes it easier to compartmentalize the conversations while MC. At least one of the media should also have limited audibility (e.g., e-mail, instant messaging) so that audio interference between the two conversations does not occur. In addition to limiting the communication of sensory information, certain media characteristics allow the focal to better manage the multiple conversations so to evade detection. Media with delayability (termed *flexibility of tempo* in Reinsch et al. 2008), reviewability (Clark and Brennan 1991; similar to *reprocessability* in Dennis et al. 2008), and revisability (Clark and Brennan 1991; similar to *rehearsability* in Dennis et al. 2008) may give the focal the extra seconds necessary to juggle multiple conversations without one conversation being detected by the other partner. To limit partners' awareness of the other conversation, high media fit pairs should be those in which both media have invisibility (e.g., e-mail paired with telephone), at least one medium does not have audibility, and at least one medium has delayability, reviewability, and revisability (such as e-mail or instant messaging). Thus,

HYPOTHESIS 7 (H7). *Multicommunicating that employs a media pair with higher media fit will have lower levels*

of partner awareness of the other conversation than MC that employs lower media fit media pairs.

Affective Trust. Incivility can impair one's trust in the organization because it disrupts one's work motivation and sense of empowerment (Montgomery et al. 2004). Similarly, we propose that communication incivility can affect interpersonal trust. Interpersonal trust is "the extent to which a person is confident in, and willing to act on the basis of, the words, actions, and decision of another" (McAllister 1995, p. 25). One aspect of interpersonal trust that may be particularly salient in the context of MC is affect-based trust, which is "grounded in reciprocated interpersonal care and concern" (McAllister 1995, p. 25). Incivility may not decrease one's trust in the other's professionalism (many people may cognitively trust a rude but brilliant doctor) but does influence one's affective relationship (Holmes and Rempel 1989). That is, although cognitive or role-based trust may be a very important and useful basis upon which social exchanges may take place (Blau 1964), repeated social exchanges and interactions that show reciprocated regard and respect should result in the development of affective trust (McAllister 1995).

We propose that during MC, the partner's perceptions of the focal individual's incivility is a sign of the partner's assessment of the exchange. SET suggests that successful exchanges promote the development of trust, influencing the future relationship between the exchange partners. One outcome of these fair and just exchanges is the development of trust between the exchange partners (Becerra and Gupta 2003, Blau 1964, Lind 2001, Molm 2000, Whitener et al. 1998). Because social exchanges are not governed by explicit rules, this trust is key to the success of future social exchanges between the exchange partners (Blau 1964). Thus, fair and just social exchanges contribute to the development of high-quality relationships.

Less successful exchanges are those in which the partner has heightened perceptions of incivility. Although fair exchanges promote trust, the perceptions of inequality created by unbalanced exchanges can damage and erode trust (Blau 1964). Positive or negative social exchange–trust cycles can develop (Cropanzano and Mitchell 2005): fair exchange experiences promote trust, which allows for further positive exchanges, and unfair exchanges damage trust, which makes it more difficult to have successful exchanges in the future. These unsuccessful exchanges can hurt the partner's trust in the focal. Research supports the detrimental effects of incivility on future relationships: uncivil exchanges can spiral into more negative future exchanges (Andersson and Pearson 1999), reduce helpfulness on subsequent tasks (Porath and Erez 2007), and permanently weaken relationships (Leary et al. 1998). On the other hand, successful exchanges that do not engender perceptions of incivility can promote the development of trust, in particular interpersonal trust. Accordingly,

HYPOTHESIS 8 (H8). *Partners' higher perceptions of focal individual incivility will result in lower perceptions of interpersonal affect-based trust in the focal individual.*

Control Variables. Two control variables were included in the model: workplace norms and propensity to trust. First, different workgroups and organizations can have different norms regarding managing multiple tasks at the same time (Bluedorn et al. 1999), and partners' perceptions of incivility may be influenced by these norms (Reinsch et al. 2008). Thus, we added a measure of workplace polychronic norms to control for differences in perceived incivility as a result of different work environments. Second, some individuals are generally more trusting than others (Rotter 1967), and the propensity or disposition to trust can have a significant effect on interpersonal trust (Mayer et al. 1995), especially in ambiguous situations (Johnson-George and Swap 1982, McKnight et al. 1998) such as workplace MC. Therefore, we controlled for propensity to trust to account for any individual level differences in affective trust.

Methodology

SET views relationships longitudinally: the current exchange influences the quality of the relationship, which influences future exchanges (Emerson 1976). However, pragmatic methodological challenges mean that SET researchers "must necessarily snip a small number of exchanges out of their context" (Cropanzano and Mitchell 2005, p. 889). Therefore, the current work focuses on the social exchange that occurs during one MC episode. Further, because this is an emerging phenomenon with little empirical research, it was important to capture MC that occurs in a realistic setting. The use of experimental methods to study select variables would be premature given that we lack an empirically based, broader understanding of this behavior. Thus, a survey methodology was used where employees were asked to report on an MC episode they had experienced while at work.

The survey contained both open-ended and closed-ended questions, enabling both qualitative and quantitative analyses of the data. Respondents were asked to recall an episode at work where a person *they were communicating with* (the focal individual) appeared to be engaged in a second conversation (i.e., when the respondent was the partner in a MC episode). Data collection focused on discrete episodes (Bitner et al. 1990), and respondents were asked to identify and report on a specific incident allowing "first hand evidence of the relationship between context and outcome" (Chell 1998, p. 56) to emerge.

This method is similar to, but not the same as, the critical incident technique, an exploratory method used "to increase knowledge of a phenomenon about which relatively little has been documented" (Bitner et al. 1990, p. 73). Unlike the critical incident technique, we did not ask respondents to identify their most *critical* incident (Chell 1998), but we instead asked them to identify their most *recent* incident so as to (1) minimize selection bias toward those incidents that involved particularly positive or negative reactions, and (2) shorten the length of time between the episode and its recall to minimize retrospective bias (Golden 1992). Over 80% of the responses reported on an episode that had occurred within the preceding two weeks. But ultimately, as with critical incident technique studies, "the choice of what incidents to recount is under the control of the interviewee" (Chell 1998, p. 68). Traditional critical incident technique approaches enable the researcher to ask further questions regarding the incident. This was not possible with a survey methodology, but respondents were asked to provide textual descriptions of their episodes. Thus, they could recall a particular episode in their own words so that their answers to the closed-ended questions that followed would be less influenced by retrospective bias (Miller et al. 1997).

Procedure and Sample

Respondents were asked to recall an MC episode at work where they were the partner. The first question in the survey was open-ended and asked respondents to textually describe details of the episode before answering the remaining questions. Respondents were also asked specific questions about the recalled episode, outcomes of the episode, one marker variable (extraversion) to assess common method bias, and general demographic information. For those who could not recall an MC episode, only individual characteristics and demographic information were collected, and these cases were not used in the analysis.

The survey was pretested with graduate students, university employees, and researchers' acquaintances. The main survey was administered to organizational employees using the StudyResponse Project at Syracuse University, New York: "The StudyResponse project facilitates online research for behavioral, social, and organizational science researchers by distributing email participation requests to adult research participants" (StudyResponse Project 2006). StudyResponse recruits and manages a panel of volunteer participants. The panel is 60% female, has an average age of 34 years and 15 years of work experience, and contains volunteers from over 40 different sectors. Participants are not paid but are included in drawings for gift certificates, and interested participants receive a report of the study results. The awarding of prizes is administered by StudyResponse. StudyResponse has been used in management and psychology research (e.g., Piccolo and Colquitt 2006), and all studies using StudyResponse must obtain ethics approval.

A random selection of currently employed StudyResponse volunteers received an e-mail request to complete our survey, and 11% responded. In our respondents, 57% were female, 60% were between the ages of 25 and 45, over 85% had a minimum of 5 years of work experience, and over 80% had postsecondary education. Although our response rate is typical of other StudyResponse studies (StudyResponse Project 2006), it is fairly low. Therefore, we examined the data for potential response bias. The age, gender, and education level of those who responded was compared to the demographic information obtained from StudyResponse for the overall sample to which our survey was sent, and no significant differences were found for gender or education level. Although there was a difference for age, the magnitude of the difference was small (our respondents were approximately three years younger than the overall sample). Of the respondents, 75% (324 respondents) were able to recall an MC episode.

Measures

In the survey, two open-ended qualitative questions were asked. Respondents were asked at the beginning of the survey to write a few sentences describing their episode, and they were invited at the end of the survey to note any additional comments. Responses on quantitative measures were also collected. Several model constructs did not have existing scales or had not previously been measured in a communication context. Thus, before testing the hypotheses a card-sort study ($n = 22$), a media fit survey ($n = 45$), a mini-survey ($n = 81$), and a large-scale survey ($n = 755$) were used to examine the validity of the newly developed measures, specifically, perceived accessibility, conversational leveraging, focal performance, media fit, and MC orientation. See the appendix for the measures used in the present survey.

Data Analysis

The hypotheses were tested using the quantitative data. The qualitative data were not used to explicitly test the model hypotheses but were content analyzed and typical comments were used to illustrate key findings (similar to the method used by Jansen 2004, p. 282).

Qualitative Analysis. All respondents' textual accounts of the episode details were coded according to our model. New ideas or themes that emerged were also coded and helped to provide explanations for some of the novel findings. Data from the episode descriptions appeared alone on the first Web page of the survey, and thus most of these themes were introduced by the respondents themselves and are not affected by the subsequent survey questions. However, the respondents' comments at the end of the survey may be biased by the questions asked. Except where noted, all qualitative

quotes are from the episode descriptions at the beginning of the survey. The qualitative data were coded by the first author and a research assistant who was blind to the research hypotheses. A Cohen's kappa of 0.77 was obtained for interrater reliability (rather than percent agreement, which inflates agreement as it does not account for agreements that would have occurred naturally by chance; see Cohen 1960), indicating a substantial level of agreement (Fleiss 1981).

Quantitative Analysis. For the quantitative data, all multi-item scales demonstrated high internal consistency (Cronbach's alphas between 0.78 and 0.92), and the item-to-total correlations were all above the suggested 0.30 threshold (Field 2005). Descriptive statistics and correlations are available in Table 1.

Common method biases "pose a rival explanation for the correlation observed between the measures" and can be especially problematic in self-report surveys (Podsakoff et al. 2003, p. 879). Multiple methods were used to assess common method bias (Lindell and Whitney 2001, Podsakoff and Organ 1986). First, the Harman single-factor test was performed. Multiple factors emerged and the largest factor did not account for a majority of the variance (18%), suggesting that common method bias is not a significant problem (Podsakoff and Organ 1986). Next, common method bias was examined using a theoretically unrelated marker variable, extraversion of the partner. Following Lindell and Whitney's (2001) procedures for partialling out common method variance, the smallest correlation between the marker variable and one of the dependent variables ($r_{\text{smallest}} = 0.01$, using the correlation between extraversion and incivility) was used to adjust all significant correlations between independent and dependent variables ($p < 0.001$). The adjusted correlations were (at most) 0.01 lower than the original correlations, and relationships retained their levels of significance. The overall conclusion of these analyses is that the relationships between constructs cannot be accounted for by common method bias.

Our data were analyzed using structural equation modeling (SEM), a second-generation statistical technique that allows greater flexibility in analysis and avoids problems with multicollinearity and correlated dependent variables present in many first-generation techniques (Maruyama 1998). We conducted the SEM analysis using Amos 6.0 (Arbuckle and Wothke 1999), a SEM software program that is used frequently by researchers (Shook et al. 2004). SEM handles both the measurement (i.e., how well the items fit their latent variables) and the structural (i.e., the path) models in the same analysis (Garson 2008). For the measurement model, Comrey and Lee (1992) suggest that factor loadings of 0.71 are excellent, 0.63 are very good, 0.55 are good, and 0.45 are fair (Tabachnick and Fidell 2007, p. 649). All indicators loaded on their latent factors at the excellent or very good level except two items for PCO and three items for propensity to trust. Because these items were part of existing scales, we decided to keep the scales intact for comparability to other research.

Results

The overall fit of the SEM was marginal ($X^2/\text{df} = 2.1$, comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.85, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.06) as some of the fit indices fell outside the acceptable range (X^2/df between 1.0 and 2.0, Hair et al. 1998; CFI > 0.90, Bentler and Bonett 1980; RMSEA < 0.06, Tabachnick and Fidell 2007). Thus, two changes were made in an attempt to gain a better understanding of the partner's reactions to MC. First, the relationship between the partner's PCO and incivility (H5) was only marginally significant ($\beta = -0.11$, $p < 0.10$), despite the strong theoretical rationale and the relationship found in the correlational data (Table 1: $r = -0.24$, $p < 0.001$). Further,

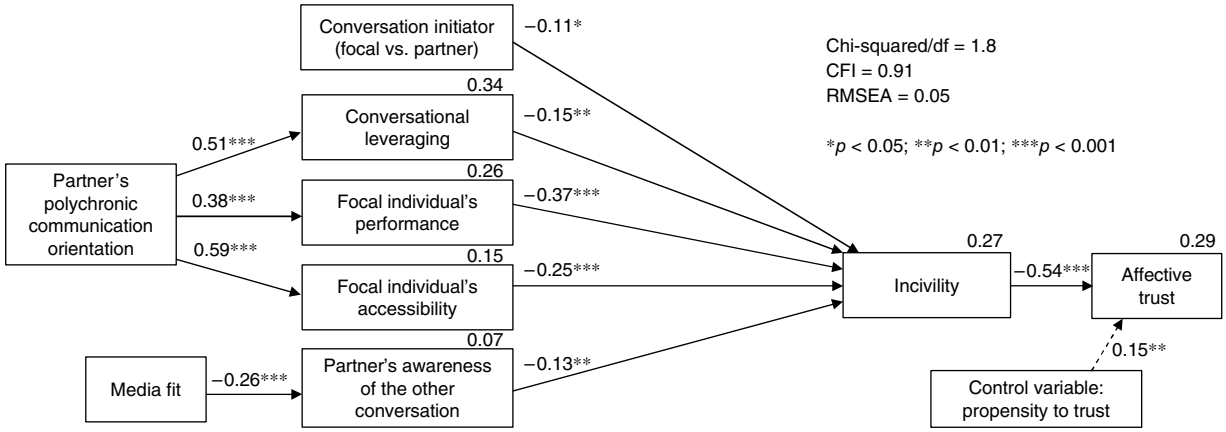
Table 1 Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

	Mean	SD	Initiator	Lever	Access	Perf	PCO	Norms	Fit	Aware	Ptrust	Incivil	AffTrust
Initiator	0.6	0.5	**N/A**										
Lever	3.2	2.0	−0.11	**0.90**									
Access	3.3	1.6	0.18***	0.46***	**0.84**								
Perf	4.4	1.5	−0.01	−0.25***	−0.40***	**0.88**							
PCO	2.6	1.1	0.06	0.37***	0.43***	−0.25***	**0.78**						
Norms	4.2	1.2	−0.04	0.04	0.10	−0.09	0.28***	**0.87**					
Fit	0.2	0.4	−0.09	0.11	0.08	−0.05	0.02	0.07	**N/A**				
Aware	4.6	0.8	0.00	−0.06	−0.04	0.00	−0.11*	0.02	−0.27***	**N/A**			
Ptrust	4.9	1.0	−0.08	0.01	−0.01	0.08	−0.13*	0.03	−0.05	0.15**	**0.88**		
Incivil	3.3	1.5	−0.14*	−0.32***	−0.44***	0.43***	−0.24***	0.00	−0.04	−0.09	−0.08	**0.92**	
AffTrust	4.3	1.5	0.03	0.12*	0.30***	−0.33***	0.14**	0.10	0.03	0.11*	0.16**	−0.48***	**0.90**

Notes. The numbers on the diagonal (in bold) are reliabilities. Incivil, perceived communication incivility; Perf, focal individual multicommunicating performance; Ptrust, partner's propensity to trust; Access, accessibility of the focal individual; Norms, workplace polychronic norms; PCO, polychronic communication orientation; Lever, conversational leveraging; Fit, media fit; Aware, partner's awareness of the other conversation; Initiator, conversation initiator.

*$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$; ***$p < 0.001$.

Figure 1 Post Hoc Model Results



illustrations of a *direct* relationship between PCO and incivility were not found in the qualitative data (but evidence of *indirect* effects did emerge, as described in the next section). Therefore, indirect relationships were modeled for PCO through conversational leveraging, focal accessibility, and focal performance. Second, the path between the control variable workplace polychronic norms and incivility was nonsignificant, and no illustrations were found in the qualitative data. Therefore, this control variable was dropped from the model. These two changes were made and a post hoc model was analyzed (see Figure 1). The overall fit of the revised SEM model was satisfactory ($X^2/\text{df} = 1.8$, $\text{CFI} = 0.91$, $\text{RMSEA} = 0.05$) and the path coefficients for the retained paths were consistent with those in the original model.[5] Further, a power analysis found a post hoc power of over 0.80 (MacCallum et al. 1996).

Each hypothesis was tested by examining the individual path coefficients and comparing them to the themes that were evident in the qualitative data. The quantitative support and qualitative illustrations for each hypothesis are summarized in Table 2. Except for Hypothesis 5, both the quantitative and quantitative data show support for the original hypotheses.

Discussion

This study contributes to our knowledge by suggesting MC as a potential starting point in the incivility spiral, by proposing conditions under which it is more or less likely for MC to be perceived as uncivil, by proposing novel influences on incivility, and by examining trust as an outcome of incivility. Through the use of SET, we conceptualize MC as a social exchange between focal individuals and partners. We assessed the partners' perceptions of the focal individual's incivility as one reflection of how they view the balance of the exchange, and we found that their perceptions of incivility are influenced by several factors. Specifically, MC episodes with higher focal accessibility, the use of conversational leveraging, higher levels of MC performance, partner-initiated conversations, and full partner awareness of the other conversation are less likely to become a starting point in the incivility spiral.

When considering the factors that influence this starting point, our results suggest that we should also consider the partner's PCO. This construct did not directly influence perceived incivility but influences incivility indirectly through the mediating variables of conversational leveraging, accessibility, and focal MC performance. It appears that although individual characteristics such as PCO are important in the partner's assessment of the exchange, characteristics of the episode itself have more direct effects. This explanation is consistent with Kanfer (1990), who suggests that distal variables such as personality traits will demonstrate indirect effects, whereas more proximal variables will exhibit more direct effects on outcomes. The qualitative data also illustrate some of these indirect effects: the Table 2 quotes regarding these indirect effects include many tentative phrases such as "seems," "usually," and "very often." It may be that although these participants feel their personal opinions are important, they also want to leave room for the influence of situational factors. Thus, partners' attitudes, beliefs, and values regarding juggling multiple conversations at the same time do not directly influence perceptions of incivility but act as a lens through which they judge the benefits and costs of an MC episode. It is these elements of the episode that directly affect how partners assess the social exchange of the MC episode.

PCO affected the partner's perceptions of conversational leveraging, accessibility, and performance, but not conversation initiator or partner awareness. A possible explanation is that leveraging, accessibility, and performance are more perceptual variables, whereas initiator and awareness are more objective variables. More specifically, accessibility represents the partner's perception of the personal benefit of the MC (in terms of the focal individual's availability). The partner will be more likely

Table 2 Quantitative Support and Qualitative Illustrations by Hypothesis

Hypothesis and illustrative quotes	Quantitative (post hoc)
H1: Initiator → Incivility "I did not know with whom X was communicating, but it irritated me, particularly because she phoned me. If she was too busy, she could have phoned at a more convenient time."	Supported. (−0.11*)
H2: Leveraging → Incivility "While talking to X on the conference call (conversation A) I could notice that there was a delay in X's answer to any questions I had. Fortunately, after the delay, X always came up with a reasonably good answer, which suggests other people around X were helping him resolve our issue. …It was a good experience of communicating."	Supported. (−0.15**)
H3: Focal individual performance → Incivility Many participants noted that during the episode the focal individual made errors, seemed confused, asked for questions to be repeated, delayed in responding, or did not participation fully in the conversation. Concerning these performance problems, one participant also noted in the comments section at the end of the survey: "I don't even mind multiple conversations as long as neither [conversation] suffers for it."	Supported. (−0.37***)
H4: Accessibility → Incivility This participant seems to have a positive view of the episode, possibly because the client's multicommunicating allowed him or her to be more accessible to the participant: "I was meeting with a client of mine who has a very busy schedule so any appointment with him was a good time. I was marketing a product that my client was very interested in but at the same time he was running his day to day activities as he has a lot of employees under him. So he was juggling me and his staff at the same time, trying get the best out of each conversation."	Supported. (−0.25***)
H5: PCO → Incivility No qualitative comments.	Weak; dropped in post hoc.
H6: Awareness → Incivility Explicit explanations and apologies may be one reason why total awareness is better than suspicion: "While our conversation was ongoing, X asked on several occasions to be excused for a second because he was responding to an email."	Relationship opposite than predicted. (−0.13**)
H7: Media fit → Awareness Several comments related to media pair differences and awareness were noted. For example, "[It] should not be done using identical types of communicating—eg. cellphone and landphone—where it is possible for the other party to hear the three-way in the background." "I do not think people should be answering e-mails while on a call UNLESS the person at the other end of the call cannot hear the keystrokes."	Supported. (−0.26***)
H8: Incivility → Affective trust Several participants described the focal individual as "pretending" to listen or be interested and one noted that "If the person does not pay much attention to the conversation, it reflects his/her sincerity in the relationship," suggesting possible perceptions of mistrust.	Supported. (−0.54***)
Post hoc: PCO → Leveraging One participant noted in the comments section at the end of the survey: "My personal make up and the education that I have received have always taught me to multi-task. Things are interconnected so being able to draw from one to give to another—as one is talking or writing or whatever—seems only natural."	Supported. (0.51***)
Post hoc: PCO → Focal individual performance One participant noted that he or she generally does not like multicommunicating and that there are often problems in conversations that are handled in this way: "Personally I find these situations very frustrating. When I take a call I usually stop what I'm doing to give the person I'm conversing with my full attention, I find very often that others are not so considerate and I think our work suffers for it."	Supported. (0.38***)
Post hoc: PCO → Accessibility No qualitative comments.	Supported. (0.59***)

*$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$; ***$p < 0.001$.

to view this as personally beneficial if he or she is predisposed to MC (high in PCO). Additionally, leveraging represents using one conversation to gain information needed for another. If a partner is high in PCO, then he or she would be predisposed to view this as a potential benefit of MC. Similarly, if a partner is high in PCO, then he or she would be predisposed toward MC and view the focal individual's performance as higher.

In contrast, more objective variables should not be influenced by an individual's PCO. The initiator is a dichotomous indicator of who initiated the conversation and awareness is the certainty that the focal is involved in a second conversation; these should not be affected by the partner's PCO.

Our research did not find a significant relationship between workplace polychronic norms and incivility. This is surprising as the spiral theory emphasizes workplace norms as an important factor in identifying the potential starting point for an incivility spiral (Andersson and Pearson 1999), and there is research supporting

the importance of norms when using communication devices during meetings (Stephens and Davis 2009). One possible explanation is that the Bluedorn et al. (1999) instrument is not a precise enough measure. Rather than focusing on communication-specific behaviors, the workplace norms scale Bluedorn et al. propose measures orientation toward "activities," "projects," "tasks," and "assignments." Thus, measuring organizational culture with regard to polychronicity may not be the same thing as measuring it with regard to MC.[6] This represents a potential area for future research.

As hypothesized, it was found that total awareness of the other conversation was associated with lower perceptions of incivility compared to suspected MC. The qualitative data in Table 2 offer a possible explanation for this effect: total awareness may often be accompanied by explanations or apologies by the focal. Our study did not capture the mechanism through which the partner became totally aware. Future research could determine whether it is simply sharing knowledge of the other conversation, providing an explanation for the other conversation, or giving an apology for MC that changes the partner's assessment of the exchange. That is, rather than direct effects, the relationship between awareness and incivility may be moderated by whether the focal voluntarily gives an explanation of and apology for his or her behavior or the partner finds out about the MC on his or her own. Further, one artifact of our method was that respondents could not report on MC episodes that they did not realize were occurring. Thus, we cannot speak to the differences caused by partners who are aware compared with those who are completely unaware of any MC. Future research should use other methods such as experiments to more fully understand the effects of all levels of awareness.

Our data support the generally held assumption that technologies such as instant messaging, text messaging, and wireless e-mail devices make it easier to unobtrusively juggle multiple conversations at the same time. Considering the relationship found between suspected MC and perceived incivility, these findings suggest that focal individuals who select their MC media in an attempt to mask their MC partners may have this strategy backfire. If partners suspect that something is going on despite the focal individual's hiding strategy, they may experience higher perceived incivility and more mistrust than if the focal had "come clean" and acknowledged the other conversation. This creates a paradox, as the very features of a technology that make it useful for MC may put the user at risk for heightened negative reactions to this behavior. Thus, technology used in a way that fulfills its "spirit" (DeSanctis and Poole 1994) may actually have negative workplace implications. Even though a technology has certain features or supports particular behaviors, it does not mean that all these features should be used in a work environment. Future research could further explore this paradox and its implications for organizations.

Our results suggest that balanced social exchanges, as evidenced by low perceptions of incivility, can improve, whereas unbalanced exchanges can erode, trust between the focal and partners. Although social exchange theorists have long highlighted the importance of successful exchanges in the development of interpersonal trust (e.g., Blau 1964), our research is the first to broaden SET to include incivility as an important precursor of trust in the social exchange process. Further, although incivility and trust have been examined outside of the workplace (Mutz and Reeves 2005), trust's relation to incivility has received little attention in organizational research. The strong relationship found between incivility and affect-based trust empirically establishes this previously proposed relationship (Andersson and Pearson 1999). Finally, although we focused on interpersonal trust because it plays a central role in SET (Blau 1964), other important outcomes of incivility do exist (e.g., decreased helpfulness; see Porath and Erez 2007), and other outcomes of incivility in the context of MC should be examined in future research.

Although the post hoc model exhibited satisfactory fit, some variables may be missing that would increase our understanding of partners' reactions to MC. SET suggests that the characteristics of the relationship influence the processes of social exchange (Blau 1964). Thus, factors such as the relative hierarchical status of the communicators, as well as their social roles, may be important. Although this information was not collected quantitatively, our qualitative data were used to perform a preliminary examination of the influence of their relationship. Specifically, we created a hierarchy of roles (subordinate, coworker, boss, and client)[7] and, in 20% of the episode descriptions, were able to code the relationship according to this hierarchy. In line with status characteristics theory—which suggests that comparisons of hierarchical status influence social interaction (Kalkhoff and Thye 2006)—it was thought that the higher the status of the focal in comparison to the partner, the lower the partner's perceptions of incivility would be. That is, the partner would be more upset by MC when the focal individual was the partner's subordinate or coworker than when the focal was the partner's boss or client. When examining the episodes, however, a relationship between hierarchical status and incivility was found in the opposite direction ($r = 0.39$, $p = 0.002$). It may be that we perceive our conversations with coworkers or subordinates as less formal and do not place a high value on the time that we spend with them. Thus, it may not matter as much to us if they are engaged in other conversations at the same time. On the other hand, we may perceive our conversations with bosses or clients as more formal and place a higher value on the time that we get

to spend with them (as we sometimes have their attention for only short periods of time). Thus, any inattention on their part is particularly frustrating. When combined with the results of an earlier study, an interesting paradox appears: focal individuals are more likely to engage in MC when the focal is of higher status than the partner (Turner and Reinsch 2007), but our results suggest that partners are *more upset* when the focal is of higher status than the partner. Thus, the choices we make as multicommunicators may not be optimal for managing our social relations. As only a subset of the episodes could be coded for hierarchical status, future research should further examine how this and other aspects of the focal–partner relationship influence the outcomes of MC.

Another variable that may be important is the partner's perceptions of the priority or urgency of the conversation. It has been proposed as an important antecedent to MC (Reinsch et al. 2008, Turner and Reinsch 2007) and may influence a partner's reactions to this behavior. Multicommunicating often occurs when we try to leave ourselves accessible to others in case something important arises, but it is these priority conversations that probably should receive our undivided attention. Paradoxically, it may be that we should try to avoid the types of conversations which often cause MC. Future research could examine how priority or urgency influences the outcomes of MC from the perspective of the partner.

Strengths, Limitations, and Contributions. Although this study increases our understanding of MC and partner reactions to this behavior, some limitations of this research should be noted. First, this study focuses on the two conversation MC episode as the level of analysis. Terms such as "thrashing" (Morello 2005) and "life hackers" (Thompson 2005) have surfaced in the popular press and underscore the growing concern of constant multitasking as a way of life. The importance of social processes in shaping how we select and use communication technologies (Markus 1994) suggests that future research should examine the impacts of MC in the context of whole workgroups, organizations, and even society. Second, retrospective bias may be a problem in our data as the passage of time can influence one's perception of recalled events (Golden 1992) and can result in a selection bias as individuals recall incidents that are more memorable to them. In an attempt to minimize these biases, the instructions specified that respondents were to remember their *most recent* MC episode, with over 80% of respondents reporting on an episode that had occurred within the previous two weeks. Third, common method bias is another potential issue with survey studies. However, recommendations concerning the separation and ordering of construct scales were followed (Lindell and Whitney 2001, Podsakoff et al. 2003). Substantial effort was also made to assess the impact of common method bias on the results, with the conclusion that common method bias could not account for the relationships among the data. Last, this research examines only linear and main effects. Future research should test for nonlinear and interaction effects. For example, curvilinear relationships have been suggested for the performance outcomes of MC (Reinsch et al. 2008) and such nonlinear relationships may also exist for the relational outcomes of MC. Further, constructs such as workplace norms may not have a main effect but may moderate the effect of other variables.

There are also several strengths of this research. First, both qualitative and quantitative data were collected, with the former largely supporting and providing triangulation for the quantitative findings. Second, the survey methodology and administration techniques allowed data from employees from a variety of sectors and backgrounds to be collected, increasing the generalizability of the results. Finally, the use of literature and data-grounded scale items, using existing instruments where possible and performing extensive pretesting elsewhere, makes it difficult to attribute unexpected results to measurement error and increases the validity of the results.

By integrating research and theory on MC, incivility, and SET, we contribute not just to our understanding of MC but also extend current theory on incivility. One of the key characteristics of incivility is its ambiguous intent to harm (Andersson and Pearson 1999). As Cameron (2000, p. 129) notes for the use of mobile phones in public spaces, MC is ambiguous as it sits on "the boundary between what we consider acceptable and what we sanction as intolerable." Thus, the starting point of the incivility spiral becomes particularly important: When does a certain behavior lead to perceptions of incivility? Our research finds that MC can become the starting point of the incivility spiral process and that it is useful to look for triggers that increase the likelihood of this spiral starting.

Our work can also increase our understanding of incivility in other contexts. When dealing with established or well-understood behaviors, the definition of the situation is clear. We know the script and how to "play our part" (Goffman 1959). In the age of ever-changing technology and ubiquitous computing, new workplace interactions have emerged for which the preexisting rules, norms, and rituals are inadequate. Predicting incivility can be difficult in the context of these emerging interactions. Our research demonstrates the usefulness of SET and its related concepts for understanding incivility in the context of one such emerging behavior: MC. We hope that our work stimulates other organizational researchers of emerging behaviors to explore SET as a powerful tool for investigating the incivility spiral.

As stated earlier, this research also contributes to our understanding of the relational outcomes of MC, extends the literature on workplace incivility, and deepens our understanding of multitasking that occurs in a

social context. Through these contributions, this research responds to calls to further investigate facets of interactional justice, which include incivility and rudeness (Bies 2001), the consequences of multiple media use (Bélanger and Watson-Manheim 2006), the relationship side of computer-mediated communication (Te'eni 2001), the partner's perspective (Rudy 1996, Te'eni 2001), and the potentially interruptive nature of technologies (Davis 2002, Zweig and Webster 2002).

This research also has significant implications for practitioners. With increasing reliance on virtual work in today's high-pressure business world, MC may be unavoidable. Some propose that MC will be perceived as a sign of diligence, but others suggest that it will be seen as rude (Williams 2009) and should be avoided because it will be detrimental to performance (Santosus 2003). Our research offers insight for managers who wish to mitigate any negative relational outcomes while MC. In the service industry, where responsiveness to the customer is a top priority, MC may be a way to increase their accessibility to clients. However, this benefit will be offset by increases in incivility if employees are not able to effectively handle both conversations or if they do not provide an explanation for their behavior. Employees should also find out their partners' attitudes, beliefs, and values concerning MC before engaging in this behavior. Finally, employees will want to carefully consider the detrimental effects of incivility on trust, given trust's link to teamwork, collaboration, organizational citizenship behaviors, and workplace satisfaction (Bromiley and Cummings 1995, Dirks and Ferrin 2001, Jones and George 1998). Thus, any decreases in trust as a result of MC could have fundamental effects on the organization.

Conclusion

Multicommunicating is an emerging area of research characterized by many unanswered questions. Whereas existing multitasking research can help to explain the performance implications of this behavior, multicommunicating is particularly complex because we are not just juggling tasks—we are juggling *people* and often, multiple media. In multicommunicating, partners can be affected by communication tools "even if they do not adopt the tools themselves" (Katz and Aakhus 2002, p. 316). The extended spiral theory of incivility helps us to understand the social effects of multicommunicating. How we interact with those around us influences what they think of us, how they judge our actions, and our relationships with them. Multicommunicating has the potential to build up or damage our workplace relationships and may have broader implications for other aspects of organizational life such as teamwork, organizational citizenship behaviors, and workplace satisfaction.

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Appendix. Survey Scales

Communication Incivility. Although a workplace incivility scale exists (Cortina et al. 2001, p. 70), it measures respondents' experiences of uncivil behaviors with items such as "Have you been in a situation where any of your superiors or coworkers ignored or excluded you from professional camaraderie?" There is no instrument that specifically measures *perceived communication* incivility. Therefore, the respondent's perceptions of incivility during the MC episode were measured using items adapted from existing scales (e.g., interpersonal justice, Colquitt 2001; rudeness, Porath et al. 2004) or definitions in the literature (relational devaluation, Leary et al. 1998). In addition, several new items were created that are specific to the context of communication.

Incivil1	X was polite. (reverse-coded)
Incivil2	X was rude to me.
Incivil3	X treated me with respect. (r)
Incivil4	X treated me in a polite manner. (r)
Incivil5	X treated me with dignity. (r)

Conversational Leveraging. Three items were developed to measure the partner's perception that the focal individual used one conversation to gain information needed for the other conversation. These items were validated in the pretests.

Lever1	Being in a conversation with me gave X access to information that assisted him or her in *conversation B*.
Lever2	Being part of *conversation B* gave X access to information that assisted my conversation with X.
Lever3	X was able to use one conversation to provide up-to-date information for the other conversation.

Focal Individual's Performance. A six-item measure of the focal individual's performance during the MC episode was developed and examined in the pretests.

Cost1	X made some mistakes. (r)
Cost2	X's responses were slow. (r)
Cost3	At times, X seemed to lose his or her train of thought. (r)
Cost4	It seemed that X was confused. (r)
Cost5	X sometimes missed questions or comments that I made. (r)
Cost6	The conversation progressed smoothly without need for repetition.

Focal Individual Accessibility. The focal individual's (X's) accessibility to the partner was measured using six items developed with the assistance of pretest surveys.

Access1 Juggling these conversations at the same time allowed X to be more available to me.
Access2 If X had handled the conversations one after another (instead of at the same time), it would have been harder for me to reach him or her.
Access3 Juggling these conversations at the same time made X more accessible to me.
Access4 Because X juggled two conversations at once, I was more productive overall.
Access5 By participating in two conversations at the same time, X helped me get my own tasks done more quickly.
Access6 If X had handled the conversations one after another (instead of the same time), it would have resulted in a delay for me.

Initiator. Respondents were asked to indicate who initiated their conversation with the focal individual. A dummy variable was created to indicate whether the conversation was initiated by the focal individual (0) or themselves (1).

Polychronic Communication Orientation. The partner's orientation toward MC was assessed using Turner and Reinsch's (2004) general PCO scale. Their scale extends Bluedorn and colleagues' (1999) earlier inventory of polychronic values by incorporating a focus on communication. A five-item subscale of the original PCO scale was used in the present study.

PCO1 I like to manage multiple conversations at the same time.
PCO2 I would rather devote my attention to one conversation before going on to the next interaction. (r)
PCO3 I believe people are most effective when they are managing multiple conversations at once.
PCO4 People should try to manage multiple conversations at once.
PCO5 It is okay to manage multiple conversations at once as long as the people you are communicating with do not know.

Workplace Polychronic Norms. Multicommunicating norms in the communication partner's workplace were measured by capturing the respondent's perception of whether or not their organization has positive attitudes and beliefs concerning multitasking. These norms were measured using Bluedorn and colleagues' (1999) 10-item inventory of group polychronic values.

Awareness. To measure whether the communication partner was completely aware of or only suspected the existence of the other conversation, respondents were asked to indicate on a scale of 1 (not sure) to 5 (sure) how certain they were that the focal individual was involved in a second conversation.

Multicommunicating Media Fit. Respondents were asked to report (if known) the communication channel used for each conversation. Based on these responses, media pairs were assigned a fit rating of high (1) or low (0). These ratings were based on a previously administered media fit pretest that asked respondents to rate—on a seven-point Likert scale—the media fit of 36 different possible media pairs. High media fit pairs included at least one medium with delayability, reviewability, and revisability (such as e-mail or instant messaging) and both media with invisibility (e.g., e-mail paired with telephone). All other combinations were considered low media fit.

Affect-Based Trust. Interpersonal trust between the respondent and the focal individual was measured using McAllister's (1995) five-item scale of affect-based trust.

Propensity to Trust. The 10-item trust scale from Costa and McCrae's (1992) revision of the NEO Personality Inventory was used.

Marker Variable. The respondent's level of extraversion was included in the survey as a marker variable that was expected to be unrelated to the variables of interest. The 10-item extraversion scale from Goldberg's (1992) 5-factor personality inventory was used. Goldberg's 5-factor inventory has been used extensively and has demonstrated high reliabilities in prior research (Smith and Snell 1996).

Endnotes

[1]Multitasking can be seen as occurring along a continuum according to the importance of the social context. Managing two noncommunication tasks at the same time would fall on the low end of this continuum. Managing one conversation while also performing a noncommunication task would be higher on the continuum. MC involves managing multiple different conversations with different people at the same time and would be placed higher on the continuum. The current research investigates MC but some of the findings may also have implications for multitasking behaviors at other points along the continuum.

[2]This paper focuses on the exchange process between two individuals, although social exchange in networks has also been studied (Cropanzano and Mitchell 2005).

[3]Other proposed influences on incivility include partner power and personality, gender, discrimination, overwork, stress, justice, and organizational climate (e.g., Andersson and Pearson 1999, Blau and Andersson 2005, Cortina 2008, Johnson and Indvik 2001, Montgomery et al. 2004, Pearson and Porath 2005).

[4]In the study that follows, this particular idea could not be tested as partners cannot report on MC episodes of which they are completely unaware.

[5]An alternative model was analyzed with only direct paths between the independent variables and trust (no indirect paths through incivility). These paths are weaker than the hypothesized relationships and did not improve fit.

[6]We thank the input of an anonymous reviewer for these ideas.

[7]The roles were organized according to organizational hierarchy—subordinate, coworker, boss—with client being placed at the top of the hierarchy because of the importance of the client to the ultimate success of any business (in line with the adage that "the customer is always right"). Only the 60 cases where roles could be assigned were included in this analysis.

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CORRECTION

In this article, "Relational Outcomes of Multicommunicating: Integrating Incivility and Social Exchange Perspectives" by Ann-Frances Cameron and Jane Webster (first published in *Articles in Advance*, July 10, 2010, *Organization Science*, DOI: 10.1287/orsc.1100.0540), "MC fit" has been corrected to read as "media fit" throughout.