FALLING ON THE SWORD: WHEN AND WHY TO TAKE BLAME
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ABSTRACT

Many organizational failures are diffuse: several people share the responsibility. Recent research suggests that the responsible parties, when discussing the failure post hoc, can earn greater social rewards by taking blame than by expressing remorse or evading. The current research explored when and why this preference for blame-taking emerges, i.e., the moderators and mechanisms. Building from recent theorizing, it proposes that listeners reward blame-taking because it demonstrates character, but only when the failure was diffuse and when they themselves were partially responsible. Four studies using a variety of methods and samples supported these predictions, suggesting that blame-taking is a potent, post-failure behavior, but only for a particular audience. In short, the benefits of blame-taking may not extend to conversations with uninvolved parties, either inside or outside of the organization.

Key words: Blame-taking, remorse, failure, character
FALLING ON THE SWORD: WHEN AND WHY TO TAKE BLAME

Facing charges that they either miscalculated or misreported their borrowing costs, which sent ripples throughout the financial system, Barclays recently agreed to pay a $452 million fine. Subsequent reports revealing that numerous employees played a role cost at least three senior executives their jobs. These events constituted a diffuse failure: a negative event for which several people shared the responsibility (Gunia, 2012).

Though failures this severe are rare, failures this diffuse are common: since several interdependent people contribute to many organizational outcomes, many organizational failures are diffuse (Goodman et al., 2011). Recent research has taken a first step toward determining what the people who are responsible for a diffuse failure do and should say to one another, post hoc. Focusing on blame-taking (i.e., ascribing responsibility to the self), this research shows that the responsible parties rarely take blame, but when someone does take blame, the other responsible parties roundly reward it (Gunia, 2012). In particular, these other parties appear to prefer blame-taking (e.g., “I take the blame for this”) to expressions of remorse (e.g., “I am sorry this happened”) or evasion (e.g., silence). Despite admitting culpability for a failure, blame-takers consistently earn greater social rewards than do the remorseful or evasive. Thus, this research highlights a blame bias in which people take less blame than their self-interest suggests that they should.

Though informative, this research provides only preliminary answers to several important questions about blame-taking. Indeed, it emphasizes that future research is needed on the topic of when and why people reward blame-taking (i.e., its mechanisms and moderators; Gunia, 2012). As these issues strike to the heart of the theoretical differences between blame-taking and remorse, as well as the practical implication that organizational actors should take more blame,
they remain important to resolve. The current research sought to do so by: 1) unpacking the character perceptions expected to mediate the benefits of blame-taking; and 2) circumscribing the situations in which blame-taking will and will not generate rewards.

Four multi-method, multi-sample studies indicate that people appreciate blame-taking because it conveys character, but only when the failure was diffuse and when they themselves were involved. Thus, uninvolved actors, whether inside or outside of the failing organization, may not especially appreciate blame-taking. These findings may help to formulate both theory and organizational prescriptions about blame-taking.

**RESPONDING TO DIFFUSE FAILURES**

Diffuse failures, though common in organizations (Edmondson, 1999; Goodman et al., 2011; Reason, 2000), have received less research attention than concentrated failures: negative events for which a single person bears the responsibility (e.g., Kim, Ferrin, Cooper, & Dirks, 2004; Scher & Darley, 1997; Schlenker & Darby, 1981). A large literature on interpersonal transgressions (e.g., forgetting to call a friend) has investigated how the victims and observers of a concentrated failure react to the statements of the transgressor, i.e., the person in whom the responsibility is “concentrated” (e.g., Darby & Schlenker, 1982; Ohbuchi, Kameda, & Agarie, 1989; Scher & Darley, 1997; Schmitt, Gollwitzer, Forster, & Montada, 2004).

This research has generally concluded that victims and observers appreciate when the transgressor apologizes, i.e., “acknowledges both responsibility and regret” (Kim, Dirks, & Cooper, 2009: 411). Specifically, this research classifies blame-taking (“responsibility”) and remorse (“regret”) as elements of an apology, demonstrating that they have an additive and approximately equal effect on people’s positive reactions to apology (Scher & Darley, 1997;
The victims and observers of a concentrated failure, it seems, want to hear both blame-taking and remorse from the transgressor.

The transgressions underlying this research usually concern competence (i.e., ability or effort) rather than integrity (i.e., moral awareness or concern; Hamilton, Blumenfeld, & Kushler, 1988; Kim et al., 2004; Reeder & Brewer, 1979). A memory lapse rather than a disregarded promise, for example, explained a transgressor’s failure to call his friend (Scher & Darley, 1997). Integrity failures may limit the efficacy of blame-taking: Kim and his colleagues (2004), among others (e.g., Bottom, Gibson, Daniels, & Murnighan, 2002; Riordan, Marlin, & Kellogg, 1983; Schweitzer, Hershey, & Bradlow, 2006), have argued that the blame-taking component of an apology may impress people less after a (concentrated) integrity failure than a (concentrated) competence failure, because admitting culpability for immorality is worse than admitting culpability for inability. Thus, people may react less favorably to blame-taking after concentrated integrity failures.

Conversely, they may react more favorably to blame-taking after diffuse failures, whether matters of competence or integrity. Based on a variety of theoretical foundations and organizational examples, Gunia’s (2012) research explicitly separated “taking blame” (which conveys responsibility) from “expressing remorse” (which conveys regret) and “evading” (which conveys neither). Four studies suggested that these messages function as separate statements. Yet, the two studies focused on blame-taking showed that people are reluctant to take blame for the failures in which they were involved.

The other two studies focused on how a particular group of people, the other responsible parties, would react to these statements, predicting that they would especially appreciate blame-taking. The logic was straightforward: Responsible parties, unlike victims or observers, face the
prospect of getting blamed. Accordingly, they should appreciate statements that resolve the responsibility more than statements that do not. Taking blame not only resolves the responsibility; it also prevents the responsibility from falling on the other responsible parties. Although expressions of remorse may mend broken relationships (Scher & Darley, 1997), they do little to resolve the responsibility; evasion, in turn, resolves neither responsibility nor relationships. Accordingly, Gunia (2012) argued and found that the other responsible parties would show a pronounced preference for blame-taking. Indeed, his results showed that this preference extends to integrity (and other severe) failures, presumably because particularly negative impressions of culpability are counterbalanced by particularly positive impressions of someone who would “take the hit” for such a damning failure. Thus, past research suggests that the responsible parties favor blame-taking because it protects them, even as it admits culpability.

**WHY AND WHEN TO TAKE BLAME**

Past research also suggests, but does not exhaustively test, the idea that this protective act sends implicit signals about the blame-taker as a person. It suggests, in particular, that the act of taking blame may signal two trust-relevant qualities: benevolence and integrity (Gunia, 2012; Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995). Blame-taking may signal benevolence because the protective act reveals a concern for the welfare of the people who could have been blamed. It may signal integrity because protecting others involves admitting rather than avoiding responsibility, which requires honesty and courage and suggests a strong moral foundation (Mayer et al., 1995).

As neither remorse nor evasion protects others, neither should signal as much benevolence or integrity, although remorse could seem empathetic and thus imply some benevolence. Since the combination of benevolence and integrity has been associated with
character-based (as opposed to competence-based) trust (Gabarro, 1978; Pirson & Malhotra, 2011; Yamagishi, 2001), Gunia (2012) called the combination of these two qualities “character,” predicting that blame-taking would demonstrate more character than the other two statements, and that character would mediate blame-taking’s positive effects. In other words, people would see character in the act of taking blame, and character would drive the rewards that people confer on the blame-taker. Consistent with this logic, the rewards accorded to a blame-taker were mediated by perceptions of the blame-taker’s character (Gunia, 2012; Study 4). Because this study was not primarily designed to test the character mediator, however, Gunia (2012) called for more and stronger evidence. Thus:

**Hypothesis 1**: After a diffuse failure, the responsible parties will reward blame-taking more than they will reward expressions of remorse, which they will reward more than evasion; these effects will be mediated by character perceptions.

Prior research was also not designed to test the presumed link between character perceptions and protection: Hypothesis 1 rests upon the idea that people see character in blame-taking because it protects them from the failure’s fallout. Though theoretically plausible, this has not been empirically documented. Thus, in addition to documenting character as a mediator, the current research investigated whether protection and character co-vary: i.e., whether people see less character when they feel less protected by blame-taking. In other words, it sought to investigate whether less-protective blame-taking would send fewer positive signals.

Blame-taking does less to protect listeners who would not have been blamed in the first place. Compared to a failure that they partially caused, for example, listeners are less likely to get blamed for a failure that the blame-taker singlehandedly caused, i.e., a concentrated failure (as suggested by Gunia, 2012). Someone who takes blame after forgetting to call, for example
(Scher & Darley, 1997), does little to protect anyone else because no one else was responsible. More generally, when no one else needs protection, no one should feel particularly protected by someone else’s blame-taking. If not, then blame-taking should reveal less benevolence, saying less about the blame-taker’s concern for others, as well as less integrity, since less honesty or courage is required to admit obvious responsibility. Indeed, in the absence of these positive signals, people could readily focus on the admission of responsibility inherent in blame-taking, as Kim and his colleagues (2004) have proposed.

Along similar lines, blame-taking is not particularly protective when one person has already been deemed fully responsible. Regardless of that person’s actual responsibility (i.e., whether the failure was truly concentrated in them), their ascribed responsibility makes it likely that they will also receive the punishment. In either of these related situations—when the blame-taker was actually or deemed to be fully responsible—other people should feel less protected by blame-taking and thus less appreciative of the blame-taker. Thus:

**Hypothesis 2a**: Blame-taking will generate more rewards for diffuse failures than for concentrated failures; character perceptions will mediate this effect.

**Hypothesis 2b**: Blame-taking will generate more rewards for failures in which the responsibility has not yet been assigned than for failures in which the responsibility has been assigned to one person; character perceptions will mediate this effect.

Just as listeners are unlikely to get blamed for someone else’s concentrated failure, they are also unlikely to get blamed for a failure that happens on an entirely separate team. If the listener had no connection to the failed team or its members, blame-taking should offer few protective benefits and say little about the blame-taker’s benevolence or integrity. Once again, listeners may then see blame-taking as a mere confirmation of culpability, lending additional
credence to the underlying proposition that people appreciate blame-taking when it protects them. Thus:

**Hypothesis 3**: Blame-taking will generate more rewards from people on the blame-taker’s team than from people outside the team; character perceptions will mediate this effect.

A final and critical situation in which listeners are unlikely to get blamed is when they are located outside of the organization. Like members of another team, members of the general public are not generally culpable for organizational failures. They were not in any way connected to the failure’s cause and thus would not be responsible for its consequences. As blame-taking does nothing to protect them, they should neither greatly appreciate it nor see strong signs of character in it. Thus:

**Hypothesis 4**: Blame-taking will generate more rewards from people inside the organization than from people outside the organization; character perceptions will mediate this effect.

These hypotheses, if documented, would substantially extend prior work and offer organizational actors with substantial guidance about when and why to take blame.

**THE CURRENT RESEARCH**

Four studies tested these hypotheses. Study 1 was a scenario study in which working adults read about a food poisoning incident in a restaurant and reacted, perceptually and behaviorally, to a subordinate who took blame, expressed remorse, or evaded (Hypothesis 1). Study 2 was a scenario study in which people learned that their manager was involved in a concentrated or diffuse accounting-related failure, then reacted to the manager’s blame-taking (Hypotheses 1-2). Study 3 was a laboratory study in which participants watched a relatively
concentrated or diffuse failure of an employee in a puzzle task. Acting as the employee’s manager (own team condition), another employee’s manager (other team condition), or a public observer (public condition), they reacted to the employee’s blame-taking (Hypotheses 1-4). Study 4 was a scenario study of the general public’s reactions to blame-taking. Acting as members of the public or intra-organizational colleagues, MBA students read and reacted to a series of statements from companies’ real annual reports (Hypotheses 1 and 4). The findings generally supported all four hypotheses.

**STUDY 1**

Study 1 tested Hypothesis 1 by presenting scenarios about a food poisoning incident to a sample of working adults from across the U.S. Respondents assumed the role of manager in the restaurant where the incident occurred; they evaluated an employee who took blame, expressed remorse, or evaded. As a basic robustness check of the predicted blame-taking preference, the study portrayed the food poisoning incident as a matter of either competence or integrity, and, in both cases, portrayed the consequences as quite severe. Results supported Hypothesis 1.

**Methods**

**Respondents.** Respondents were 75 working-age adults (21.3 percent men; 36.8 years old, $SD = 13.9$) who had joined a national subject pool and agreed to participate in periodic surveys for the chance to win Amazon.com gift certificates.

**Design.** The design of this study was a 2(failure: competence or integrity) x 3(statement: take blame, express remorse, evade) between-subjects factorial.

**Procedure.** Respondents received an email inviting them to participate in a survey on “Decision-Making.” After clicking a link, they learned that they (the manager), a chef, and a cook were the kitchen staff in a small restaurant which had prepared a soufflé containing a
mushroom that put several customers into a two-week coma. The food safety commission had
determined that the kitchen staff’s insufficient knowledge (competence) or concern about others
(integrity) was the cause (see Appendix A). After reading about the failure, the respondents
learned that one of their employees (the chef) took blame (“I take the blame for this incident”),
expressed remorse (“I am sorry that the incident happened”), or evaded responsibility (remained
silent)—statements that were extensively pretested in Gunia (2012).

**Dependent Measures**

Respondents answered a series of questions (see Appendix A): Two questions, asking
about the chef’s integrity and benevolence, were compiled into a character scale, $\alpha > .86$. Three
questions, asking how much respondents wanted to reward the chef (via performance ratings, a
bonus, or not firing him), were compiled into a rewards scale, $\alpha > .70$.

**Results**

In accordance with Hypothesis 1, the responsible parties preferred and rewarded blame-
taking to remorse and evasion. This preference emerged across competence and integrity
failures, and as a result of the blame-taker’s perceived character (see Figure 1). An ANOVA on
the rewards scale led to a main effect of statement, $F(2,72) = 8.89, p < .001$: planned
comparisons indicated that respondents rewarded the chef more for taking blame ($M = 6.57, SD$
$= 1.45$) than for expressing remorse ($M = 5.28, SD = 2.76$), $t(47) = 2.07, p = .001$, and
marginally more for expressing remorse than for evading ($M = 4.08, SD = 1.96$), $t(48) = 1.78, p$

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1 A separate sample of 100 working adults read the two scenarios and answered: “What was the cause of this
incident?” (open-ended). Two trained coders, blind to the hypotheses, rated their answers as referencing competence
and/or integrity. After coding 25 responses jointly ($\alpha = .81$), they independently rated half of the remaining
responses. The coding data confirmed that respondents saw the integrity scenario as more of a matter of integrity ($M$
$= 1.67, SD = .46$) than the competence scenario [$M = 1.55, SD = .49$; $t(96) = 2.30, p = .02$].
= .08. As in Gunia (2012), however, actors did not differentially reward blame-taking for competence and integrity failures, t(73) = 1.69, p = .10.

An ANOVA on the character yielded a similar effect of statement, F(2,72) = 50.00, p < .001 (see Figure 1): Planned comparisons indicated that chefs who took blame were seen as having more character (M = 5.46, SD = 1.31) than chefs who expressed remorse (M = 3.79, SD = 1.85), t(47) = 3.65, p = .001, who were seen as having more character than chefs who evaded (M=2.67, SD=.99), t(48) = 2.69, p = .01. This all supports Hypothesis 1.

In addition to these two main effects, Hypothesis 1 predicted that perceptions of character would mediate the positive effects of blame-taking. To test this hypothesis, both statements and character perceptions were entered into regressions as predictors of the rewards scale, including only the blame-taking and remorse statements to be conservative (results were stronger when all three statements were included). As shown in Figure 1, both statements (β = .29; p = .04) and character perceptions (β = .80; p < .001) independently predicted the rewards index. When both were included in the same regression, however, the effect of statements became non-significant (β = -.11, p = .28) while the effect of character perceptions remained significant (β = .85, p < .001), suggesting mediation. A bootstrap test (Preacher & Hayes, 2004), with 5000 iterations, yielded a confidence interval that did not include zero (.30 to 1.43)—indicating full mediation and supporting Hypothesis 1.

**Discussion**

This study bolstered and extended previous findings by showing that the responsible parties, in the wake of a diffuse failure, prefer blame-taking to expressions of remorse or evasion. In short, blame-taking established the blame-taker’s character, which led listeners to confer rewards. These results, all of which supported Hypothesis 1, cut across both competence and
integrity failures and held despite the fairly severe consequences of the failure (a two-week coma). Overall, and in light of prior research, these results strongly establish the benefits of blame-taking when talking to the other responsible parties.

STUDY 2

Study 2 had two parts, both using the same scenario. Study 2A investigated whether people who were not responsible because the blame-taker was responsible (a concentrated failure; Hypothesis 2a) would still appreciate blame-taking. Participants read a scenario about a failure on their team which was attributable either to their boss or to their entire team, including themselves. They then reacted to their boss’s blame-taking.

Study 2B used a similar scenario but focused on the relationship between character perceptions and the protective power of blame-taking (Hypothesis 2b). It varied whether the responsibility had already been assigned, then measured participant’s perceptions of the blame-taker’s character. Collectively, Studies 2A and 2B supported both parts of Hypothesis 2.

Study 2A Methods

Participants. Participants were 51 undergraduates in a business school subject pool at a Midwest U.S. university (35.0 percent men; 21.7 years old, $SD = 1.6$). They participated virtually, at a time of their choosing. The use of undergraduates in an experiment is a methodological choice to make carefully. We felt that experimental methods were well-suited for the current context, as they allowed for tight control of the subtle variable under investigation. An undergraduate sample was also valid, we felt, because decisions about how to cope with failure are inherently value-based, and research on value-based decisions has suggested that most people reach the apex of their moral development before college (Kohlberg, 1958). Thus,
undergraduates’ reactions were expected to be reasonably representative of the broader populations’ reactions.

**Design.** This study manipulated a single, between-subjects variable: 2(failure type: concentrated or diffuse).

**Procedure.** Participants received an email inviting them to participate in a study about “Decision Making.” After clicking the survey link, they learned that they worked on the accounting team (managed by Chris Jones), as opposed to the marketing team (managed by Pat Smith), at a company called The Moore Corporation (see Appendix B). Upon arrival at work one day, they received a memo indicating that the company had filed tax documents with “severe inaccuracies.” The memo revealed that the inaccuracies were either caused by Chris alone (concentrated failure condition), or by the entire accounting team together (diffuse failure condition). For example, the diffuse failure “was almost certainly caused by a whole team, acting together. Specifically, it appears that the accounting team used highly questionable assumptions when computing the company’s expenses.” Participants learned that Chris had emailed the entire company later that day, saying: “With respect to the tax incident, I take the blame. I am responsible for our tax returns.” They then answered a series of questions.

**Study 2A Dependent Measures**

**Comprehension check.** Three questions checked whether participants understood the relationship between themselves, Chris Jones, and the accounting team (see Appendix B).

**Rewards.** The Study 1 behavioral questions, modified slightly for the current context, measured participants’ desire to reward Chris Jones (see Appendix B). They were compiled into a rewards scale (α = .77).
Character. Character was measured using the 11 integrity and benevolence items from Mayer and Davis’s trust scale (1999), adapted to refer to Chris. For example, participants indicated whether Chris “has a strong sense of justice” and “really looks out for what is important to me” (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). A factor analysis indicated that all but the one negatively-worded item loaded onto a single scale explaining 60.93% of the variance. Thus, this item was dropped and remaining items compiled into a character scale ($\alpha = .95$).

Study 2A Results and Discussion

Three participants answered the comprehension check questions incorrectly; they were excluded from subsequent analyses. Overall, people perceived the most character in, and conferred the most rewards on, the blame-taker when the failure was diffuse. Additionally, character mediated the increased rewards associated with a diffuse failure.

Hypothesis 2a predicted that a concentrated failure would attenuate the character perceptions and rewards that otherwise accompany blame-taking. In support, participants rated the blame-taker as having more character after the diffuse failure ($M = 4.44$, $SD = 1.21$) than the concentrated failure [$M = 3.33$, $SD = .98$; $t(49) = 3.62$, $p = .001$], and conferred more rewards on the blame-taker after the diffuse failure ($M = 5.04$, $SD = 1.96$) than the concentrated failure [$M = 3.13$, $SD = 1.31$; $t(49) = 4.10$, $p < .001$]. Additionally, both character ratings ($p = .002$) and rewards ($p = .002$) were lower than the scale midpoint for the concentrated failure, but higher than the midpoint for the diffuse failure (character $p = .08$, rewards $p = .01$), though the character effect was marginal.

As shown in Figure 2, the causal logic underlying Hypotheses 1-2a was supported by a series of regressions: Both failure type ($\beta = .52$, $p < .001$) and character ratings ($\beta = .67$, $p < .001$) predicted rewards. When both were included in the same regression, both remained significant
(failure $\beta = .26, p = .03$; character $\beta = .55, p < .001$), but the beta on failure type was substantially reduced, suggesting mediation. Supporting mediation, a bootstrap test (Preacher & Hayes, 2004) with 1000 iterations produced a confidence interval that did not include zero (.35 to 1.39). In short, and in support of Hypotheses 1-2a, taking blame for a diffuse failure appeared to signal more character than taking blame for a concentrated failure, which led to more rewards.

Study 2A began to suggest the limits of blame-taking. People saw more character in, and conferred more rewards on, a blame-taker when they themselves were involved in the failure than when they were not (supporting Hypotheses 1-2a). Though consistent with the idea that people see character in blame-taking when it protects them, this study did not measure protection directly; Study 2B was designed to do that using a similar scenario.

**Study 2B Overview**

Hypothesis 2b predicted that blame-taking would signal less character and elicit fewer rewards when it did not protect the listener. As a direct test, Study 2b varied whether the responsibility and punishment associated with the failure had already been assigned, making the blame-taking relatively “inconsequential,” or whether they were still being assigned, making the blame-taking potentially “consequential.” As a comparison for blame-taking, this study also included a statement that expressed remorse.

**Study 2B Methods**

**Participants.** Participants were 125 working adults (57.8 percent men; 30.9 years old, SD = 11.7) who had agreed to participate in short, online studies administered by Amazon mTurk in exchange for a small amount of compensation (in this case, $1). Research has shown that, as compared to an undergraduate sample, the mTurk sample is more diverse and representative of
society, and at least as reliable (e.g., Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011). Participants completed the study remotely, via computer.

**Design.** The design of this study was 2(consequences: consequential or inconsequential) x 2(statement: blame-taking or remorse) between-subjects factorial.

**Procedure.** After clicking a link to participate in an online survey, participants essentially followed the Study 2A procedure. Unlike Study 2A, however, this study mentioned consequences and included a remorse condition. All participants learned that the tax inaccuracies would result in “a 10% salary reduction and a one-week suspension.” Participants in the consequential condition learned that management was still deciding who was responsible and would face these consequences: “The decision about whom to hold responsible is not yet finalized.” Participants in the inconsequential condition, in contrast, learned that management had already decided that the entire accounting team was responsible: “This decision to hold the whole team responsible is final.” Participants in the blame-taking condition read the same statement as in Study 2A; participants in the remorse condition read, “I am sorry that the tax incident happened.” All participants then answered the same three character questions (scale $\alpha = .95$) and rewards questions (scale $\alpha = .85$).

**Study 2B Results and Discussion**

Consistent with Study 1 and Hypothesis 1, an ANOVA on the character scale yielded a main effect of statement, $F(1,121) = 41.86, p < .001$: these (partially-responsible) participants saw more character in blame-taking ($M = 5.71, SD = 1.50$) than in the expression of remorse ($M = 4.10, SD = 1.35$). Consistent with Hypothesis 2b, however, the ANOVA also yielded a main effect of consequential / inconsequential, $F(1,121) = 10.86, p = .02$, indicating that both statements conveyed more character when they were consequential ($M = 5.19, SD = 1.64$) than
when they were inconsequential ($M = 4.60, SD = 1.58$). Although the interaction between the two variables did not reach significance, $F(1,121) = 2.52, p = .115$, an analysis of the simple effects indicated that character perceptions were higher for consequential than inconsequential blame-taking, $t(59) = 2.70, p = .009$, but there was no difference between consequential and inconsequential remorse, $t(62) = .57, p = .57$.

Consistent with Study 1 and Hypothesis 1, an ANOVA on the rewards scale yielded a main effect of statement, $F(1,121) = 22.92, p < .001$: participants rewarded blame-taking ($M = 6.52, SD = 2.45$) more than the expression of remorse ($M = 4.48, SD = 2.27$). Also consistent with Hypothesis 1, character perceptions fully mediated the effect of blame-taking on rewards (confidence interval = -2.23 to -0.99). Although the rewards conferred after consequential ($M = 5.52, SD = 2.74$) and inconsequential ($M = 5.43, SD = 2.74$) blame-taking were in the predicted direction, this effect was not significant, $F(1,121) = .04, p = n.s.$, inconsistent with Hypothesis 2b.

These findings offer full support for the idea that blame-taking conveys character because it protects the other responsible parties—that character perceptions are linked to protection. People saw more character in blame-taking than in remorse, and in consequential statements than in inconsequential statements. Critically, the consequential nature of the statement only mattered for blame-taking, suggesting that the character people see in blame-taking arises directly from the protection that it offers. As the consequential or inconsequential nature of the blame-taking had no effect on rewards, however, these findings offer only qualified support for Hypothesis 2b as a whole. It appears that people were willing to reward blame-taking even when it did not offer direct protection, suggesting that the blame-taker’s colleagues may have several reasons to appreciate blame-taking, only some of which relate to their protection.
Together with the results of Study 2A, then, this study offers qualified support for the idea that blame-taking protects the other involved parties and thus conveys character and attracts rewards. When it does not protect anyone—because they do not need protecting or the consequences have been preordained—blame-taking does less to help the blame-taker. Study 3 sought more evidence from a controlled setting with real consequences.

**STUDY 3**

Study 3 investigated all four hypotheses in a realistic setting, with real consequences. Using Gunia’s (2012; Study 4) puzzle task, participants watched an employee suffer a diffuse or concentrated failure and then take blame. Participants—in their role as that employee’s leader (own team condition), the leader of another employee (other team condition), or a public observer (public condition)—recorded their reactions, which lent support to all four hypotheses.

**Methods**

**Participants.** Participants were 128 undergraduates (38.3 percent men; 19.9 years old, SD = 1.36) in the same subject pool as in Study 2A. Participants received an $8 participation fee and were told that they could receive up to $20 more in bonus money. Actually, everyone received $8 plus a $5 bonus.

**Design.** The design of this study was a 3(role: own team, other team, public) x 2(failure type: diffuse or concentrated).

**Procedure.** The procedure was modeled on Gunia (2012)’s fourth study, and used two of the four video stimuli from that study. After arriving at the lab, participants were escorted to a breakout room or private cubicle and asked to complete a consent form and a series of demographic questions.
In the own team and other team conditions, the computer notified participants that they were randomly assigned to act as the leader in a two-party experiment on spatial skills. They would work with (but not meet) an employee located in a different room on the construction of a 16-piece puzzle (the Tanagram Task; Kellogg Teams and Groups Center, 2010). Specifically, participants would have five minutes to read the rules, then type and send instructions to their employee about how to build the puzzle. Their employee, who had 16 disassembled pieces, would attempt to construct the puzzle based only upon the leader’s instructions. In the own team condition, participants would then watch a video feed of their own employee constructing the puzzle. In the other team condition, their own employee would receive their instructions, but participants would not watch their own employee; they would watch a video feed of another employee, who had received instructions from a different leader (they would learn about their own employee’s performance later; see Appendix C).

The public observer condition resembled the other team condition, except that participants would not have an employee of their own. Instead, they would watch an employee who had been paired with a leader, recording their reactions “as a member of the general public.” These participants read the same information about the task and had the same five minutes to read the rules and type instructions; this instruction period, however, was portrayed as an opportunity “to learn about the task” (see Appendix C).

In all conditions, then, participants had five minutes to read the rules and type instructions; a timer at the bottom of the screen marked the time. As Gunia (2012) demonstrated, however, five minutes is not nearly enough time to process the rules and also provide adequate instructions, suggesting that the leader (whether it was the participant or someone else) was always somewhat responsible for the eventual failure (i.e., that the failure was always somewhat
diffuse). After the five minutes had elapsed, the computer refreshed and informed participants that they would watch the relevant employee’s performance through a live video feed.

Participants watched one of two videos, provided by Gunia (2012). Both videos showed an undergraduate female confederate ostensibly reading the leader’s instructions and then sitting at a table with her back to the camera to build the puzzle. Over the next 90 seconds, the videos showed her failing for one of two reasons. In the diffuse condition, she repeatedly tried but failed to assemble the puzzle pieces, reinforcing the idea that the leader had not provided adequate instructions, and that the failure was diffuse. In the concentrated condition, she yawned and looked around lackadaisically instead of really engaging with the puzzle. Notwithstanding the leader’s poor instructions, then, the responsibility was relatively concentrated in her. (Both of these manipulations were extensively pretested in Gunia, 2012).

After 90 seconds, the experimenter (an undergraduate male) entered the room, checked her progress, and said, “Ok, well, you didn’t get many right, so you only earned $5 out of $10, to split between you and the leader. Do you have anything to say to the leader?” The employee then took blame, saying, “I take the blame for this.” Participants answered a series of questions.

**Dependent Measures**

**Character.** As in Gunia (2012), participants rated the employee’s “integrity,” “benevolence,” and “character,” which were compiled into a character scale ($\alpha = .86$).

**Rewards.** Participants answered the same questions as in Gunia (2012):

- We are collecting nominations for the award of ‘Top Employee in Study 11011.’ The Top Employee will receive a $20 bonus at the end of the month. Do you want to recommend your employee for this award? (1=Definitely not to 7=Definitely)
In a moment, you will proceed to the second round. Today only, we are giving leaders the opportunity to switch to another employee if they choose. What do you want to do?

(Work with the same employee; Switch to another employee)

As in that study, the variables were correlated ($r = .53, p < .001$), but not strongly enough to construct a reliable index ($\alpha = .69$); thus, they were analyzed separately.

**Results**

Hypotheses 1-4 predicted that positive reactions to blame-taking would be confined to diffuse failures on one’s own team. Only in those situations does the listener bear responsibility, so only in those situations would the listener particularly appreciate someone else’s attempts to accept the responsibility. Consistent with this logic, the other team and public observer conditions did not differ on the character scale, $t(75) = .05, p = .96$; employee award question, $t(75) = .35, p = .73$; or second task question, $\chi^2 = .16, p = .92$. Thus, these two conditions were collapsed and analyzed together as the reactions of those “outside the team.”

Consistent with the hypotheses, an ANOVA on the character scale yielded a main effect of failure type, $F(1,124) = 106.54, p < .001$, as well as a marginally-significant main effect of role, $F(1,124) = 2.73, p = .10$. As shown in Figure 3, participants saw more character in blame-taking after a diffuse failure than a concentrated failure, and marginally more after a failure on their own team than a failure on a team in which they were not a member. Finally, a planned contrast indicated that participants saw the most character in blame-taking after a diffuse failure on their own team, vis-à-vis all of the other conditions, $t(122) = 6.29, p < .001$.

Similarly, an ANOVA on the employee award question yielded main effects of both failure type, $F(1,124) = 44.15, p < .001$, and role, $F(1,124) = 14.13, p < .001$. As shown in Figure 3, participants recommended the employee for the award more strongly after a diffuse
failure than a concentrated failure, and after a failure on their own team than a failure on another team. Additionally, they recommended the employee most strongly after a diffuse failure on their own team, vis-à-vis all of the other conditions, $t(122) = 6.31$, $p < .001$. Likewise, participants less often switched employees after a diffuse failure than a concentrated failure, $\chi^2 = 6.28$, $p = .01$; they also wanted to switch marginally less often after a failure on their own team than a failure on another, $\chi^2 = 2.36$, $p = .12$. Finally, they wanted to switch employees least often after a diffuse failure on their own team, $\chi^2 = 6.78$, $p < .001$.

Given that participants saw the most character and conferred the most rewards after a diffuse failure on their team, as implied by the hypotheses, the causal logic underlying the hypotheses was tested through a series of regressions comparing this condition (labeled “diffuse-own”) with all of the other conditions. As shown in Figure 3, both diffuse-own ($\beta = .46$, $p < .001$) and character ratings ($\beta = .69$, $p < .001$) predicted the employee award question. When both were included in the same regression, both remained significant (diffuse-own $\beta = .21$, $p = .002$; character $\beta = .60$, $p < .001$), but the beta on diffuse-own was substantially reduced, suggesting mediation. Supporting mediation, a bootstrap test (Preacher & Hayes, 2004) with 1000 iterations produced a confidence interval that did not include zero (.64 to 1.39). Similarly, both diffuse-own ($\beta = -.23$, $p = .009$) and character ratings ($\beta = -.39$, $p < .001$) predicted participants’ desire to switch employees. When both were included in the same regression, however, character ratings remained significant ($\beta = -.35$, $p < .001$) while diffuse-own did not ($\beta = -.09$, $p = .33$), suggesting mediation. Supporting mediation, a bootstrap test (Preacher & Hayes, 2004) with 1000 iterations produced a confidence interval that did not include zero (-2.21 to -.60). In short,
and in support of Hypotheses 1-4, taking blame signaled the most character after a diffuse failure on the listener’s team, which led the listener to reward the blame-taker.

Discussion

Study 3 offered converging evidence, in an involving context, that people confer rewards in accordance with their involvement. The more responsibility that listeners themselves bore for a failure—because the failure was diffuse and/or because it happened on their own team—the more character they saw in the blame-taker and the more they were willing to reward blame-taking (supporting all four hypotheses). Listeners who were less involved in the failure were apparently less interested in resolving its responsibility questions and thus less appreciative of the blame-taker. Instead, they appeared to focus on the blame-taker’s culpability, generating the types of negative reactions envisioned by Kim and his colleagues (2004). The public condition in the current study provided initial evidence that this logic extends to the general public. Our last study focused specifically on that issue.

STUDY 4

In Study 4, MBA students read real statements from companies’ annual reports, previously coded as a form of blame-taking or evasion (Lee, Peterson, & Tiedens, 2004). Respondents were told that a CEO had made the statements. They were then asked to assume the role of the CEO’s subordinate, superior, or a member of the general public and to indicate what salary the CEO deserved.

Methods

Respondents. Respondents were 89 MBA students (69.2% men; 27.5 years old, SD = 2.09; 68.46% response rate) enrolled in one of two sections of an introductory leadership class at a Midwest U.S. business school. Participation was voluntary, virtual, and at a time of their
choosing. Both sections were taught by the same professor; because the two sections had no
effects on the results (all p’s n.s.), the data from both sections were combined for the analyses.

**Design.** The focus of this study was role-based reactions to statements that assumed or
evaded responsibility for failures (blame-taking vs. evasion). To minimize suspicion and demand
effects, however, successes were intermingled with failures. Thus, the design was a mixed:
3(role: observer, superior, subordinate) x 2(statement: assume or evade responsibility) x
2(valence: failure or success). The first factor was between-subjects. Because respondents read
all statements in (random) sequence, the second two factors were within-subjects.

**Procedure.** In the fifth class of a two-week course, the professor gave students an option
to complete the survey, stressing that it was optional but relevant to the course and that
respondents would receive feedback on the class’s aggregate responses. Immediately after the
class session, respondents received an email containing a survey link; they later received one
reminder email. As promised, respondents subsequently received in-class feedback about their
aggregate responses.

After clicking the survey link, respondents learned about a company called General
Holdings, Inc.; the company had a busy year, and the CEO had made a number of statements
about the company’s performance. Participants were asked the read and evaluate the statements,
assuming the role of the company’s chairman (superior to the CEO), the company’s vice
president (subordinate to the CEO), or a member of the public. Participants in the two intra-
organizational conditions had heard the statements in a meeting; those in the public condition
had read them in the newspaper.

**Statements.** Respondents read 20, randomly-ordered statements that contained both a
statement (assume or evade responsibility) and a valence (failure or success). They read five of
each statement-valence combinations. All statements came from Lee et al.’s (2004) study on the relationship between the statements in companies’ annual reports and their subsequent stock price. Briefly, these authors found that internal attributions for negative events, which resemble blame-taking, predicted stock price improvements in the next year, controlling for a host of other variables. To reach that conclusion, they had coders review the annual reports of 14 representative companies over 21 years, extracting all 655 statements that contained both an outcome and an attribution. Using three-point scales, separate coders then rated the outcomes as failures or successes and the attributions along several attributional dimensions (Kelley, 1967; Seligman, 1982).

From this database of statements (which Lee et al. graciously provided), we selected the subset that received the highest score in the four (assume vs. evade) x (success vs. failure) categories. From these 152 statements, we selected a random sample of 20, five from each of the four categories. As Lee et al.’s coders had already coded these same statements as highly representative of the categories, reliably and exhaustively, we treated them as indicators of those categories, averaging respondents’ reactions to them to form indices.

Appendix D lists the statements that respondents read. As taking blame is making an internal attribution, publicly and proactively (Gunia, 2012), the internal attributions in this context were treated as equivalent to blame-taking: they were public (stated in annual reports) and proactive (stated by choice, not in response to questions). Thus, the assumption of responsibility for a failure was coded as blame-taking and its opposite as evasion.

**Dependent Measures**

After reading each of the 20 statements, the primary question that respondents answered was: “How should the CEO's salary change?” (-9%, -6%, -3%, no change, +3%, +6%, +9%).
Results

Intra-organizational respondents, whether superior or subordinate to the CEO, rewarded blame-taking more than members of the public did, supporting Hypotheses 1 and 4. Specifically, superiors and subordinates recommended a higher salary for the blame-taking CEO than for the evasive CEO, $t(71) = 6.71, p < .001$ (see Figure 4). Consistent with Gunia (2012), no difference emerged between the two groups for either blame-taking, $t(70) = .67, p = .51$, or evasion, $t(70) = .87, p = .39$, so reactions were combined and considered together, as “organizational” reactions.

Hypothesis 4, which predicted that organizational actors would appreciate blame-taking more than observers would, was supported: A mixed ANOVA yielded a main effect of blame-taking / evasion, $F(1,87) = 12.66, p = .001$, as well as a (blame-taking / evasion) x (observer / organizational) interaction $[F(1,87) = 5.26, p = .02$; see Figure 4]. The main effect suggested that both groups preferred blame-taking to evasion. Planned comparisons of the interaction’s simple effects, however, indicated that neither observers nor organizational actors appreciated evasion, $t(87) = .39, p = .70$, but organizational actors appreciated blame-taking significantly more than observers did, $t(87) = 2.46, p = .02$. Follow-up comparisons indicated that both superiors, $t(42) = 2.04, p < .05$, and subordinates, $t(60) = 2.39, p = .02$, each appreciated blame-taking more than observers did.

Discussion

This study provided additional evidence that involved, organizational actors laud and reward blame-taking (Hypothesis 1). However, this preference does not extend to members of the general public, who were not responsible for causing the failure (Hypothesis 4). Together with prior studies and prior research, this study contributes to a relatively clear picture of when
blame-taking does and does not help the blame-taker. Based on these results, the responsible parties would be advised to take blame more readily inside versus outside of the organization.

**GENERAL DISCUSSION**

Four studies upheld the power of blame-taking but also suggested that blame-taking generates the most favorable reactions in a specific set of situations: when talking to the other organizational actors who share responsibility for the failure. As these situations are omnipresent in organizations (Goodman et al., 2011), these findings do not undercut the imperative to take blame. However, they do suggest that blame-takers should carefully weigh the costs when talking about failures that they single-handedly caused (for which no one else was responsible) or when talking to people who were clearly uninvolved (and thus not responsible). These results yield several implications for researchers and practitioners grappling with organizational failure.

**Theoretical Implications**

These results both uphold and extend emerging research on blame-taking, which suggests that the responsible parties can generate warmer reactions from others by avoiding their natural inclinations to evade blame. The current studies replicated these positive reactions but showed that they are confined to the responsible parties, consistent with the reasoning that blame-taking helps because it protects those who could get blamed. The uninvolved parties, who did not cause and would not likely get blamed for a failure, should be less appreciative of blame-taking. The fact that they are supports prior research.

As prior research ended with the reactions of the involved, however, the current research offered a significant step forward: First, it teased out the implications of this theorizing by identifying the specific, uninvolved audiences that should appreciate blame-taking less. Whether outside of the failing group or outside of the organization entirely, individuals who were not
responsible showed a lesser appetite for blame-taking. This suggests that reactions to blame-taking, and possibly to other post-failure statements, hinge on the listener’s causal role. Future research on post-failure reactions could use involvement as a lever to generate novel hypotheses.

Consistent with this reasoning, the current research also showed that people react less warmly to blame-taking for a concentrated failure, or a failure that has been attributed to one person, even if that person was not solely responsible. This all makes sense, because blame-taking by the person who has or will get blamed does little to relieve anyone else’s fears of reprisal. They would not have been blamed anyway. Instead, this form of blame-taking primarily highlights the speaker’s culpability, consistent with prior research on apology (e.g., Kim et al., 2004). Thus, the current research helps to unify two rather disparate streams of research, suggesting that blame-taking hurts when it primarily confirms the speaker’s culpability (i.e., a concentrated failure; Kim et al., 2004), but helps when it primarily disconfirms the audience’s culpability (i.e., a diffuse failure).

Together with the above implications, this suggests that reactions to blame-taking and other post-failure statements may depend on a combination of failure type (concentrated versus diffuse) and audience type (involved versus uninvolved). Note, however, that one of these four cells (concentrated failure-involved audience) does not exist, unless the speaker is talking to themself. Future research could apply these two dimensions to a wide range of failures, generating novel theoretical propositions and useful practical insights.

**Organizational Implications**

The current research may help organizational actors who are confronting a failure decide what to say and especially whether to take blame. Specifically, it suggests a simple set of
questions that these actors can ask themselves. The first and most basic question is: “Did I contribute to this failure?” If not, then taking blame seems futile at best and dangerous at worst.

If so, then they might ask themselves: “Did other people also contribute to this failure?” If not, then the current research suggests that blame-taking is unlikely to generate favorable reactions from others. Though possibly necessary and probably incumbent on them from a moral point-of-view, blame-taking is unlikely to generate rewards from their colleagues. Given this realization and prior research on concentrated failures, fully-responsible parties might focus on a more holistic apology that combines elements of both remorse and blame-taking.

If other people did, in fact, contribute to the failure, however, they might ask a third question: “Am I talking to those people?” If not, then the audience was uninvolved and is unlikely to be impressed with blame-taking. This, again, is not intended to discourage blame-taking; it only indicates that the speaker should not expect social rewards. If the speaker is in fact talking to the involved, however, the current research offers a relatively clear prescription: they could and probably should take blame. In sum, the current research advises organizational actors to take blame for the failures in which they and others were involved, when talking to these other involved actors, even if only for their own benefit.

A provocative implication of these conclusions is that organizational actors might deliver different messages to different audiences. Though consistent with the theorizing, this implication requires further research before implementation. In a world of social networking, where few organizational events remain private for long, such an audience-contingent approach could generate numerous problems of its own. This and other implications generate many opportunities for future research.

Limitations, Future Research, and Conclusion
Like all research, the current studies had a number of limitations that future research could remedy. First, it emphasized laboratory methods and American respondents. Although Studies 1, 2b and 4 moved outside of the laboratory and drew from samples that were substantially more diverse, and although laboratory methods allowed for control virtually unattainable in the field, the current results should be interpreted with the known limitations of these methods in mind. Future research might attempt to replicate the current findings in organizational teams, especially in a non-Western culture.

Another limitation of the current research was implied by the section above. To build from and extend prior research, the current research was primarily concerned with social rewards. However, the organizational actors who are involved in failures may have additional concerns. They may wish to respond ethically or to protect themselves from scapegoating, for example. Since the current research primarily spoke to social rewards, the steps the organizational actors should take to fulfill ethical obligations or organizational necessities represent important avenues for future research.

Several other research opportunities arise naturally from the current research. First, the fact that people reacted similarly to blame-taking after a concentrated failure and a failure in which they were not involved raises a provocative possibility: people who were not involved in a failure may have a natural tendency to see it as concentrated. Looking in on a failure from the outside, people may find it tempting to regard even the most diffuse failures as a product of one person’s error or malfeasance. Documenting this possibility, which gels with intuition on many real-world failures, offers an exciting research opportunity. In addition, the current research highlights the acute need to document the long-term performance implications of blame-taking. It seems reasonable to presume that blame-taking, by releasing the involved parties from blame,
may allow them to move forward, learn from the failure, and perform better in the future. This logic also resonates with research on psychological safety (Edmondson, 1999). Documenting it conclusively, however, remains a priority for future research.

Awaiting that research, the current research offers several theoretical and organizational steps forward. Theoretically, it suggests the outlines of a failure- and audience-contingent model of post-failure behavior. Organizationally, it highlights a series of simple questions that can help people navigate failures. Theoretically and organizationally, then, the current research offers substantial insight into when and why to take blame.
References


Kellogg Teams and Groups Center. (2010).


Appendix A: Study 1 Scenario and Questions

One evening, two of the restaurant’s customers become ill immediately after eating the soufflé. The symptoms are severe: they get a dangerous stomach infection that puts them into a coma for two weeks. The city’s food safety commission conducts an investigation.

Their report….says that the incident reveals “a lapse in culinary [ability/ethics], in that the kitchen staff did not seem to [know that this mushroom carried risks / consider that this mushroom could inflict harm on others].

- How would you rate the chef’s integrity? (1=low to 7=high)
- How would you rate the chef’s desire to treat you well? (1=low to 7=high)
- What performance rating does the chef deserve at the end of the year? (0=Poor performance to 10=Superior performance)
- If you had a $10,000 bonus pool to allocate between the chef and cook, how much would you give to the chef? (0 to 10K)
- Will you fire the chef? (0=Definitely not to 10=Definitely; recoded)
When you arrive at work today, you find a memo labeled “URGENT” in your mailbox. It says that the government audited General Holdings’ tax returns and found some severe inaccuracies. The company is now facing major financial penalties. The memo goes on to say that “An internal investigation has revealed that “[Chris Jones / the accounting team] used highly questionable assumptions when computing the company’s expenses. In other words, the memo calls into question the behavior of [your own manager / your own team]."

Later that day, you and everyone else at General Holdings receive an email from Chris Jones. Chris’s email says, “With respect to the tax incident, I take the blame. As manager of the accounting team, I am ultimately responsible for our tax return”
Appendix C: Study 3 Instructions

[Own Team]
- All participants have been randomly assigned to act as either a leader or an employee. The leader will give their employee instructions. You have been selected to act as a leader.

[Other Team]
- All participants have been randomly assigned to act as either a leader or an employee. The leader will give their employee instructions and then watch a different employee complete the same task.
- Note that this is not the person to whom you just sent instructions. This is a different employee, who has received instructions from a different leader.

[Public Observer]
- All participants have been randomly assigned to act as either a leader or an employee. You have been selected to watch, as a member of the public.
- Note that this person did not receive your instructions. They received instructions from their leader.
Appendix D: Study 4 Scenario

[Superior Condition]
You are chairman of the board at the large, diversified corporation General Holdings, Inc. Your job is to maximize the company’s performance, on behalf its shareholders. The CEO is your subordinate; thus, he periodically meets with you and the other board members to discuss the company’s performance.

[Subordinate Condition]
You are a vice president at the large, diversified corporation General Holdings, Inc. Your job is to maximize the company’s performance, on behalf of its employees. The CEO is your superior; thus, he periodically meets with you and the other vice presidents to discuss the company’s performance.

[Observer Condition]
You are reading a newspaper article about the large, diversified corporation General Holdings, Inc. It concerns the company’s performance. The CEO is the company’s spokesperson; thus, he periodically meets with the media to discuss the company’s performance.

[All Conditions]
General Holdings has had a busy year. The company’s numerous divisions have had a wide variety of successes and failures. This is common knowledge to everyone who follows the company. Suppose that the CEO made each of the following statements during a recent meeting.

Assume Responsibility for a Failure (Blame-Taking)
- Because of our decisions regarding strategic direction, the viability of our corporation was challenged
- Our plan to focus on our core business led us to discontinue our energy business
- Staff reductions in our operations led to severance expense
- The fact that we share the development cost with the customer led to a decrease in our gross margins
- The reality of our business situation led to a reduction in infrastructure

Evade Responsibility for a Failure (Evasion)
- Because of a general downturn in the industry plagued by intense competition, losses continued
- Because of obsolescence or changing market conditions, profitability could not reach our targeted returns
- An adverse court decision on an environmental matter resulted led to our loss
- A decline in spending for military electronics led to a decline in earnings
- A shift in demand for products led to a decrease in profitability

Assume Responsibility for a Success
- Our persistent efforts led to improved performance
Our ability to design, source, and build customer's requirements led to distinct competitive advantage.

Because of our workforce's dedication to total customer satisfaction and operational excellence, we had record sales and earnings.

Because of vigorous R&D activity and a cash award that encourages employees to submit invention disclosures, we had a record number of patent filings and awards.

Our development work led to the two large orders we received.

Evade Responsibility for a Success

Because of increasing demand that information be available anytime, growth in this market is excellent.

The requirement for our product resulting from Operation Desert Storm led to our development of this product.

Because of new business generated in niche markets, sales for the year increased.

Rapid growth in the industry led to significant growth potential.

Because of significant growth in this marketplace, we received our largest single order for the product.
**Figure 1: Study 1 Results**

*Character*

![Bar chart showing character results](chart1.png)

*Rewards*

![Bar chart showing rewards results](chart2.png)

![Diagram](diagram.png)

1 = express remorse
2 = take blame
Figure 2: Study 2 Mediation

1 = concentrated failure  
2 = diffuse failure
Figure 3: Study 3 Results

**Character**

- Own Team
- Outside the Team

**Rewards**

- Own Team
- Outside the Team
Task 2

**Figure 1:**
- Bar chart showing the percentage of concentrated and diffuse responses for tasks considered own team and outside the team.

**Diagram:**
- Character is connected to Condition with a correlation of .40***.
- Character is connected to Employee Award with correlations of .69*** and .60***.
- Condition is connected to Employee Award with correlations of .46*** and .21**.

1 = other conditions
2 = diffuse-own
Character

Condition

Desire to switch employees

.40***

- .39*** / -.35***

-.23** / -.09ns

1 = other conditions
2 = diffuse-own
Figure 4: Study 4 Results

![Bar Chart]

- **Evade**
  - Public: 3.25
  - Organizational actor: 3.0

- **Take Blame**
  - Public: 3.75
  - Organizational actor: 4.0

7-Point Scale