

## The Cost of Tardiness

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## Abstract

*According to a recent Business Insider article (Carlson, 2013), Yahoo CEO Marissa Mayer is routinely late for meetings. Responses to her lack of time management range from the sympathetic due to her hectic schedule, to the irritated who feel she is wasting their precious time. This paper will first examine the explanations for tardiness of 12 teachers employed at various universities. The student reactions of when an instructor enters the classroom will then be discussed from a questionnaire distributed to over 180 students asking for their responses concerning punctual or tardy instructors. Responses from teacher interviews indicate that workplace culture and personality are largely responsible for their tardiness. Student responses to late teachers reveal that occasional lateness can be forgiven, but the cost of continual tardiness has a number of negative implications.*

## Introduction

Late employees can be found in any organization. The implications of such workers has been estimated to cost companies thousands of dollars a year in lost production or revenue as an individual's lateness behavior impacts not only his or her performance, but others as well (Mirvis & Lawler III, 1977; Jamal, 1984; Blau, 1994; Sagie, Birati, & Tziner, 2002). The effect on others is especially pertinent in the university setting, as classes cannot commence until the instructor arrives. Lessons that do not start on time become shorter resulting in a decrease in the amount of material taught which affects student learning. As tardiness has no organizational benefits associated with it, it needs to be examined as to why such an act occurs and how it influences those who are exposed to such behavior. It is hoped that research in this area could lead to a decrease in teacher tardiness.

Employee lateness or tardiness can be defined as the start of work after the scheduled starting time as agreed to by employee and employer (Adler & Golan, 1981). In a university setting, for example, if the first period class is required to begin at nine o'clock, an employee would be considered late if arriving at one minute past nine. Lateness can be sorted into two types of categories – avoidable and unavoidable. Avoidable lateness is employee controlled and refers to when employees have more important or better things to do rather than be on time. This could range from sleeping in or reading a newspaper in the morning, to chatting to co-workers in the coffee room. Unavoidable lateness tends to be circumstance

controlled and is characterized by less controllable factors such as late trains, bad weather, or personal illness (Blau, 2011).

Although unavoidable factors contribute to employee tardiness, they cannot be controlled, thus will usually be forgiven by an employer if the frequency of the occurrence is minimal. It is the avoidable lateness that is frowned upon as it is seen as an unnecessary cost to a company and would best be eliminated.

### **Determinants of Tardiness**

There are a number of causes of tardiness that are seen as preventable, one of which is linked to employees' personality. Delonzor (2002) led a study of 225 people and identified seven different kinds of late people. She found three traits that are common people who are often late. One of the most common she classified as the *deadliners*. These people tend to be subconsciously drawn to the adrenaline rush of finishing at the last minute. They are the procrastinators that need deadlines to keep motivated. Unfortunately, as they waited too long to begin, they often have trouble meeting the required time frame. Another category of late people is called the *producers*. Those are the people who try to do too much in too little time. This means they overburden themselves and become inefficient. These types of people set up a meeting in their office, call a colleague, send a few texts, and photocopy something for the next class in the break between classes. The third group is what she calls the *absent minded professors*, which are those people that easily get distracted. If they are going to quickly print something for a class, they will not only print the page, but also suddenly end up surfing the Net for a while. They have a hard time getting from one place to another without stopping at a few places in between.

Other potential causes affecting employee lateness are related to the job itself. Lateness is often an indication of job withdrawal behavior; that is, employees use tardiness as a negative response to conditions stemming at the workplace, and therefore, attempt to remove themselves from their jobs (Adler & Golan, 1981; Foust, Elicker, & Levy, 2000). Hence, the employee starting work late is consciously or unconsciously expressing dissatisfaction or negative feelings with the employer. Low job satisfaction and a lack of organizational commitment have been found to contribute to the job withdrawal behavior of lateness.

Job satisfaction is an employee's emotional response to the organization and is a reflection of the discrepancy between what an individual wants and what he or she perceives to be getting on the job (Locke, 1976). If a job is not challenging to an individual or lacks meaningfulness and achievement, it may lead to tedium. When one is no longer satisfied with the working conditions, he or she may resist spending the required maximum amount of time at the place of employment. Dwyer and Ganster (1991) found that when employees perceive that they have little or no

control over their work and working environment job satisfaction is lowered which in turn led to higher instances of tardiness. Adler and Golan (1981) also examined the relationship between lateness and job satisfaction at work and found high measures of feelings of tedium could predict subsequent duration and frequency of lateness.

An employee has a high level of organizational commitment if he or she has a strong belief in and acceptance of an organization's values and goals. The employee would then exert considerable effort on behalf of the organization in order to remain employed by the organization (Porter, Steers, Moday, & Boulin, 1974). Research from Dishon-Berkovitz and Kolowsky (2002) found that punctual employees had significantly higher levels of organizational commitment than late employees had. They concluded that organizational commitment had the most impact on predicting whether an employee was punctual or late. The reason being punctual employees try not to behave in ways that may be seen as disrespectful to the organization.

In addition to personality and attitude towards the place of employment, the culture of an organization plays a role in an employee's punctuality behavior. The work group norms and organizational culture that occur within an organization can often specify assumptions about the level and type of work behavior expected from someone (Hatch, 1993). As for tardiness, research has found that individuals who perceive the lateness culture to be lenient, for example, no one is monitoring or enforcing his or her lateness, will believe that it is more acceptable to be late for work. This leads to elevated incidences of tardiness as a lenient lateness climate suggests to some that it is more acceptable to be late for work (Elicker, Foust, O'Malley & Levy, 2008). A negative impact of this lackadaisical lateness behavior is that one employee can influence the behavior and punctuality norm of other employees, especially if he or she is in a position of authority (Kanekar & Vas, 1993).

### **The Cost of Tardiness**

For most organizations, late employees result in the loss of productivity. The financial consequences of employee lateness have previously been examined in a number of settings. Sagei, Birati, and Tziner (2002) estimate that both the direct and indirect costs of employee lateness in a leading, mid-sized high-tech company to be approximately 737 dollars per employee per year. Hopkins (2013) who also examined financial costs of individual companies found that if 10% of a company of 150 employees in Canada were consistently late, the cost of productivity loss would be \$14,000 a year. The financial costs of tardiness when calculated on a larger national scale increase significantly. Employee lateness costs U.S. businesses more than \$3 billion per year in lost productivity (DeLonzor, 2002), and Mercer (2012) found that from a survey conducted by Heathrow Express, 590,000 workers in the U.K show up late every day, which can cost the economy up to £9 billion a year.

The cost being late is not only financial. Jamal (1984) found that employees' morale and work motivation deteriorated when their co-workers were late. When an employee continually arrives late, particularly when sanctions are not clearly visible, they may be sending a negative psychological message to co-workers that such employee deviance is acceptable. These colleagues may begin to resent the tardy employee or see him or her as negligent, thus leading to negative emotions and relationships at the workplace (Sagie et al., 2002; Dishon-Berkovits & Koslowsky, 2002).

In an educational setting such as a university, tardiness not only affects colleagues, but also to a much greater degree, the students. However, the negative implications remain the same. Kearney, Plax, Hays, and Ivey (1991) reported on teacher misbehaviors, that is, behavior by a teacher that negatively interferes with student learning or instruction. Tardy instructors were included under this undesirable label as students felt such teachers were indolent, as they did not appear to give high regard to the students and their learning. The researchers warned that teacher misbehaviors could negatively influence teacher credibility and the students' respect and liking for the teacher, which may lead to a decrease in learning.

### **Aim**

Although the rationale and costs of tardy employees has been examined in a variety of settings, there has been no research that has specifically investigated the reasons behind the tardiness of teachers in a university setting. Furthermore, although research has investigated student perceptions on general teacher misbehaviors, no research has been found that focused specifically on student reactions to teacher tardiness. As such, this research paper posed the following questions:

1. Why are tardy instructors employed in a university setting late for classes?
2. What are students' reactions to punctual or tardy teachers?

### **Procedure**

This research was conducted in English over a five-year period at four different universities in Japan. The participating academics were 12 university instructors working at various universities where the researcher had taught. Five of the teachers were full-time teachers on contracts ranging from five to seven years, and the remaining seven instructors had part-time positions at different universities. Each teacher was invited to participate in a short 10-15 minute interview regarding his or her reasons for arriving late in the classroom. As all the teachers interviewed had a reputation of being continually tardy, their views contributed to an

understanding as to why teachers are late for class. All teachers agreed to be interviewed under the condition of anonymity.

The student participants were 183 undergraduate students enrolled in English classes taught by the researcher at four different universities. Students were asked to fill in a questionnaire on the last day of class asking for their preferences and opinions regarding teachers that were punctual, occasionally late, or always late (see Appendix for the questionnaire). All students were assured that their participation was voluntary and that all responses would remain anonymous and confidential. Students were given 15-minutes to answer the questions which could be done in English or Japanese. A Japanese English teacher translated all answers that were written in Japanese.

## **Results and Discussion**

The first research question addressed the reasons as to why certain instructors have a habit of arriving late for their classes. From the interviews the explanations given could be grouped into three different categories: work culture, teacher personality, and finally, job satisfaction.

The primary reason given by a majority of the interviewed teachers for being late for the classes was related to the working environment. All of the part-time teachers that were interviewed ( $n = 7$ ) reported their tardiness was a result of their colleagues' actions. When asked to expand on such an accusation, the most common response to what the teachers' said included:

- No-one left the staff room until the bell went, so I thought that was the policy.
- I observed when the other teachers in the room left and I followed them.
- A full-time member of the staff told me not to go to class until I heard the bell.

Such explanations confirm what was found in previous research on the influence of a culture of lateness in the workplace (Blau, 1995; Elicker, Foust, O'Malley & Levy, 2008; Kanekar & Vas, 1993). That is, when an individual perceives a group of people or a superior in the place of employment to have a relaxed attitude towards starting times, she or he may also begin to adopt this behavior. This appears to be the case in the universities where the research was conducted as all of the part-time teachers interviewed claimed to only be late for their classes as they were following what was being done by those who had been hired before them.

Other teachers' reasons for being late ( $n = 3$ ) were related to their personality. Two of the full-time contract teachers seemed to lose track of time. They expressed surprise that they were continually late and that the the start of class began when

they were in the middle of something else. They claimed they did not intend to be late so often got distracted. Their explanations for being tardy could be found in the comments below:

- Often as I am on my way to class, I will run into co-workers or students and stop to talk for what I think is only a minute, and then I hear the bell.
- Something always comes up just as I am about to leave the staffroom for class.

These teachers all appear to be the the kind of people that Delonzor (2002) has labelled as the *absent minded professors*. These type of teachers are easily distracted and as Delonzor points out may also be the same people who leave things in the classroom or forget appointments.

The other teacher who seems to attribute his lateness to personality could be labelled as the producer - the type of person who needs to get as much done in as little time as possible (Delonzor, 2002). As a full-time contract teacher on the second year of his contract, he felt he had an enormous amount of responsibility, but wanted to do as much as possible as he enjoyed his job. Some of his comments included:

- I want to prepare good lessons and grade the homework. I have committee work I want to finish, and I want to do the paperwork as soon as I get it. I am working on a few research papers. I don't want to waste time, so I try to finish everything, but sometimes it makes me late for class.

This teacher wants to squeeze in as much into his working day as possible. Delonzor found that such people schedule themselves to make use of every minute of the day and as a result schedule too much and thus end up being late for scheduled events. This may be the case for this specific teacher.

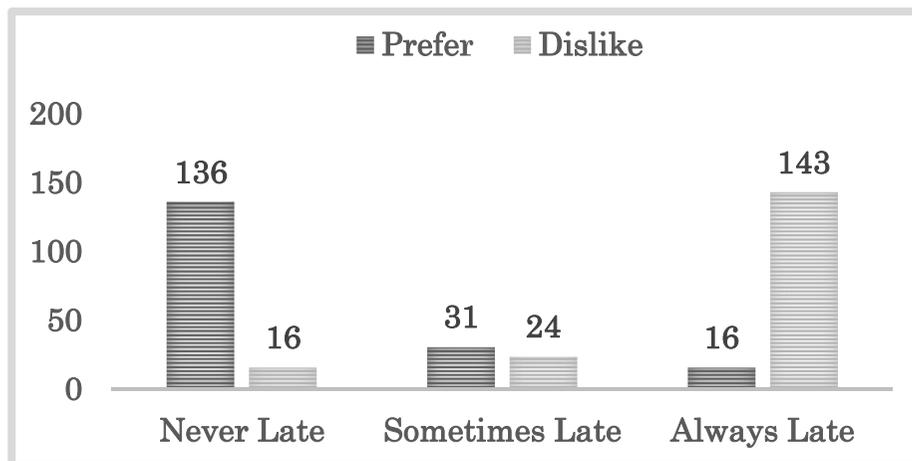
The final reason a few teachers ( $n = 2$ ) give for their chronic tardiness was related to their job satisfaction. These two full-time contract teachers were on the last year of their five and seven year contracts and would no longer be employed by their universities in the following year. Their comments suggested they had become disillusioned with their place of employment:

- I do not understand why the university will not hire me for another year. I felt I really contributed to this place.
- I have to spend all my time making resumes and applying for new jobs. Why can't I continue to work here?

These two instructors clearly stated that they no longer satisfied with the conditions of their employment, and whether they know it or not, their tardiness

reflects their attitude toward the organization. Their tendencies to arrive late for class is a type of employment withdrawal behavior and supports the findings from other researchers (Adler and Golan, 1981; Blau, 1994). Furthermore, as the teachers are being released from their place of employment in the near future their commitment to the university has waned. The result is the teachers not making as much effort to remain employed. These low levels of organizational commitment resulting in tardiness are consistent with the findings of Dishon-Berkovitz and Kolowsky (2002) who found that late employees do not have the same level of commitment to their place of employment when compared to those who want to remain employed by an organization.

For research question two, students were asked to state their preferences regarding teachers that were never, occasionally, or always late for classes. As can be seen from Figure 1, of the 183 students that responded from to the questionnaire, an overwhelming 74% of the students prefer to have an instructor that arrives to class when it begins. On the flip side, respondents clearly do not look favorably upon teachers that are chronically late as almost 80% of the responses indicated they would prefer not to have such an instructor teaching them.



**Figure 1. Student reactions to punctual and tardy instructors**

In order to understand the true cost of tardiness in a university setting the students stated their reactions to different types of teachers' time management skills. The question, "Which teacher do you prefer?" will first be examined to find out why respondents favor teachers that arrive at the classroom at different times.

Students who prefer teachers to be in the class when it commences accounted for approximately two-thirds of the students surveyed. Although a variety of reasons were given, a majority of the responses clearly stated that a teacher who arrives to class on time was perceived as someone who is not only a good teacher

but also a respectable role model. Positive comments about punctual teachers included:

- The teacher is trying his best.
- The teacher has responsibility so I can trust her.
- Seems like a passionate teacher. I want to learn from a passionate teacher.
- This teacher is a role model and showing us the correct way. If the teacher is on time the students will be on time.

The results illustrated in Figure 1 indicated that 17% of the students prefer a teacher that is occasionally late for their classes. The main reason given for this preference is that these students understand that avoidable circumstances happen to anyone including themselves, thus it can be forgiven if an instructor is late due to unforeseen events. Here are representative statements from students that preferred teachers that are sometimes late for classes:

- Delays of the train are permitted.
- Humans are not perfect, so I think being late 2-5 times is O.K.
- My train is sometimes late, so if the teacher is late sometimes I can be forgiven.

Finally, there were a small number of students (9%) that favor teachers that are always late for their classes. A large number of the respondents did not comment about the tardy teacher, but rather about shortened class time. These students did not appear to be in university for the educational benefits. A majority of the comments included:

- The class time is shorter. I do not like studying.
- I can enjoy chatting with my friends or relaxing during class time.

The second question on the survey asked participants which type of teacher, the punctual, occasional tardy, or always late teacher, they disliked and once again, the reason behind their choice. As to be expected, of the 9% who previously stated they preferred the teacher who was continually tardy for class, 87% of those student also disliked the punctual instructor. The comments from these students were similar to their previous opinions as they wrote:

- I get tired with a full class so less class time is good.
- I want to talk to my friends.

As indicated by Figure 1, the amount of students that dislike teachers that are occasionally late (24%) is similar to the 31% of the respondents that prefer the teachers that sometimes stroll into classes late. However, the reactions to such teachers are very different. Most of the students who preferred occasional tardiness wrote they did not mind if a teacher was late once in a while as it can happen to anyone for whatever reason. A majority of the comments from the students who did not like sporadically tardy teachers were not as forgiving and focused on confusion regarding the class and the teacher. Common comments from these students included the following:

- Disorder! Students are confusion (sic).
- Be consistent! Can we be late or not? What is the class policy?
- The sometimes late teacher complains when I am late, but he can be late?

Of the 183 students who were asked which instructor they did not prefer to be their teacher, the largest group of 143 students (78%) wrote they did not want to learn from someone that was always late for class. Unlike the positive comments that were written from a majority of the students towards the punctual instructor, most of the comments written about the continually tardy teacher focused on three themes: the students' rights to receive what was paid for, the poor qualities of the teacher, and class overtime. The comments related to money included:

- Time is money.
- I pay money so I want the full lesson. The teacher has to teach for 90-minutes.
- I cannot study everything on the syllabus or textbook.
- Students that have a teacher who is always on time are getting a better education than the students who have a teacher that is always late.

The students that commented about the teacher wrote:

- The teacher does not seem to care.
- The teacher does not have motivation to teach.
- He or she is not a good teacher.

Many students also commented on not being pleased with tardy teachers as a late start to the class was often accompanied with a late finish. Students who were not pleased with the class extending into the break wrote:

- If a class finishes late, it will make me late for the next class.
- Late teachers always finish class late. I have no time to go to the bathroom

or relax. I hate it.

In sum, the findings of the students' preferences and opinions towards punctual and tardy teachers suggest that students' view tardy teachers favorably, they can be empathetic if the class occasionally begins late, but perceive chronically late instructors as poor teachers that are stealing their time and money.

The pattern illustrated by the higher numbered figures above reveal a matched positive-negative set. Students perceive the punctual instructor as someone who cares about them and their learning, they are trustworthy and a positive role model for the students. On the other hand, the continually tardy teachers are judged as lazy, untrustworthy, de-motivated and looked down on by the students. The unfavorable responses support the findings of Kearney, Plax, Hays and Ivey (1991) in which students perceive teacher tardiness as a teacher misbehavior.

The costs of teacher misbehaviors on students have been reported as only negative. Teacher misbehaviors have been correlated with a loss of teachers' credibility, respect and liking from students (Kearney et al., 1991; Banfield, Richmond, & McCroskey, 2006), they decrease student participation and compromise student effective learning (Goodboy & Bolkan, 2009), and teachers that continually misbehave were found to have strong impact on students' demotivation or motivation to learn (Goram & Christophel, 1992; Trang & Baldauf, 2007; Kikuchi, 2009). These findings suggest that teacher tardiness, a type of teacher misbehavior, is associated with unfavorable consequences that may impede instruction and student learning.

## **Conclusion**

In light of the fact that that any company employee arriving late for work can cost a company in a variety of ways, this research set out to investigate why certain university instructors are consistently late for the start of their classes. Additionally, in order to uncover the effects of tardiness on students, a questionnaire was given to learners to ask for their reactions to teachers that were always on time, occasionally late, or continually tardy for their classes. The first key finding of this study is that teacher tardiness is an avoidable behavior that arises due to three conditions: First, a lenient late workplace culture, where recently hired or part-time instructors will model the tardy behavior of others in the university. Second, individuals with personality traits who are easily distracted tend to lose track of time resulting in problems with getting to the classroom at the required time. Third, teachers whose contracts will be terminated develop lower levels of organizational commitment. These instructors then exhibit one type of employee withdrawal behavior which appears to be a late arrival to the classroom.

The other major finding revealed that of the 183 students that responded to the

questionnaire a majority expressed strong reactions towards specific types of teachers. A large number, 136 (74%) of the respondents, stated they preferred a punctual teacher and equated positive qualities such as passionate, motivated, trustworthy and caring to these teachers. The instructors that arrived to class late more often than not were not viewed in such a positive manner. Even more students, 143 (78%), wrote negative comments towards the tardy teacher. These students felt such teachers were wasting their time and money, and displayed qualities of a bad teacher. That is, an instructor that does not have the motivation to teach, nor cares about the subject or students.

Collectively, the findings in this study reveal that the cost of tardiness in the university has many negative implications. As with businesses, in the university setting there are also financial repercussions. Late instructors are being paid the same amount as their punctual counterparts, yet are not putting in the same amount of time. This may or may not be recognized by co-workers, but most certainly is noticed by the students that are forced to wait in a classroom without a teacher. As the tardy teacher repeats the cycle of being late, the costs begin to extend beyond money. The reactions written by the respondents indicate a loss of teacher credibility, respect, and feelings of disdain all of which can interfere with the processes of learning. Recognizing these potential costs, tardy teachers would be wise to consider the students' perceptions of arriving in the classroom late and try to eliminate this negative avoidable behavior.

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## Appendix

### Teachers in University

There are three types of teachers in your university: One type of teacher is punctual, that means he or she is never late for the start of classes. Another type of teacher is sometimes late for class. This teacher may be late for the start of class around five times a semester. Finally, the last type of teacher is always late for class. She or he is rarely in the class when class starts.

I would like to know your opinion about the different types of teachers. Please teach me which type of teacher you prefer and which type of teacher you dislike. I would also like to know why you like or do not like the different type of teachers.

Please look at the three different types of teachers below. Then look at the questions and answer them. Please give a reason for your answers.

#### **Types of Teachers**

**Teacher A** – This teacher is never late. She or he is always in the classroom before the class starts.

**Teacher B** – This teacher is sometimes late. She or he will be late about five times a semester, so sometimes the teacher is in the class before the class starts, but other times the teacher may be late.

**Teacher C** – This teacher is always late. He or she is rarely in the class before the class starts.

*Question 1* – Which type of teacher do you prefer? Why?

I prefer Teacher A/Teacher B/Teacher C because...

(2015年9月4日受理)