his or her latitude of acceptance. Within marketing, SJT has been used to explain inefficacy of product warning labels. For example, DeCarlo (1997) found that heavy drinkers reported that they typically did not read warning labels on alcohol. This avoidance suggests that the warning falls within these receivers' latitude of rejection and shows support for an ego-defensive position. The ELM also emphasizes the importance of knowing your audience. In this case, however, receivers must be motivated and able to process objective, elaborated messages. When the audience is unmotivated or unable to process such messages (or both), peripheral cues should be used. ELM has been successful in explaining a variety of management and marketing topics, including consumer perception of online shopping Web sites. Chen and Lee (2008) concluded that online marketers need to include peripheral messages for consumers who primarily "shop for fun" and seek an emotional and sensory experience, while centrally routed messages work better for shoppers who are chiefly task-related in their purchasing. The theory of planned behavior takes persuasion a step farther, stating that three concepts can predict an individual's behavior: attitude, normative beliefs, and controllability. This theory has been used extensively in health care contexts, where health care providers often attempt to convince patients or the public to adopt specific behaviors, such as becoming organ donors (Park & Smith, 2007) or practicing safe sex (Cha, Kim, & Patrick, 2008). The theory of planned behavior also has use in marketing, for example, to study intended consumer behavior when new technologies become available (Pederson, 2005). Finally, inoculation theory provides a means to argue proactively in support of a position by sending preemptive messages that include forewarning of the threat and refutations to anticipated arguments. The theory's application has wide reach, including public relations' research demonstrating that inoculation messages are a viable proactive strategy in crisis communication (Wan & Pfau, 2004).

Case Study 7: The Database Dilemma

As the senior writer in the sales division of a Fortune 100 consulting firm, Sarah Miller and her sales team created, edited, and updated the content for all of her firm's sales proposals. She also managed the sales database that stored all of the sales proposals and accompanying research. Although seemingly trivial to employees outside of the sales team, maintaining the integrity of this database was critical because responding to sales proposals

was the first step in gaining new business. If a proposal did not meet the client's expectations, the firm was immediately disregarded for that project. And the firm's executives did not respond well when proposals were rejected.

The sales database was divided into 30 sections, one for each of the firm's 30 industry-based divisions. For example, one section of the database was the aerospace and defense section, and Sarah and her sales team worked directly with the aerospace and defense division on keeping that section updated.

Regardless of division size, all sections were equally important because the sales team had to be prepared to answer any questions that a prospective client might ask. Sarah's team really depended on each of the industry divisions to stay on top of the information in the database. Ultimately, it was up to each division to make sure that its section was accurate and to provide the writers with any new information the sales team may need to know.

In order to make things easier and more consistent, Sarah developed a process in which each division would have one consultant assume the role of industry expert (IE). In this role, each of the 30 IEs would help the writers maintain their division's section of the sales database. The division heads agreed to this method and appointed their IEs. Although the process worked well in the beginning, it fell apart after only a few months.

At first, Sarah's team tried setting strict deadlines with the IEs, thinking that the IEs would respond to harsh "do it or else" cutoff dates. When that didn't work, Sarah tried "bribing" the IEs into cooperation. She sent the IEs little gifts, such as candy, to remind them to review their sections on time. When that also failed, Sarah decided that she needed to take a different approach.

With her boss's support, Sarah embarked on a research project. First, she measured how timely (or untimely) the IEs were in responding. Although about a few IEs met the deadline, the majority was well past the deadline, and several of the IEs never reviewed their sections at all.

Next, she used a survey to gather the IEs' perceptions of the whole sales process. Out of the 30 IEs, 27 responded to the survey, shedding substantial light on the situation for Sarah's team. The results indicated that while many of the IEs saw the database process as valuable, it was not as important as their other responsibilities as consultants. Several IEs commented that it seemed like the sales team forgot that IEs had entire jobs to perform; being an IE for the sales database was just a very small part of their duties. In fact, a few of the IEs commented that their division heads had basically told them it was just something on paper and not to worry about it.

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One IE noted, "My manager came to me and forewarned me that I'd be pressured to start doing a whole other process, and he told me that the new process was just some new phase and not to bother."

The IEs also made it clear on the survey that they found it hard to find time to review their sections of the database, mostly because they had so many other projects on their plate. A fair number of the IEs indicated that they wanted to help the sales team but that they just didn't have the time.

Sarah was also surprised to learn that although these individuals had been given the role of IE by a senior manager in their division, the responsibility was not listed in their job description or even mentioned during their annual review.

One IE commented, "You know, they keep asking you to do more and more, but they don't want to compensate you. I'm at the point where if it's not in my list of goals or not part of my bonus incentives, then I'm just not going to do it."

Knowing how time-consuming the IE role could be if done right, comments like this made Sarah understand why many of the IEs put the sales database at the bottom of their to-do list and chose to focus on other projects first.

The third step in Sarah's process was the easiest: She gathered the numbers for all sales proposals delivered to clients during the last year. During this phase, Sarah also gathered statistics on the number of incorrect responses that were given during this time frame. This factor was important because inaccurate responses were usually the cause of sections that had not been updated. In other words, this number was tied directly to the IEs. One final piece of information that Sarah decided to collect included the number of new clients whose business the company had won over the past year, due in part to the sales proposals. Sarah thought it was important to share this information with the IEs and to let them know that the sales team had a direct part in making it happen.

After analyzing and summarizing all of the data that she had collected, Sarah and her boss met individually with each of the 30 division heads. During these meetings, Sarah presented how much "bad information" had gone out in sales proposals over the past 12 months. Sarah also told the division heads about the feedback that they had received directly from the IEs, making sure to mention that many of them felt they did not have sufficient time to perform their IE responsibilities. At the end of each meeting, Sarah directly asked the division heads to include the IE duties in their job description and as part of their bonus structure. Although some had to be more convinced than others, all of the division heads eventually agreed to this request.

The final phase of Sarah's project was to gather all of the IEs together and present Sarah's findings to them. During Sarah's presentation, Sarah could tell that several of them were shocked that their role had such an impact on the firm's sales process. They were also happy to hear that the work they did as IEs would be added to their job description. In fact, many of their division heads had already informed them of this. In several cases, the division heads apologized that this hadn't been done sooner and even offered to take another project off of their plate to make more time for their IE work.

The investigation was a lot of work—9 months' worth, to be exact. However, in the end, Sarah's team got the outcome that they sought. The division heads and the IEs agreed to make the sales database a top priority, and the sales team saw instant results with turnaround times. Sarah's 9 months of work proved worth it in the end.

Questions for Consideration

1. Using SJT, explain the IEs' initial attitudes about their extra duties. How does the latitude of rejection initially prevent Sarah's team from succeeding? What could Sarah have done from the get-go to encourage a wider latitude of acceptance from the IEs?
2. Which peripheral cues did Sarah's team initially use to try to persuade the IEs to complete their updates on time? Why do you think they didn't work? Explain how Sarah used the central route to create a strong argument and ultimately succeed in solving her dilemma.
3. Use the theory of planned behavior to speculate why some IEs complied with Sarah's database request, while others were sporadic or just didn't comply at all. Make sure to touch on attitude, normative beliefs, perceived behavioral control, and behavioral intention.
4. Clearly, division heads gave different messages to their IEs about their role in the sales process. Do you see any evidence of inoculation theory? How might Sarah have used inoculation theory premises?
5. Which persuasion theory seems to explain the situation better than the others? Why do you believe this to be the case? What situations might arise that would make a different theory or theories better at explaining the situation? How could you combine theories to make for an even better explanation of the situation?