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Ph.D. – Organizations and Strategic Management (Marketing and Scale Development minor):
Expected date of graduation - June 2006.
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Antecedents and Outcomes of Bricolage as a Response to Industry Decline – A Current Taxonomy of Perceived Uncertainty Sources

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Proposed Dissertation Abstract

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The concept of bricolage can be generally defined as the creation of value where others see no opportunity. Bricolage is often realized through the recombination or retooling of existing resources. This concept can be a powerful tool for an organization facing limited options. This dissertation will explore the antecedents and outcomes of bricolage as a response to an industry in decline. Does an organization in a declining industry tend to see opportunities or threats in a given situation? How does the perception of opportunities or threats relate to different sources and types of uncertainty? To understand how organizations view these concepts, it's important to examine how executives classify opportunities, threats, and sources of uncertainty.

The first phase of this dissertation seeks to understand how managers classify sources of uncertainty and then form opinions on how different categories of uncertainty affect their firms. Research has lagged in exploring the sources which may create uncertainty for modern managers. With few exceptions, classifications of the environment (i.e., potential uncertainty sources) are based on conceptual work or case studies conducted some 20 to 40 years ago.

In this dissertation, I take an initial step towards addressing three fundamental research questions. First, I explore the validity of the older, established classification schemes for environmental uncertainty sources, and try to assess their validity. Are these classifications still acceptable and applicable for new research on the present-day uncertainties facing top executives? Second, how do executives consider internal firm components as potential sources of uncertainty in comparison to external sources? And third, what underlying factors do executives use to classify (i.e., distinguish among) different sources of potential uncertainty?

For the first phase of this dissertation, I have used a convenience sample of 41 executives in the UW-Milwaukee Executive MBA program. I asked the executives to generate a comprehensive list of sources of uncertainty. After a data reduction performed by three organizational experts, I presented the same sample of executives the list of thirty sources of uncertainty that were self identified. I further instructed the executives to sort the sources into like groups of sources, sufficiently alike within groups, but groups were

sufficiently different to warrant different grouping. With these data, I am using Multidimensional Scaling to analyze the respondent's groupings of uncertainty sources.

These data have been analyzed and with the results I have created a new, up to date taxonomy. Using this taxonomy for the second phase of this dissertation, I will perform a field study analyzing a firm's responses to specific sources of uncertainty.

Phase two of this dissertation will explore the concept of bricolage and other strategic actions organizations face. In a declining industry, I will explore what types of threats and/or opportunities executives perceive. Environmental scanning will also be considered in the context of executives perceptions of opportunities and threats.