Complexity in Work Identifications: the Case of the H-1B Worker in the United States

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Table of Contents

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ABSTRACT

The H-1B visa program allows for United States employers to supplement their workforce with high-skilled foreign workers. Issues arise for these workers when transitioning their lives to the U.S because they have to adapt to a new culture and are exposed to a constantly changing work environment. This exploratory study addresses how these individuals identify with their employing organization and their clients. The findings show that the H-1B contract workers identify more with the client organization as opposed to the employer, who was viewed by the majority as the "payroll department." Primary factors of such client identification include treatment and relationships with colleagues and managers. Personal factors include motivation and goals. Daily interaction with the client as well as a positive corporate culture had an impact on client identification as well. This study has important implications for both research and practice of management. Furthermore, this study is beneficial to employers seeking to ease the stress of employees joining their organization.

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INTRODUCTION

> *"The price you pay for coming to the United States is an H-1B"*
> -An excerpt from an interview with an H-1B Worker

The H-1B visa program (established by the Immigration Act of 1990) is used by U.S. employers for the purpose of hiring foreign workers in specialty occupations to supplement their work forces, (McGee & Laplante, 2007). The program requires immigrants to have expertise in a particular field, such as, computer programming, architecture, engineering, accounting, medical and teaching at, and at least a bachelor's degree or its equivalent (USCIS, 2010). It is a controversial visa since there is a backlash, given the perception that these workers are taking up prized U.S. jobs, (Zeider, 2009).

H-1B workers are an under-studied group whose status is often hotly debated. They are unique because these workers are hired by an organization usually in their homeland and paid by that organization. However, they are sent overseas to work for organizations in the United States because of their classification as skilled professionals. While some Americans feel threatened by their presence in an already impoverished job market, those who employ H-1B workers argue that they are necessary. In fact, in 2008, a yearly cap of 65,000 visas was imposed for skilled workers and an additional 20,000 for workers with masters and doctorates from United States universities. In 2001, after 9/11, the cap was lifted to 195,000 to accommodate High-Tech companies (Kronholz, 2008). However in 2003, the cap was reduced down to the original 65,000. However, in 2008, companies asked Congress to lift the cap of 65,000. A number of High Tech companies have stated that the inability to obtain visas would force them to expand overseas. Oracle did just that and sent many jobs to Ireland and India (Kronholz, 2008).

It is important to understand the organizational identification of H-1B workers because it affects the outcome of their work for the host organization. Identity is a key concept which explains why people think about their environments in a particular way and how they interact with it. It captures the spirit of who people are and why they do what they do (Ashforth, 2008). Identification is the process by which people begin to define themselves, communicate it to others, and navigate through both their work and home lives (Ashforth, 2008).

Individuals identify within organizations which affects their self esteem and influences how they perform their work. As a result, the organization is affected in terms of employee turnover, job satisfaction, and behaviors in the work place (Ashforth, 2008). Low identification negatively impacts a business organization by hindering employee cooperation and performance. Therefore, in order for a business organization to obtain high output and positive results, it must focus on employee identification.

This exploratory study is focused on the experiences of H-1B contractors working between two organizations. In particular, issues of identity, focusing on problems they faced in their efforts to integrate themselves into a foreign work environment and a new cultural community. Even though the vast majority of H-1B workers are actually employed by their countries of origin, such as India and China, and are sent to work as contractors for companies in the United States, their status in this country is not transparent. Identity issues arise due to the complexity of the global work arrangements. Existing research focuses primarily on the identity issues of U.S. domestic contract workers (1099 employees), but there is a lack of research on alien contract workers. Understanding this is important since research shows significant positive outcomes of employee identification with the organizations that they work in.

As this is an exploratory qualitative study on an under-studied group of people, the investigation is framed in the form of research questions rather than hypotheses which would be proved or disproved. The overall research question, (central goal) is how do employees negotiate such complex international work arrangements and how does that affect their identification with the organizations they are associated with? This question will be addressed in the form of two broad sub-questions: How do H-1b workers transition to the United States? Do H-1B workers identify with their host organization or their home organization? Within these two broad questions, additional questions were raised.

LITERATURE REVIEW

As of February 2005, there were about 10.3 million contract workers. This accounts for 7.4 percent of the employed population (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics). One such group of workers in the United States includes H-1B and L1[1] workers. Each year, the United States allows 65,000 foreign workers to enter the United States on H-1B visas (USCIS).

To conduct this study, existing literature on contract workers (non-traditional work arrangements), the H-1B program, and identification theories to better were examined to understand all of the different topics related the research questions and see what has been done in the field.

As today's world is becoming more globalized, organizations are seeking employees from the international work force to cut costs and remain competitive. This often leads to different complicated relationships and employee identification issues. However does this dilute the relationship, performance, and identification with the employer or the client? Organizational identification has been proven to impact the satisfaction of the individual (employee) and the effectiveness of the organization (Ashforth and Mael, 1989). In the case of such kinds of situations where the employee is removed from the employer, what are the implications?

Contract Workers
According to the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, 10 percent of the U.S. workforce consists of non-traditional contract workers (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1999, 2001).   In a non-traditional work arrangement, the types of relationships between the employee and employer are diverse as the employee spends the majority of their time at a client site. Contract workers are bound between two organizations. They are employed by an organization and work on site at a different organization. The two organizations are at a distance from one another especially in the case of the H-1B [2]worker. The employing organization is often located in the country of origin whereas the client work site is located in

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[1] The L1 visa is available for employees of an international company with offices in the U.S. It allows foreign workers to relocate to the corporation's U.S. office after having worked abroad for the company for a minimum of one year. None of the participants in this study were on a L1 visa.

[2] An H-1B visa can be granted to non-contract workers. Individuals on an H-1B have attended colleges or universities in the U.S. and were granted the visa when they began working. This study focuses on H-1B contractors who are employed by one organization and work at a client site.

the United States. As a result, the worker has limited interaction with the contract organization, who is in fact their employer.

To demonstrate this situation, let's take the example of Ashhok, an H-1B contract worker. He is a software engineer employed by TCS India. He comes to work in the U.S. and is sent to work at UPS, a client. While TCS is his employer, he works at UPS every day. While he is technically employed by an Indian company, he lives in the US. So who does Ashok feel close to – TCS or UPS?

In their seminal work on the issue, George and Chattopadhyay (2005) examined the organizational identification of contract workers associated with two organizations. Their research demonstrated that contract workers identify with both the employing and contract/client organizations depending on the characteristics and social relationships within the organizations. The study found that "contract workers identify with both the employing and client organizations based on perceived characteristics of the organization as well as the social relations within the organization," and that contract workers in fact "identified with their employing organization to the extent that they found this organization to be positively distinct," (George and Chattopadhyay 2005). In addition the attributes that the individual valued in themselves, and found congruent in the employer allowed for stronger identification with the organization. Attributes also depended on characteristics of the organization, such as values, distinctiveness, and prestige (George and Chattopadhyay, 2005). In fact, it was found that contract workers identified with their employing organization when the organization was considered to be reputable and that the workers valued attributes of the organization that they found in themselves (George and Chattopadhyay, 2005). Therefore, the greater the congruence between attributes contract workers value in themselves, and in their client and employing organizations, the greater will be the contract workers' identification with each organization. Interestingly, identification with the client organization was associated with the quality of social ties with colleagues within the organization. While George and Chattopadhyay's (2005) study focused on domestic contract workers, this study will focus on the H-1B contract workers, which is argued can be more complex due to their global

contractual situation. A contract worker may identify with one, both, or neither of the organizations. Prior to defining identification, what exactly is an H-1B?

H-1B Visa and Status

In 2005, 266,000 visas were both renewed and allowed from the original 65,000 (Wasem, 2007, 7). Workers come from all over the world, with India being the largest country of origin. Approximately 49% of admitted H-1B workers in 2005 were from India, and 9% from China, (Wasem 2007). To qualify for a visa, an individual and employer must follow criteria set by the United States Citizen and Immigration Services (USCIS). The job must be considered a specialty occupation. To qualify as a specialty occupation it must be complex or unique enough that it can only be performed by individuals with a bachelor's degree or higher. As a result, in order for an individual to accept a job offer, they must have completed a U.S. bachelor's or higher degree required by the specific specialty occupation from an accredited college or university or an equivalent foreign degree.

Post September 11th terrorist attacks lead to the Department of Homeland Security to issue and monitor the H-1B visa through two divisions: the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS) and the Immigration and Customs Enforcement Office (ICE). The employer completes the application process. The first step requires that the employer submit a Labor Conditions Application (LCA) through the U.S. Department of Labor. This ensures that the treatment of the employee, benefits, compensation, and prevailing wage are equivalent to that of a domestic worker. Afterwards, the employer submits a completed Form I-129 to USCIS. After the forms have been approved, the prospective worker may apply with the United States Department of State at a United States consulate or embassy for an H-1B visa. In addition, the prospective H-1B worker must apply to U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) for admission to the United States in H-1B classification.

Employment relationships have become increasingly complex over the years. An H-1B visa grants one entry into the United States. In order for an individual to obtain an H-1B visa, an employer must sponsor the individual. The H-1B visa system allows for skilled workers to come to the United States to address shortages in areas where advanced degrees are required. While on H-1B status, a worker is prohibited from working for an organization other than the

organization sponsoring the visa. Furthermore, accepting compensation for consulting is a violation of the visa rules. H-1B status is temporary and is granted for a period of three years with the possibility of a three year extension. This time period may be extended, but generally cannot go beyond a total of six years, though some exceptions do apply under sections 104(c) and 106(a) of the American Competitiveness in the Twenty-First Century Act (AC21). If a worker wished to remain in the U.S. permanently, the employer can initiate the green card petition process.

April 1st of each year is the opening day of the H-1B cap. It is usually exhausted within the first week. Recently, job losses as a result of a weakened economy lead to a reduced number of H-1B filings for 2010. Additionally, President Obama's stimulus bill which included the Employ American Workers Act (EAWA) prevents companies from hiring H-1B workers instead of U.S. workers if the company received funds from the Troubled Asset Relief Program (TARP), (Azhar, 2009). While many feel that the visa takes prized jobs from U.S, workers, many feel that the H-1B cap could stunt economic growth. Cyrus Mehta, a member of the American Immigration Lawyers Association, believes that due to the six year H-1B limit, and delays in processing by the Department of Labor, many will not obtain a green card in time, (Sambamurty & Siliconindig, 2000).

As mentioned, the H-1B visa program was created in 1990 to increase innovation for companies lacking employees to fulfill job requirements. The GAO began to track demand and trends thereafter. From the years 2000 to 2009, the demand exceeded the cap, (Sherrill, 2011). Interestingly unmet demand is not tracked as the Department of Homeland security stops tracking once demand is met. Figure 1 below demonstrates the trend.
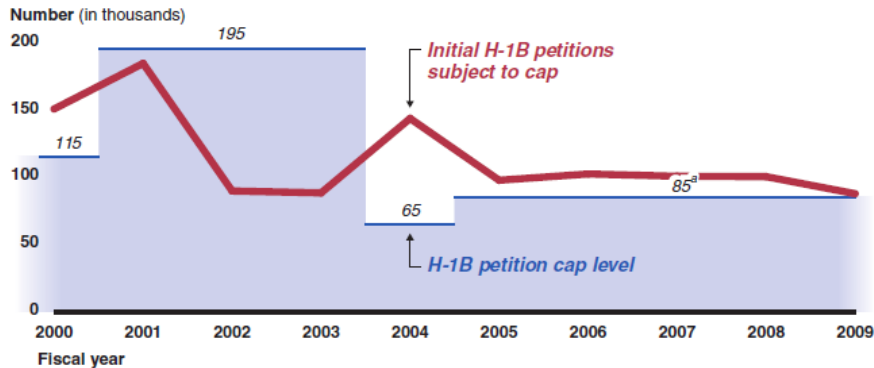
The National Research Council created a report finding that employers have difficulty recruiting qualified, U.S. workers to fill employment gaps. (Siskend & Susser, 2003). In addition, it was found that the green card process is rather substantial, making it easier to hire H-1B workers. There is a high concentration of H-1B workers in the IT field. In fact, in 2001, nearly 58% of H-1B visas were issued to "computer related occupations," (Siskend & Susser, 2003). Ten percent of the IT labor force is comprised of H-1B workers. These workers are prized due to their knowledge and flexibility. In addition, H-1B workers have

high skill levels, exemplifying boundaryless workers (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996). As the

need for more high skilled workers in the U.S. has risen, the H-1B visa has become a gateway of opportunity for foreign workers. Their ability to transfer across various client organizations led to them being categorized

Figure 1: Number of Initial Petitions for New H-1B Workers Submitted by Employers Subject to the Cap

Number (in thousands)
200
195
Initial H-1B petitions subject to cap
150
115
100
85
65
50
H-1B petition cap level
0
2000 2001 2002 2003 2004 2005 2006 2007 2008 2009
Fiscal year

Source: GAO analysis of Department of Homeland Security CLAIMS 3 data on initial petitions.
[a] Includes 20,000 visas allocated to workers graduating from U.S. master's programs or higher.

as contingent workers (McLean, Parks, Kidder, and Gallagher, 1998). While they are praised for qualities such as flexibility, being knowledgeable, and flexible, the topic of having H-1B workers remains controversial. There are two sides to the debate. On one side, it is felt they are necessary as they assist in the development of technologies, whereas others feel they take jobs from U.S. workers. In the following quote, former President George W. Bush explains his feelings on the topic. President George W. Bush (January 2007) stated:

> We've got to expand what's called H-1B visas. It makes no sense to say to a young scientist in India, you can't come to America to help this country develop technologies that help us deal with our problems.

While the former President considers the program to be an area of expansion, sadly, post September 11th attacks lead to racial profiling and raised the barriers to entry. Non-citizens were not trusted and even prohibited from working on projects labeled as "sensitive" (Fernandes 2007). Simultaneously, the attacks demonstrated just how necessary H-1B workers are as the cap was lifted to 195,000 (USCIS).

There are also many individuals who are anti- H-1B. Rob Sanchez, the host of the anti-H-1B web site www.jobdestruction.info writes of watching illegal immigrants cross the border from Mexico to the United States. Then, he writes of how immigration impacted his career. Chakravartty, (2006b) explains that the H-1B program should be eliminated because "good

jobs" should be strictly reserved for American citizens as opposed to foreigners. Politician Michael Gildea has a similar feeling as he compares the hiring of H-1B workers to the outsourcing of manufacturing jobs.

Michael Gildea, 2006, states:

> As they used to say in one of this nation's' greatest technology initiatives, the space program—"Houston we've got a problem". And I would suggest it's a big one. Only this time it's not those textile, steel, machine tool and other manufacturing jobs; many of them are long gone. Now it's the high tech, high end, high paying jobs that are headed out of town. The question for this Subcommittee is to what extent are the guest worker programs under your jurisdiction contributing to the outsourcing tidal wave. I would suggest that it is significant.

Americans appear to feel a sense of entitlement to employment within the Unites States. Anti H-1B organizations "believe that American workers are the best, most creative, most productive and highly motivated in the world," (Coalition for the Future American Worker, 2008). In this environment, opinions regarding the program are mixed. As a result of the varying opinions, different employees may have different opinions on this, and therefore if there is an H-1B worker in the workplace could react to them depending on what their opinions are.

Identity

Personal identity is defined as "a person's unique sense of self" (Postmes & Jetten, 2004). Identity and identification are terms often used interchangeably. They are critical terms and capture the feelings of a person which often impact an organization. Identification with an organization can serve to enhance an employee's self esteem (Erez & Earley, 1993). Social identification is the sense of belongingness to a group. The individual perceives him or herself as a symbolic member as well as psychologically intertwined in the group, sharing similar experiences (Tolman, 1943). Turner (1986) hypothesized that identification is related to the perception of the organizations values and practices.

Identity is the description of one's self and the perception of individuality. There are various theories on identification. Self Categorization Theory (SCT) describes how a person finds characteristics of the in-group in which they relate to, and then find themselves to be interchangeable with members of the group. The characteristics are then incorporated into their social identity. Similarly, Gardner felt that a person's social identity is a self analysis reflecting membership in various groups. Characteristics such as reputation and beliefs are internalized, building a social identity. Self Categorization Theory (Turner, 1987) suggests that self categorization occurs through a process of depersonalization. In this case, a person identifies the characteristics of the in-group which relate to them. Tajfel (1978:63) defined social identity as "that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership."

Social Identity Theory (SIT) explains how people have the tendency to classify themselves as well as others in social categories from gender, age, and religious affiliation (Tajifel & Turner, 1985). The theory explains that a person has multiple "personal selves," due to various groups of membership. Various social contexts may trigger a person to think, act, or feel differently (Turner et al, 1987). Hogg and Vaughan (2002) later elaborate to reinforce that a person has multiple "social identities." The definition of their identity is derived from the internalized group of membership. In studies performed by Turner and Tajfel (1979), three variables were identified that contribute to the development of "in-group favoritism." The variables include: the extent to which an individual identifies with the in-group and can internalize that membership into their self concept, the extent to which the individual compares to the group, and the perceived status of the group. Each of these variables allows a person to relate and identify with the group. The stronger the connection to the group and more variables related to, the stronger the identification to the group. Furthermore, social identity theory defines the self as a personal identity which is comprised of "idiosyncratic characteristics such as interests and abilities," (Tajfel and Turner, 1985). Individuals classify themselves and others into various social groups such as organizational membership, gender, age, and cohort. The classification allows individuals to locate themselves and others within a social environment.

Former characteristics of the work place are beginning to diminish. There are less hierarchies in the work place; there has been a growth in team work, and employees are empowered to do well. "In the absence of an externalized bureaucratic structure, it becomes more important to have an internalized cognitive structure of what the organization stands for and where it intends to go-in short, a clear sense of the organization identity. A sense of identity served as a rudder for navigating difficult waters." (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). An organization consists of many people with diverse backgrounds, values, and expectations (Ashforth and Mael, 1989). Therefore it might be difficult for individuals to find commonalities. Finding a group with similar characteristics allows for stronger identification.

According to Ashforth and Mael, (1989) identification is important to understand because it can impact the psychological well-being of employees as well as organizational outcomes. George and Chattopadhyay's (2005) study attempts to close the gap in literature relating to contract workers and their identification; however the gap between H-1B workers and identification has yet to be examined. It is possible that contract workers appeal to the characteristics of an organization and categorize themselves based on the behavior of the organization. Studies have found that people in fact identify with the organization with a more positive image which has been found to enhance self esteem (Sutton, Dukerich, Harquail, 1994).

Understanding of contract workers' organizational identification is important because it can impact individual outcomes such as mental health and psychological well being (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). According to Ashforth and Mael, organizational identification is defined as "perceived oneness with an organization's successes and failures as one's own…the individual defines him or herself in terms of the organization(s) in which he/she is a member."

This study attempts to understand this problem of who H-1B contractors identify with. The situation is difficult for these workers as they may not have cultural training and may feel lost in a new country. To determine who these workers identify with, the research were raised in the process identified by the methodology.

METHODOLOGY

Sample and Procedure
Research questions on H-1B employee identifications were explored through interviews with
H-1B contract workers. Faculty, staff, family and friends were approached for potential
candidates. A snowball technique was used to generate more candidates. The pool resulted in
eight males of Indian descent working in the IT industry, an immigration attorney, and an HR
representative working with H-1B employees. Given the nature of the industry characterized
by many workers from India and in the IT field, it was not unusual to have such participants.
Participants were located in the Northeast, West Coast, and Southern United States. Semi-
structured interviews were conducted and the questions were derived from literature (see
Appendix A for Interview Protocol). Questions were raised to determine the identification
with the employer and client organization. Questions touched upon topics such as adaption to
the United States and identification with the employer and client organizations. Subsequent
questions were raised to explore greater detail based on the responses of the interviewee.
Interviews took place over the telephone and in person based on location. The study was
explained to the participants, and they were informed that participation was voluntary. To
ensure confidentiality, interviewees were designated by their initials and code number, for
example, AL3.

After conducting interviews, all the interviews were transcribed. The data collection yielded
ten usable interviews. Interviews ranged from 30 minutes to one and a half hours with an
average length of 45 minutes. All participants were males, married, with at least one child.

In addition, all participants had Bachelor's degree. Bachelors Degrees' were in Mathematics
(1), Electrical Engineering (1), Physics (1), Civil Engineering (2), Mechanical Engineering
(3). In addition, two participants held a Masters Degree in Computer Science and one
participant held a Masters in Business Administration and Market Research. The age range of
H-1B participants was 31 -42. The average time spent at a client site was approximately one
year, with 8.1 years of experience prior to coming to the United States,

Method of Analysis

To analyze the data, trends were first noticed and recorded. I followed a grounded theory method of data collection and analysis where the trends are emergent from the data itself (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). I read all the interviews and coded them line by line based on the research questions and grouped them into categories. As similarities among the interviews were noted, they were coded into various categories based on the transition to the United States and identification with the client vs. the employer. As I read, I found trends among the interviews and color coded similar trends, grouping them together.

Charmaz (1983) describes the method of coding as:

> Codes serve to summarize, synthesize, and sort many observations made of the data…Coding becomes a fundamental means of developing the analysis…Researchers use codes to pull together and categorize a series of otherwise discrete events, statements, and observations which they identify in the data.

Interviews were coded first to see any trends that appeared. Then second order codes were employed to find responses based on the research questions.

FINDINGS

The overall research question, (central goal) of this study is how do employees negotiate such complex international work arrangements and how does that affect their identification with the organizations they are associated with? The study strives to address this by creating two broad sub-questions. How do H-1b workers transition to the United States? Do H-1B workers identify with their host organization or their home organization? Within these two broad questions, additional questions were raised which include: Is there a relationship between the strength of identity and employee treatment? How do H-1B workers feel both organizations treat them? Do H-1B workers experience high levels of stress, when in the United States working for a U.S. organization? If so, does the stress derive from their work environment or the move to the United States? Do H-1B workers adapt to the U.S. culture easily? What enables or inhibits their adaption? Do cultural adjustment issues arise from treatment in the workplace?

In analyzing the data, various trends appeared relating to both adaption to the United States as well as treatment by the client. These trends include: cultural training, motivation, treatment by an organization the experience of stress at work and at home.

Cultural Training
 The lack of cultural training had an impact on adjusting to the initial environment and adding stress to the moving process. Six participants did not receive any cultural training prior to arriving in the United States. Two participants had diverse experiences regarding cultural training. One participant had training in the form of a one hour session. "We had a one hour session on what clients expected and what we should see and what we should not, as well as gift exchanges, office language, these kinds of things. It can be applied anywhere though, not just because you are coming to the U.S. Here [in the U.S.] there is an emphasis on what to wear in the workplace; whereas, in India, it is more relaxed," (SP5. The short one hour session was not enough for the participant SP5. He continued to describe the issues faced, moving to the U.S. was a struggle, "We faced a lot of problems: no car, no knowledge of the bus system. For me it was difficult because we moved to White Plains, New York, which is one of the most costly counties in the U.S…we didn't have cars and had to walk. Ordering food for lunch and dinner was also a challenge. I was lucky to meet helpful people at my client site [who] were also immigrants and helped me get settled. They told me about Craigslist.com, then within six months, we were all set."

In a different experience, another participant had a two week long training. "In my office, they had training on the U.S. culture, how the people are, how we are to live in the U.S., what we should do and how we should do it. Training was two weeks. It was plenty of training for me and definitely made a big difference. It gave me a lot of confidence or else I would not have known what to do," (ST6). "Normally what happened for us, some of our colleagues were on projects already, and we would contact them and ask what they thought, where we should live, and they helped us to find an apartment. If it was a new location, we would contact the client in the U.S.," (ST6).

Motivation
Interestingly financial motives were not the primary reason for taking the opportunity to work in the U.S. in such an arrangement. Education, career growth, and new opportunities were the main reasons for all participants. For example, according to SP5, "Some people come here for the money; I wanted to come here to see a different country. People who come here save a lot compared to India and that used to be a primary motivation. These days you save more in India" Similarly according to PL4, "Financial motivation might be a primary motive for some, but I always wanted to go abroad and see new things. Hollywood movies left an impression on me. You think of staying, roaming around, and seeing new places." Again, AL3 echoed similar sentiments: "If I think about myself after 10 years, coming to the U.S. was one of the major objectives because when you work for different companies, you learn the culture and are exposed to different cultures. It was an important step because I always consider the US 50 years ahead of India. It helps to enhance my thinking."

Treatment
Overall, participants spoke of positive treatment by the client. AL5 described a negative experience, **"**There are a lot of differences between treatment of H-1B and normal employees. You don't have a normal seating arrangement. There are a lot of differences in your rights. There is a lot that is expected of you like working overtime. When I was at [one client] I didn't have these problems, but [in another client site] I did. When you come to this country, you have to be there [on site]. For example, at one site, I was told the hours were 9 to5, but I had to be there 9 to 6, but I was only paid to work from 9 to5. When you come to this country as a consultant, there are different expectations of you." After inquiring about the seating arrangement, it was explained that contract workers sat in areas of small cubicles separate from full time employees. These areas were also known as "hotelling space."   This meant that it was not permanent seating, accommodating short term contractors. A particular participant had a strong opinion on the subject of treatment by the client and summarized the relationship by stating, "The relationship is I am giving you money for your service, so serve." He continued and mentioned, "The work culture is a little bit more demanding and very concentrated than that of what you do in India. There are different expectations [in the field] there are no performance related incentives. It is like supply and demand. They [the

client] expect you to do a lot and have so many hours." (SP5). It became clear that employees are treated differently. One participant explained that treatment correlated with the corporate culture at the client site, "There are two types of people working in this industry, a contractor, hired because they don't have a full time budget or have a need for them for six months to one year. As a contractor, it is hard to get that feeling. It depends on the company and the group you are a part of. Some groups are great, I worked at [a particular client] I loved my group and my boss. There are differences in seating arrangements, contractors sit separately. American born contractors are treated like me as well. Contractors aren't invited to Town Halls and parties. You can feel these differences" (PL4). When asked if there was a feeling of being left out, the participant responded, "Yes, sometimes I do. There are some year-end holiday parties that you are not invited to. I can understand why though. We don't sign agreements with them; their agreements are with the vendors'" (PL4).

Various participants related positive treatment to socialization and mentioned having lunch with employees at the client site. As a result, I began to ask participants if they had lunch with employees at the client site, or spent time with them in the office. "Depends on the client, some clients treat us as a part of their family, and we'll go along with them, others will not. It depends on the person's behavior. Others do not feel comfortable with us. At client sites in which the culture was positive and contract workers were included, contract workers ate lunch with employees. At client sites in which the contractor was not embraced, lunch was spent with individuals of the same culture. For example, they sat with individuals from India as it felt familiar. Interestingly, participant AL5 stated, "Here in the U.S., I do not have a culture. I would not consider India my culture. I am here to meet new people and experience new things. As a result, I do not feel the need to be with people like me." On the other hand, a participant ST6 stated, "Yes, I have the tendency to relate to people with a similar background and from the same culture when I do not always get a welcoming feeling." ST6 also stated, "If the client treats us well, we feel more happy and excited to contribute more. Other clients have restrictions which is hard for us at times. As far as I am concerned, it makes me happy to have lunch with them." These restrictions include remaining distant from contract workers due to independence rules. Also, as they are not considered to be working for the company directly, they are not invited to events such as Town Halls and Holiday Parties.

Stress

Much of the stress participants faced arose from the transition to the United States. Two participants related stress to work. Work related stress appeared to vary per participant. As participant PL4 expressed, "It varies, in my experience; I did not experience a change in stress levels. International contractors have stress because of 24/7 offshore colleagues always working. We have to send the data to our colleagues in India where there might be a nine hour time difference. Therefore, the worker might be making phone calls at 3 a.m." Participant SP5 stated, "Generally H-1B workers have more stress than their counterparts because of the work and the cultural differences. Let's say an H-1 and an American employee have the same work deadline, if the employee feels that they need a holiday on Monday, they will request the time off. But if the contractor feels they need one, he won't take one, and if he presents it to the manager, it will be rejected." Moreover, a different participant stated, "It works both ways, I feel stressed and confident. It's a combination of working with different people and how you present yourself," (AL3).

The majority of participants felt that being here on a visa creates a lot of stress that is non-work related. "We are under a lot of pressure as H-1B workers. Particularly in things like obtaining a driver's license. When your visa expires, the driver's license does so at the same time. Therefore, filing for an extension, which takes anywhere from six to eight months, leaves a person without a license. It is difficult to get around here without a license," (ST6).

Discrepancies in pay

In speaking with an immigration attorney, it was stated that pay issues are non-existent because the employer verifies the amount the "consultant" will be paid in the H-1B paperwork. However various participants mentioned awareness of pay discrepancies. Participant AL3 took a bold step in taking legal action. "From India, I worked in the Netherlands then came here from the Netherlands. When I came here, I had a bond in India that said I cannot leave the client site for one year or else I was subject pay a fine of $10,000. I worked for one of the three largest [contracting] companies [in India]. When I arrived, I realized that my salary was much less than what I should have been making. After six months, I began looking for new jobs and left [my employer]. My salary doubled. My prior employer began sending letters to my home in India saying that I owed $10,000. I replied

stating that I knew what the billing rate was, and I wasn't receiving a quarter of it. I hired an attorney out here [in the U.S.] and won the case. My new employer [also a consulting company in the U.S] was aware of the bond I had with my previous employer and told me that they would assist me if anything happened. I think I took a bold step in doing that because not many people would have due to the bond.]." As a result, this participant has changed contracting employers each time he transitions to a new client. Therefore, the employment relationship is strictly for pay.

Return to India
Each participant with the exception of one stated their eagerness to return to India. A participant stated, "I would like to return to India; however I have a family, and my wife and I are a part of a different caste. Therefore even if we wanted to return, we could not," (KM8). Others state the importance of family back home. "I miss my family; I'm a family person. The U.S. is a great place to visit, but I do not see myself here long term," (PL4). When asking a participant if they would remain in the U.S. long term, he stated, "I don't know. Situations change because now I have a daughter and a house. But my long term strategy does not align with remaining," (AL3).

Identification with employer versus client
In this particular area, participants had mixed responses. The question, "When asked who you work for, do you mention your employer or the client?" Five out of eight participants clearly stated identification with the client whereas two identified with the employer and one felt as if he was a link between the two organizations, identifying with both. Two participants stated without hesitation, "I always mention the client site," (AL3 & PL4). In speaking with participants, it was clear that they all had goals. Many had the goal of remaining here short term to satisfy career objectives and return home. Identification with the client had an impact on their stay, leading to a more fulfilling experience. Others saw the employer as just a pay check. "My employer is just payroll," (PL4). The strength in relationship with the client leads to greater satisfaction at the job site. When asked, so you feel that when you left a particular client site you would miss it? "Oh yes! I miss [a client in the financial industry][3] and [another client] because of the people. The work wasn't great, but I loved working with

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[3] Client names not revealed due to confidentiality

my group," (PL4). Similarly, AL3 stated "I get along very well with colleagues at the client site." He also stated, "I feel like I am a part of the client's organization. The client satisfied my long term goals. To me my company is just there for payroll," (AL3). Likewise, PL4 stated, "At a client, I loved my group and my boss. The work was not great, but I was sad to leave because I loved working with these guys." Interestingly, for participant PL4, the strong identification lead him to feel left out of various situations. "I feel left out at times when we are not invited to Town Halls and parties. I can understand why though, we don't sign agreements with them, but with the vendors[4]," (PL4).

SP5 stated having loose ties with both organizations, mentioning both companies when inquired about who they work for. "When I'm working for a consulting company such as [a client in the IT field], I mention them, but afterwards I mention the client. Sometimes I just mention both. People expect both because most people know that IT professionals are not always employees and are generally outsourced." This particular participant felt that most were aware that IT work was mainly done by contract workers.). Similarly, ST6 also stated, "If we are here [in the U.S.] people normally know that you work for a company in India. If they ask who the client is, then I mention the client."

Participant SU1 firmly stated that he always mentions the primary employer[5]. In addition, a participant felt a stronger identification with the employer because they planned to return to India and work for the employer. "Both, I am a link between the employer and the client. I am loyal to my employer because I know that when I return to India, I can continue my job with them," he later stated "If I am with the client, I am a link between the two, then I am a part of both and I identify with both. My performance ant the client impacts me in my job performance," (ST6).

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[4] Vendors is synonymous with the employing organization
[5] While the large majority identifies with the client, two individuals identify with the employer too and one specifically with the employer. However because it was just one person, reasons for such identification were not generalized and results focused on identification with the client due to the ample support.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of this exploratory study was to uncover the organizational identification of H-1B contract workers. Issues arise for these workers when transitioning their lives to the U.S and have to adapt to a new culture and a constantly changing work environment. This exploratory study addresses how these individuals identify with their employing organization and their clients; Figure 1 (Appendix C) illustrates the findings. Client identification included many factors. Positive corporate cultures and daily interface with the client allowed relationships to strengthen with employees. In addition, social ties allowed H-1B workers to feel as if they were being treated well. The motivation and goals of the individual allowed them to view the client in a positive light as the client fulfilled these goals and fueled the motivation and desire to learn. In addition, the move to the U.S., while proving to be stressful was eased in the workplace through social interaction and advice given by co-workers (use of Craigslist etc.).

Findings here show that the H-1B contract workers identify more with the client organization as opposed to the employer, who was viewed as "payroll." Considerable support was found to show that H-1B contract workers identified with their client organization to the extent that they were being treated well. A positive culture often correlated with positive treatment which included positive relationships with colleagues, strong social ties with employees at the client site, as well as inclusion on daily events such as lunch. Workers were motivated by the opportunity to work and live in the US, even comparing it to the "Hollywood" movies. They were looking forward to experiencing the culture and enhancing their learning to benefit their long term careers. The client satisfied goals for these workers, allowing them to have an experience in the United States, increasing their knowledge, and enhancing the value of their careers long term. In addition, distance and lack of social relations with the employing organization mitigated the identification. Meanwhile, daily interaction (proximity) strengthened client identification.

Prior research suggests that happy employees exhibit higher levels of job-related performance than unhappy employees (Cropanzano & Wright, 2001). Although happiness was not measured in this study, participants used the word to describe their feelings of positive

treatment by the client and being included in social situations of the client. H-1B contractors felt "happy" when invited to lunch and included in office conversations. One participant mentioned the love they had for a particular client due to the social interaction, expressing that although the work was dull and uninteresting, he was sad to leave the client site. Though not measured in this study, future researchers may find a relationship between happiness and identification. In this study, employee happiness in the workplace stemmed from treatment by the client organization. Participants mentioned feelings of happiness when included in client events and social interaction with the client.

Various researchers have argued that identification with an organization is affected by personal and impersonal attributes (Dutton, Dukerich, and Harquail, 1994) as well as their relationships with members of the organization (Mael and Ashforth, 1992). Studies on domestic contract workers have shown that contract workers identified with two organizations, the employer and a client. Contract workers identified with their employing organization to the extent that they found the organization to be "positively distinct," (George and Chattopadhyay, 2005). In this study, identification with the client organization was strongly associated with treatment and relationships. Similar to George and Chattopadhyay's (2004) results, workers identified with likeable colleagues and managers who treated them well.   Moreover, H-1B contract workers were found to identify with their clients for similar reasons; however, there was a lack of attachment to the employing organization. While the employing organization provided the opportunity to travel abroad, it was in fact, the client that satisfied long term goals.

Despite the positive outcomes related to social ties and treatment, an overwhelming majority of workers felt stress when transitioning their lives to the United States. There are various definitions of stress and stressful experiences, and events can originate from many facets of life. For participants in this study, the majority of stress originated from non-work related experiences, such as cultural differences and adaption to the United States. Stress arose as a result of moving to a new country and cross cultural-differences. It was difficult to becoming familiar with different foods, learning where to shop, where to live, and obtaining a driver's license. Work related stress arose for participants when feeling pressure to satisfy managers

and the client especially in times of approaching deadlines. Work related issues also arose from long hours and changes in time zones impacting work.

The Transactional Model of Work Stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) framework is used to evaluate the process of coping with stressful events. Stressful experiences are construed as person-environment transactions dependent on the impact of the external stressor. This is negotiated by the person's evaluation of the stressor and then on the social and cultural resources at their disposal (Lazarus & Cohen, 1977; Antonovsky & Kats, 1967; Cohen 1984). This implies that the degree of stress is correlated with a person's perceived inability to deal with an environmental demand. As a result, a person's level of stress depends on their self-perceived abilities and self-confidence. Stress is correlated with a person's fear of failure. Participants felt pressure to satisfy clients. For example, one participant felt he could not request a day off when a deadline was approaching while a full time employee of the client organization could. Interestingly to cope with work related stress, workers reminded themselves they were only at the client for a short period of time. To cope with transitional stress, they sought comfort in their social ties.

Coping is defined as the actions an individual undertakes to deal with stressful events (Lazarus and Folman, 1984). Despite the strong identification with the client, there were moments in which the worker felt left out, such as invitations to Town Halls. To cope, the worker justified this by stating they understood as they were not a full time employee. The two employees with negative experiences coped by telling themselves it was only a matter of time before they would be transitioning to a new client site. A participant lacking social ties with domestic workers coped by spending time with employees of the same culture. Coping mechanisms although not measured here, appeared to be evident. Coping mechanisms varied for each participant. Most people identify coping strategies to deal with stress.

Social support and confidence in the workplace was evident in a particular situation, an employee had signed a bond with an employer stating to pay a fee of $10,000 if he left the organization. After realizing he was being compensated less than his domestic counterparts, he had the confidence to leave the employer to mitigate stress and do what he felt was right in

standing up for himself. He was not afraid of failure when leaving the organization for another. The outcome of the situation was positive, leading to an increase in salary and a new employer. As a result of the situation, each time his time at a client site is about to end, he changes employers. As a result, he feels no identification with the employer.

In a qualitative study by Segovis (1990), the researcher found that despite long hours, pressure, and job changes, participants who were mid level managers in the banking environment felt fulfilled and excited. Similarly in this study, participants who did not particularly enjoy the work or found there to be pressure, did not mind due to the social support in the work place. Interestingly, various contractors felt although less involved in the affairs of the client, their status to the organization were often ambiguous. Although certain types of information was not shared with them, interpersonal relationships enhanced identification with the client, proving that contract workers identify with the organization that "fulfills" the need to build relationships (Bartel and Dutton, 2001). There was more contact with individuals at the client site. A particular participant felt left out at events such as Town Halls, when he was not invited to participate.

Identities are created due to interaction between the individual and others (McCall and Simmons, 1978). When an organization recognizes the contract workers as valued members they feel a stronger sense of belonging. This was found to be true with various participants. As seen in the findings of George and Chattopadhyay (2005), interpersonal relationships for the client were related to the work group and building of relationships in the work contexts. Identity is also the extent to which as person defines himself or herself within a category or among groups of people (Ashforth, 2001). Participants classified themselves as members of the organization. Interestingly, despite constant movement from client to client, participants still felt a strong sense of belongingness to client organizations.

Limitations
This exploratory study is situated at the crossroads of global, non-traditional work arrangements and is not without limitations. One of the key limitations of this study is the low number of participants which may have influenced the findings. It was exceedingly hard

to contact people and get them to agree to participate or even respond to you. I've learned the importance of being persistent and that rejection is a part of research.

We cannot be certain that biases exist as all respondents are from similar backgrounds and within the same industry. A larger sample of individuals from different backgrounds working in different regions may have had an impact on the results. Future researchers may have alternative measures to explore findings. In spite of the lack of diversity, I found similar trends and attitudes among participants. The H-1B visa is valid for a period of up to six years. It would perhaps be more useful to measure the various levels of identification over time since the process of identification has been referred to as a perpetual work in progress (Ashforth, 1998). Moreover, the research is mainly focused on H-1B contract workers in the IT field. While they represent the largest portion of H-1B visa holders, there could be differences in identification in other areas. Future research could examine if the same attitudes are found across various occupations as well.

Recommendations
Based on my findings, for the employer, I would recommend assistance for transitioning to the U.S. in terms of cultural training, use of public transportation, grocery shopping, and assistance in finding an apartment. Additional help would ease the stress of moving to the U.S. It is clear that a client attempts to maintain boundaries with the H-1B contractor as there are laws that define differences between employees and contractors. Crossing these boundaries can classify the worker as an employee and require that he or she receive the same benefits. However, identification for the client is important as it related to performance and satisfaction. For the client, I would recommend maintaining social interaction with the workers. Lunch and meetings are a great way to maintain social interaction as long as the independence tests are satisfied which include directing employees (amount of control) and dependency (degree of integration into daily affairs).

Contributions
In this study, the objective was to develop a comprehensive understanding of the experiences of the H-1B workers. Results have important implications for organizations, particularly human resource practices as they relate to employee performance and stress. Moving to a

new country increases the stress of individual. However, positive treatment and relationships allow for increased identification. Prior research on organizational identification has proven that OI positively affects work outcomes.

Identification theory in the context of new global work arrangements has remained an understudied area. While this study is an exploratory attempt, it has important implications for both research and practice of management on complex global work arrangements. Furthermore, this study is beneficial for organizations to ensure an easy transition to the United States, minimizing the stress of employees as they transition into work arrangements at the client site. This study has contributed to the body of knowledge that studies non-traditional work arrangements and their effects on those who do the work. In spite of the positive outcomes of identification, there has been no study that looks into the identification issues of H-1B workers. This study investigated their experiences of this transition in a comprehensive way, especially in trying to understand what makes them identify with the client or the employing organization. As explained earlier, the study has important implications for managers of both employers of these H-1B workers and clients where they work. Since identification is something that is associated with positive outcomes, firms need to foster that to get the best performance from their employees – regular or contract workers. While this is specific to H-1B workers, some of these issues could resonate with migrant workers in other contexts too.

APPENDICES

Appendix A – Interview Protocol
- Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed

- About the research project

- Approximate time taken 45 minutes

- Permission

- Questions

Opening questions:
1. Can you tell me about your background?

    a. Education

        i. Type of degree? (Masters/ Bachelors/ Engineering)

    b. Work experience

    c. Country of Origin

    d. Average work experience prior to coming to the United States

    e. Occupational Category (Health, Technology, Finance etc.)

1. When arriving to the United States, what was your initial reaction? Did you have any prior knowledge of what to expect?
2. Did you have any cultural training prior to coming to the Unites States in your home country?
3. What kind of support for setting up in the US did you receive from your firm?
4. Why did you take the opportunity? (I am interested to see if there were any motives other than financial)
    a. What helped you to adapt more easily to the environment?
    b. Do you feel it derived from your work experience?

Main questions

5. Culture: Was there anything in particular that struck you in any way about the culture in the United States? Have you been given any cultural training? If so, where and how? If not, do you feel it would have had an impact?

6. Do you live on your own or with roommates?
    a. If with roommates, do you have a similar work arrangement?

7. When asked who you work for, do you mention the contract company or U.S firm?

8. Do you feel a part of the company you are working as a contractor for, or the contracting company which employs you?

9. How do you get along with the other employees in this firm you are working for?

    a. Do you chat during breaks? Do you have lunch with them? Hang out outside of work?

10. What do you feel could be changed about your work arrangement?

11. Do you love being in this company?

12. Would you miss the firm if you were to leave?

13. Do you feel like you belong to this company and it is a part of your identity?

14. At lunch time, who do you find yourself eating with?

15. When joining the organization, how were you welcomed?

16. Do you have a strong relationship with your U.S. Employer?

17. Do you feel you have strong autonomy in your work?

18. Do you feel stress from your work?

19. Do you enjoy living in the U.S.?

20. Would you recommend others to be contract workers as well?

21. Do you hope to remain in the United States?

Closing Questions
22. Is there anything else you would like to let me know about your feelings as a contract worker?
23. Do you have any questions you would like to ask?

- Thank you for your time
- Can you suggest anyone else who would be willing to discuss their experiences of living in the US and working as an H-1B worker with me?

Appendix B – Participant Agreement

     Complexity in Work Identification: the Case of the H-1B worker in the United States.

Date

Dear (Participant)/H-1B,

I, Cinthia Fruci, am a student in Bryant University's Honors Program, Smithfield, Rhode Island. With the guidance of Dr. Diya Das, I am doing a study on the Complexity in Work Identification: the Case of the H-1B worker in the United States. For this study, we would like to ask you for your honest opinions and feelings on your work arrangement.   This interview will last approximately one- two hours of your time.
This is an exploratory study that will focus on the experiences of the H-1B workers. Even though the vast majority of H-1B workers are actually employed by their countries of origin, such as India and China, and are sent to work as contractors for companies in the United States, their status in this country is not transparent. The study focuses on issues of identity, problems faced in their efforts to integrate themselves into a foreign work environment and a new cultural community. Identity issues arise due to the complexity of the global work arrangements. Existing research focuses primarily on the definition of identity issues of U.S. domestic contract workers (1099 employees), but none on alien contract workers. Understanding this is important since research shows significant positive outcomes of employee identification with the organizations that they work in.
If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to ask. With your permission, the interview will be recorded. All recordings will be absolutely confidential. No one will ever get to listen to what was said except for the researcher who will assign a code to your name to hide your identity. Any report prepared from this will not consist of any names or identities.
Your participation is totally voluntary. Please sign below if you have decided to participate. Your signature indicates that you are at least 18 years of age or older and have read the information provided above.
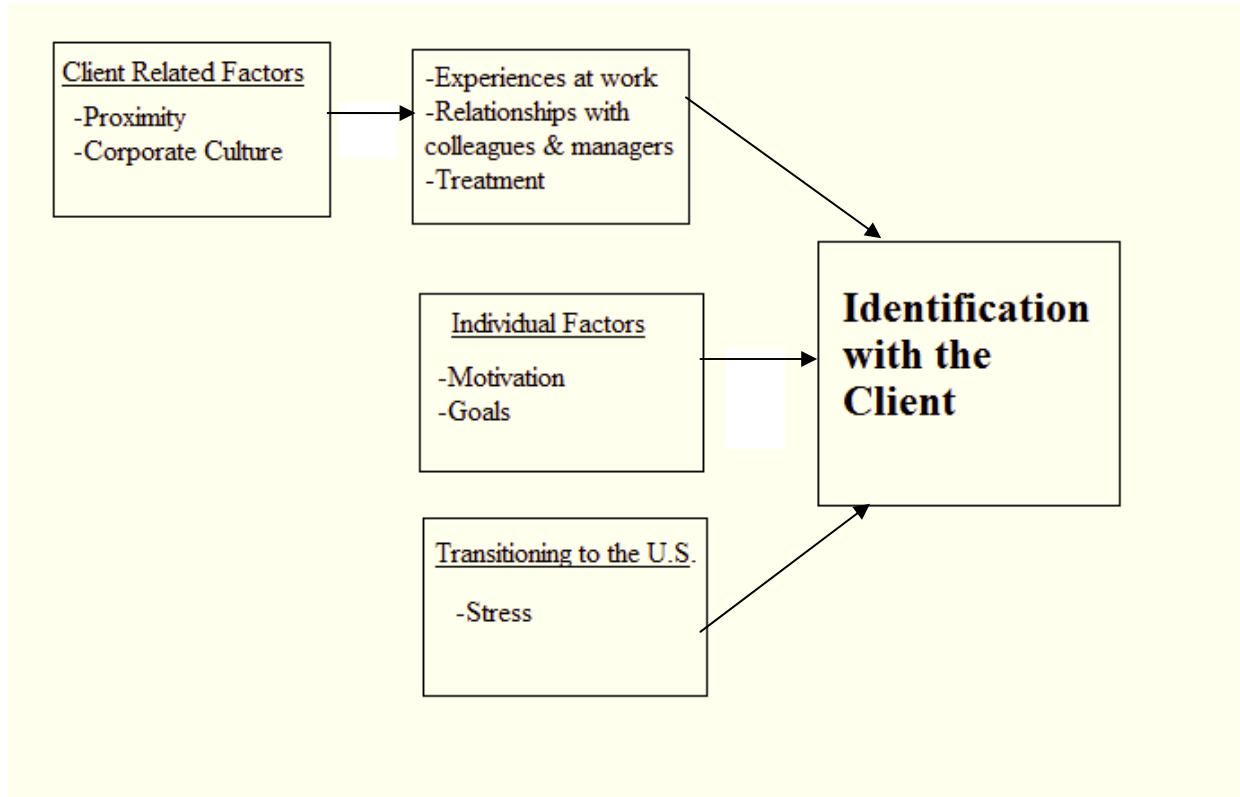

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Signature of Participant   Date

_____

Signature of Principal Investigator   Date

Appendix C – Figure 1

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