

The Corporate Value Triad

A theory of organizational contribution and influence

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Conceptual working paper 1 of 5 | Pending empirical validation

Abstract

The Corporate Value Triad (CVT) proposes that organizations convert contributions into career outcomes through processes of visibility, attribution, and influence. Its three archetypes, Builders, Relationship Operators, and Builder-Leaders, describe patterns of work rather than natural kinds of people. The model distinguishes producing an outcome from being credited for it and distinguishes recognition from subsequent reward. It also treats coordination and relationship work as potentially productive contributions. The proposed contribution is an integrated, episode-based account of how evidence reaches decision-makers and how allocation rules convert that evidence into opportunities, pay, and authority. Existing research motivates components of this account but does not establish CVT as a validated theory. This paper defines the constructs, states directional propositions, identifies rival explanations, and specifies conditions under which the framework should be revised or abandoned. The accompanying protocol separates observational prediction from causal tests and makes measurement development a prerequisite for confirmatory use. A dated extension proposes collective attribution, contribution signaling, and loss of originating credit during organizational adoption as possible mechanisms that require separate tests.

Keywords: contribution, attribution, organizational influence, recognition, career advancement

1 The problem and the proposed contribution

An organization can know that a project succeeded while remaining uncertain about who enabled the result. A customer negotiation, a reliable production system, a carefully prevented failure, and a well-coordinated handoff can all create value. Their contributions leave different evidence trails. People making evaluation and promotion decisions rarely observe those trails equally. CVT asks how this uneven information environment affects credit and career outcomes.

The framework does not presume that technical specialists deserve every available promotion. Promotion can reward past work, recruit skills needed for a different role, retain a scarce employee, or fill a vacancy. These purposes can conflict. The theoretical problem is therefore conditional: when an organization says it allocates recognition or opportunity on a particular basis, what explains divergence between relevant contribution evidence and its decisions?

Social capital already connects organizational relationships to careers (Seibert et al., 2001 [R01]). Brokerage research links network position with ideas and career outcomes (Burt, 2004 [R02]). Political skill scholarship offers a developed account of interpersonal effectiveness (Ferris et al., 2007 [R03]). CVT cannot claim these observations as discoveries. Its potential addition is to specify an intermediate allocation process with observable episodes, competing paths, and explicit opportunities for falsification. It must demonstrate usefulness beyond established constructs rather than rename them.

2 Constructs and units of analysis

The primary unit is a person contributing to a defined work episode within a team and organization. An episode has a stated objective, time window, participants, constraints, and outcome evidence. Individuals can appear in many episodes and change patterns across assignments. Team and organization rules operate at different analytical levels.

Construct	Operational meaning	What it must not stand in for
Contribution C	A person's defensible contribution to an episode's relevant outcomes, including enabling work and adverse effects	Hours, output counts, self-confidence, or visibility alone
Visibility V	Decision-makers' exposure to evidence about an episode and its contributors	Favorable evaluation or deserved credit
Attribution A	Credit assigned to a person for a specified outcome	Whether the outcome occurred or a reward followed
Influence I	Capacity to affect decisions or mobilize resources in the stated setting	Mere access, formal title, or ethical conduct
Recognition N	An observable acknowledgment of contribution, such as documented credit or an evaluation statement	Compensation or managerial suitability
Reward R	A specified allocation such as pay change, promotion, authority, or development access	A single universal measure of career success

Attribution is a judgment. Recognition is an act that expresses or records a judgment. A manager can privately credit someone without mentioning them in a review. An employee can receive a public acknowledgment without receiving a promotion. The contribution-recognition gap in paper 2 concerns this difference between relevant evidence and expressed acknowledgment. The value attribution paper examines the earlier judgment process.

Contribution is not directly observed without error. Work products, customer outcomes, stakeholder accounts, and independent review provide fallible indicators. Evidence should include negative externalities, displaced work, maintenance, and prevention. An outcome can depend jointly on people, tools, inherited systems, and favorable circumstances. A defensible account may acknowledge joint necessity without assigning percentages that sum to 100.

3 The three archetypes and the limits of the triad

Builders primarily create or sustain outcomes through domain work. Relationship Operators primarily connect people, coordinate interdependence, negotiate, or influence allocation. Builder-Leaders combine domain judgment with mobilization of people and resources. These descriptions are provisional and overlap. A relationship operator may produce high economic and social value. A builder may already exercise informal leadership.

The triad is an accessible vocabulary, not an exhaustive taxonomy. A person can perform little observed work of either kind because of onboarding, blocked opportunity, illness, mismatched assignment, or incomplete observation. That possibility does not justify a residual category of deficient employees. The

model represents behaviors and circumstances continuously. It does not divide people at a numerical threshold or infer moral worth from job function.

There is a specific dimensional problem to resolve. Domain execution and relational mobilization are work activities, whereas total contribution is an outcome construct that may include both. Treating relationship work as the low-contribution pole would build the desired conclusion into the measure. CVT instead records execution and mobilization separately, estimates contribution with a role-sensitive evidence rubric, and treats visibility and influence as distinct process variables. Whether three recurring profiles exist is an empirical question secondary to the continuous model.

4 A proposed mechanism

The proposed sequence begins when work produces evidence. Evidence can reach evaluators through direct observation, artifacts, stakeholder testimony, or a spokesperson. Evaluators assign credit using that information and prior expectations. Recognition records some of that credit. Allocation rules then combine recognition with role requirements, budgets, vacancies, and bargaining conditions to determine rewards. Influence can affect both the work itself and these allocation processes.

The sequence is a conceptual ordering, not a proven causal chain. Prior reward can increase authority, access, and subsequent visibility. A manager may give an already favored employee a better assignment. Coordination may improve both outcomes and their observability. A cross-sectional correlation between visibility and pay cannot distinguish these paths.

One useful temporal representation is:

Evidence about C at time 0; exposure V at time 1; attribution A and recognition N at time 2; reward R at time 3. Influence I and organizational rules can affect several transitions. Prior opportunity, role level, task interdependence, evaluator knowledge, and relevant prior outcomes require explicit consideration.

This representation deliberately avoids a weighted CVT equation. No evidence supports universal coefficients or a fungible conversion rate between production and influence. The model is useful only if its components can be measured distinctly and its proposed paths outperform plausible simpler accounts.

Attribution styles and contribution history

The October 19 update adds three proposed constructs. The Collective Attribution Paradox is a conditional prediction: people who habitually describe accomplishments as team achievements may receive less individual acknowledgment in systems that evaluate individuals, even when their relevant contribution is comparable. Team acknowledgment can be accurate and valuable. A collective account can also name individual roles, so collective and individual attribution are not mutually exclusive. The proposed paradox concerns a mismatch between a communication norm and an evaluation process, not a defect in teamwork.

The Attribution Dilution Effect is the proposed loss of identifiable credit for an original contribution as an innovation is adopted, modified, and institutionalized. Later contributors can legitimately earn substantial credit. A falling percentage of total credit as new work accumulates is therefore insufficient evidence of dilution. A stronger test asks whether acknowledgment of an unchanged, corroborated originating action disappears from later accounts. Originating, improving, maintaining, and coordinating adoption are separate actions. No claim about intellectual property ownership follows from this terminology.

Contribution Signaling means the explicit communication of verifiable actions and outcomes to people who evaluate work. It concerns communication behavior, while visibility concerns what an evaluator actually encounters. A message can be sent without being seen. Established signaling theory distinguishes senders

and receiver interpretation [R23]. CVT uses a descriptive communication construct here; it does not assume signal costs, credibility, or an equilibrium model. Signaling can improve the work by securing adoption, which belongs in contribution, as well as change its observability. An association after noisy contribution adjustment does not establish an independent causal premium for signaling.

These constructs extend the information mechanism without adding a fourth employee archetype. Proposed paths run from team-oriented norms to communication behavior, from communication and managerial exposure to credit, and from evolving records to preservation of contribution history. Status, evaluator knowledge, task interdependence, opportunity, and prior recognition can confound those paths. The new concepts require discriminant and incremental validity beyond existing attribution, self-presentation, and information-processing accounts.

Relation to prior work and a reported illustration

Existing research on self-evaluation [R19], combined self and other promotion [R20], and responsibility judgments in joint work [R21] supplies relevant precedents. These literatures concern different constructs and outcomes. They do not establish any of the three proposed CVT effects. The targeted review identifies related work rather than demonstrating novelty or exhaustive coverage. In particular, the proposed adoption-related dilution mechanism lacks direct validation in this package.

A reported episode concerns a specialist who created an internal utility and a colleague who later improved it. The colleague reportedly acknowledged the creator while discussing the improvements before an evaluator. The creator described a preference for collective attribution. This account suggests a possible difference in communication exposure. It contains no measured evaluator judgment or subsequent recognition outcome. Paper 3 gives the generalized account and its source limitations. Neither person's intent, fairness of treatment, nor compensation can be inferred.

5 Propositions

P1 proposes that, among episodes with comparable relevant contribution evidence, greater evaluator exposure predicts more subsequent attribution. P2 proposes that attribution predicts subsequent recorded recognition, while allowing the organization to omit or dilute credit during formal reporting. P3 proposes that recognition predicts specified rewards conditional on the stated allocation purpose, opportunity set, and available resources. These are different propositions and can fail independently.

P4 proposes that a structured evidence record reduces the portion of attribution explained by presentation exposure when exposure carries no new contribution information. P5 proposes that replaceability constraints can delay development access for people with documented operational dependencies. P6 proposes that leadership development accompanied by workload transfer produces better team outcomes than training added to an unchanged workload. The protocol retains H1 through H8 and adds H9 through H13, mapped to the update author's H7 through H11 to avoid identifier collisions. The additional propositions concern collective attribution and individual recognition, exposure as a moderator of signaling, preservation of originating credit during adoption, documentation as a moderator of attribution style, and team-oriented norms as antecedents of communication. None has been tested in this package.

None implies that visibility usually matters more than contribution. Comparing raw coefficients would be invalid when variables have different scales or reliabilities. Relative predictive importance, if studied, requires a prespecified target, comparable measurement, uncertainty estimates, and an independent evaluation sample. A visibility association remaining after noisy contribution adjustment is compatible with omitted productive work.

6 Evidence that constrains the theory

Munyon et al. (2015 [R04]) report positive associations of political skill with both performance and career outcomes. That evidence challenges a model that treats influence only as reward capture. Heilman and Haynes (2005 [R05]) experimentally examine unequal credit under ambiguity in mixed-sex teams, illustrating one bounded attribution problem. Neither source validates the CVT archetypes.

Benson et al. (2019 [R07]) study trade-offs between sales performance and managerial matching. Their work constrains the assumption that excellent current-role performance alone identifies the best manager. CVT consequently distinguishes accurate acknowledgment of past contribution from selection for future responsibility. An equitable system can recognize one employee and choose a different employee for a management vacancy, provided its criteria are relevant, transparent, and consistently applied.

These sources are a targeted foundation, not a systematic review. Their settings, designs, and constructs differ. The references companion documents the checked records and the limited claims supported by inspected abstracts or summaries. The package reports no original participants, estimates, or organizational findings.

7 Boundary conditions and rival accounts

CVT should be most informative where work is interdependent, evidence is distributed, and evaluators lack direct observation. It may add little in settings where contribution and allocation are already directly linked and well measured. Even there, the outcome measure may omit prevention, collaboration, or long-run quality. Institutional settings with strong seniority rules may constrain the recognition-reward path regardless of attribution accuracy.

The productive coordination rival predicts that apparent visibility effects shrink when coordination outcomes and assignment quality are measured adequately. The rational matching rival predicts that advancement follows prospective role requirements rather than missing recognition. The opportunity rival predicts that prior sponsorship explains both more consequential assignments and later reward. The reverse-causality rival predicts that reward precedes increased visibility. The measurement rival predicts that apparent contribution gaps disappear with better outcome evidence.

A useful test must give these accounts a fair chance. CVT loses explanatory value if its measures cannot separate exposure from contribution, if established social capital and role variables explain its predictions equally well, or if preregistered replication repeatedly yields precise effects incompatible with its directional claims. A null result with wide uncertainty is insufficient to settle the question. A rejected archetype model can coexist with a useful attribution mechanism, and the theory should state which part survives.

8 Research and practice implications

The research program begins with cognitive interviews and measurement development, followed by longitudinal episodes and experiments on evidence presentation. Analysts should collect contribution evidence before decision outcomes where feasible and separate raters from decision-makers. The accompanying protocol describes clustering, selection, missingness, multiple testing, and sensitivity analysis. The survey is a pilot item pool about reported experiences, not an independent measure of actual contribution.

Practitioners can use the framework to ask better questions about credit and opportunity. They should not use its language to rank people, deny promotion, or diagnose a workforce. A low-risk application is to

improve the completeness of project records and permit contributors to correct omissions. Such practices still require evaluation because documentation consumes time and can privilege easily recorded work.

9 Conclusion

CVT proposes an account of how organizations make work legible, assign credit, and allocate subsequent opportunity. Its value depends on distinguishing those stages while recognizing that relationship work can be productive. The triad supplies a vocabulary for discussion. The continuous, temporally specified model supplies the research claims. Version 0.1 and its October 19 research update offer a program for criticism and testing, without asserting that the program has already succeeded.

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