

The Impact of Interpersonal Communication Skills on Organizational Effectiveness and Social Self-Efficacy: A Synthesis

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Abstract

This paper synthesizes the role and importance of interpersonal effectiveness and communication competence in organizational competitiveness. Several studies concluded that oral communication skills are critically significant in business education, and business school graduates are expected to develop this essential/soft skills competency in order to place themselves in a competitive advantage for employment opportunities. Recent institutional surveys consistently determined that interpersonal communication effectiveness contributes immensely to increased workforce performance and overall organizational productivity. Additionally, it improves hiring opportunities for business school graduates as well as facilitates rapid promotional advancements in the organization. The paper stresses the urgent need to make oral and written communication skills required in business education curriculum.

Introduction/Background

Over the past ten years, academic researchers (Brun, 2010; Wilson, 2005; Ridder, 2003) and institutional studies (AAC&U, 2015; Job Outlook, 2016; career-BUILDER. 2017) have re-evaluated the critical importance of interpersonal communication in domestic and global organization. This is especially critical for graduating students and for employees in the process of changing jobs or applying for new or higher positions in organizations. These studies have determined that interpersonal competence greatly improves a candidate's competitive advantage in obtaining a position as well as improving the operations of business organization organizations. Another recent study (Singh, 2014) noted that businesses, agencies, and institutions of all kinds place a high premium on interpersonal effectiveness because of the centrality of communication skills in the productivity of organizations. The study further argues that both administrative and managerial functions and activities in organization settings require effectiveness of communication skills. Additionally, effective and efficient interpersonal and group communication skills are significant factors in evaluating the overall competence of a job seeking candidate. Singh and colleague (2014) noted that organizational recruiters place a higher emphasis on interpersonal communication skills as essential characteristic selecting and interviewing job applicants.

As scholars across business and communications disciplines continue to identify and evaluate essential skills needed to achieve the level of productivity, performance, and excellence needed for competitive advantage, competence in oral communication, employers identified writing, speaking, and listening skills as fundamental. These skills are the prerequisites students' personal and professional success in the twenty-first workforce. According to a recent survey conducted for the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) by Hart Research Associates (2015) on college learning and career success, it was determined that communication skills are essential for performing in business, academic, and professional environments. No matter the situation one faces in personal or professional contexts, one will need to communicate effectively and interact people of diverse cultures, utilizing speaking and listening skills to create and sustain impressions. For instance, in a personal and professional settings, trips to various places, including mingling with colleagues and classmates, requires effective interpersonal communication skills (Hybels & Weaver, 2015).

Communication-Based Approach to Competitive Advantage

In the work environments, much communication is required in order to accomplish personal and group tasks and projects because employees need to communicate with co-workers, supervisors, directors, other internal and external stakeholders of the organization. Soft skills, which are also identified as essential skills, are the critical skills that demonstrate interpersonal competence and organizational communication effectiveness which are essential for managerial or administrative success. The centrality of communication skills in workforce performance and productivity in organizations have been validated by numerous studies in the past decade (Morreale, Osborn, & Pearson, 2000; Alshare & Hindi, 2004; Baker & Thompson, 2004; Gray 2010). As noted in a recent survey in the Workforce-Skills Preparedness Report, PayScale (2016), it is now required that college graduates entering the workforce for the first time should communicate with confidence, express themselves competently, and be proficient in public speaking in group settings. The survey cautions that poor communication skills could severely prevent students and anyone aspiring to managing or administrative position from achieving the goal or expectations. Evidently, business organizations at all levels are willing to recruit and promote job applicants who have a comprehensive background in oral, written, and presentation skills. Therefore, well-trained college graduates and other job-seeking candidates should endeavor to acquire these soft skills that will significantly enhance their competitive advantage in the job market. The use of proper language, decorum, and professional words/phrases to express thoughts during business and social meetings, group interactions, and presentations creates favorable impression in considering a job application for employability.

Communication Competence and Sustainable Competitive Advantage

In their analysis of “the knowledge-based approach to sustainable competitive advantage,” DeNisi, Hitt, and Jackson (2003, p 3) noted that organizations are competing in a challenging global context that requires the acquisition of essential skills that would enable their workforce to outperform their competitors. Additionally, Hitt, Keats, and DeMarie (1998) had expressed the view that business organizations must identify new sources of knowledge, broaden their competitive landscape, and develop a workforce that is capable of performing tasks differently in order to be successful and benefit from globalization. Researchers DeNisi and colleagues identified knowledge-based resources as referring to skills, abilities, and learning capacity, which could be developed through formal or informal training. Some of these essential skills, otherwise known as soft skills, which are required by today’s employers include the ability to effectively communicate orally, the ability to work effectively with others in teams and in diverse groups, the ability to effectively communicate in writing, and ability to demonstrate critical thinking and analytical reasoning skills. These skills are critically needed by organizations of new college graduates and of people wishing to advance their career in competitive organizations (Association of American Colleges and Universities, AAC&U, 2015).

Interpersonal Effectiveness and Presentation Competence

Recent scholars and practitioners have consistently emphasized the need for higher education to prepare graduating students with the soft/essential skills that would enhance their competitive advantage in employment and for advancement. According to DeNisi, Hitt, and Jackson (2003, p. 9) “knowledge-based resources include all the intellectual abilities and knowledge possessed by employees (and graduating students), as well as their capacity to learn, develop, or acquire additional knowledge that would enhance their levels of performance. As the authors explained, “knowledge-based resources are the skills and capabilities which job applicants and candidates possess, mastered, and their potential for adapting new knowledge and skills.” Indeed, the impact of interpersonal communication competence on organizational effectiveness has been the subject of much discussion and analysis, because of the emphasis which employers of labor have developed for recruiting and evaluating job applicants, especially new college graduates. As graduating students prepare for the globalized workforce, the importance of communication (oral and written) becomes overly critical for employability and promotion. The essential/soft skills which business organizations require has been expanded to include critical thinking, problem solving, comprehension and attention to details, leadership and teamwork skills (Workforce-Skills Preparedness Report, 2016). Evidently, business school graduates and graduates from other disciplines need to acquire excellent interpersonal communication skills upon graduating from their respective schools. Workforce studies of recent years have emphasized the critical importance of presentation skills, indicating that business school graduates should be prepared to enter the industry of their choice with the ability to communicate effectively interpersonally and participate actively in diverse groups.

Because of the widespread emphasis on the usefulness of interpersonal communication skills, business schools and other related schools and colleges are now required to integrate presentation skills, writing competence, and research skills in their curriculum. Additionally, two primary accrediting bodies/associations for university business schools and colleges –AACSB (The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business and the Accreditation Council for Business Schools and Programs-ACBSP provided specific standards and criteria requiring competence and proficiency in communication for business schools graduates. For example, the Business School at Howard University is AACSB accredited and a good number of the courses taught at the university require oral presentation and writing skills, and research skills are required in the business communication course that equips Howard University students for effective oral presentation and intercultural communication competence. Based on the AACSB (2010), possessing proficiency and competence in communication is paramount on the listed criteria of the AACSB learning outcome/assurance learning in curriculum management

Interpersonal Effectiveness as a Strategic Resource

Consistent with the emphasis on interpersonal communication competence, Fallows and Steven (2000) noted that in view of the challenging economic recession and financial difficulties nowadays, it is inadequate for college graduates to possess the knowledge and skills of their academic discipline and training, graduating students and other job seekers should endeavor to acquire the essential/soft skills that would place them at a competitive advantage. This emphasis was also echoed by the recent study in the 2016 Workforce-Skills Preparedness Report, which clearly highlighted the soft skills employers seek of new college graduates. An evaluation of the scope of business organization indicates business school graduates aspiring to succeed in the competitive workforce must be capable of communicating with internal, external, national, and global audiences of the organization in which they work. Studies also indicate that effective interpersonal communication is essential for managerial and executive effectiveness strategic organizational planning and implementation. Shewehuk and associates (2006) noted that sound interpersonal communication skills would aid business executives in presenting and explaining information, including negotiating successfully with counterparts. Indeed, strategic planning and activities involve effective communication in verbal, nonverbal, group, and interpersonal contexts. Additionally, with proficient interpersonal communication skills, small businesses, medium-sized companies, and entrepreneurs could successfully negotiate contracts and compete for big market-share with enhanced credibility.

As a result of increasing focus on communication competence as a strategic resource, industry analysts and management practitioners (Woodward, Sendall & Ceccucci, 2010; Job Outlook, 2016; and Workforce Skills Preparedness Report, 2016) have suggested the need for integration of various forms of communication in business education curriculum in order to more adequately equip and prepare students for the 21st century workforce. The communication skills needed for competitive advantage should include cross-cultural, intercultural, nonverbal, listening, and presentation skills for global workplaces. As Non & Wilkins (2002) stressed, soft/essential skills such as group writing, team work and presentations, group project management, and development interpersonal relationships would enhance the quality of graduating students, because workforce is increasing diverse and students who are inexperienced with heterogeneous or diverse work settings would be challenged with consequence of under-performing. The need for understanding communicating and working in groups has become so important that some universities, such as Howard University, have developed a separate course in business, management communication, and strategic at undergraduate and graduate levels, focused on teaching interpersonal and group relationships, delivering presentations, critical thinking and analysis, and leadership communication. The Hart Research Associates survey conducted for the Association of American Colleges and Employers -NACE (2016) identified communication apprehension, stage-fright, or nervousness as a single most important factor affecting many employees as well as college graduates. Therefore, the inclusion of oral presentation skills across business education curriculum would improve the standards of presentation and team work for new college graduates. To curb presentation deficiency which faces many employees, Luthy & Deck (2007) suggested in their research the teaching of oral presentation skills in many business and management education courses.

Concluding thoughts and recommendations

Over the years, the importance of preparing college graduates for effective oral presentation and writing skills had existed, but the emphasis was minimal. For example, some academic and professional surveys have demonstrated the consistency of opinion that newly hired or recruited college graduates lack the presentation skills for managerial or administrative positions. These concerns about inadequate academic preparation and skills deficiency in communication for performing major tasks were also identified in a number of research studies (Ducoffe & Ducoffe, 1990; Bishop & Anderson, 1992; Thomas & Patton, 1993). Earlier studies (McKendrick, 1986, Tootelain and Shaffer, 1983) revealed the impact of inadequate communication skills among employees and college graduates, and stressed the obvious need for interpersonal skills for business students seeking employment in business and marketing environments.

Need-Based Strategic Approach - Teaching of Business Communication: Because of industry expectations of business students' ability and competence to communicate effectively and efficiently and based on empirical evidence from studies (Lesiker, 1976 (cited in Hite, Bellizi and Mckinely, 1997), business executives and other high ranking administrators identified oral communication as the most important skill set for employees seeking management position. According to Lesiker (1976) survey, management executives devote approximately 75%-95% of their official time communicating with internal or external audiences. Additionally, Blizstein (1980) survey confirmed that much time is devoted communicating in the workplaces. The survey demonstrated that many organizations (private and public sectors) identified oral or verbal communication as the most critical skill needed for on the job performance and success, making oral communication effectiveness and competence a significant skill to be acquired for employment. A range of other studies (Kelly and Gaedeke, 1990; Stallard & Hnt, 1994; Gaedeke & Tootelain, 1989) supported the emphasis on communication skills as significant for achieving excellence and increased productivity and performance in organizations.

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