Association for Business Communication

Southwestern United States

2017 Refereed Proceedings

March 8-11, 2017

Little Rock, AR

Susan Evans Jennings, President

Laura Lott Valenti, President-Elect and Program Chair

Kelly A. Grant, Secretary-Treasurer

Gerald Plumlee, Historian

Kathryn S. O’Neill, Past President

**Carol Wright, Editor**

**Nelson Rusche College of Business**

**Stephen F. Austin State University**

**P.O. Box 13060**

**Nacogdoches, TX 75962-3060**

**936-468-3103**

**cwright@sfasu.edu**

Editor’s Note

Welcome to the 44rd meeting of the Association for Business Communication-Southwestern United States. Many thanks to the planners, program chairs, reviewers, presenters, and other contributors responsible for making this strong conference program possible. Special thanks go to Laura Lott Valenti, President-Elect and Program Chair of ABC-SWUS, who has assembled a great program that will appeal to those teaching business communicators as well as those researching in the discipline.

The program this year includes 25 presentations by 43 authors from United States institutions in Arkansas, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Minnesota, Oklahoma, and Texas, as well as from Canada. Only the best full paper from the conference, 38 presentation abstracts, and 3 poster presentation abstracts are included in this proceeding. I would like to extend special thanks to the proposal and paper reviewers:Debbie D. DuFrene, Kelly Grant, Margaret S. Kilcoyne, Kathryn S. O’Neill, Gerald Plumlee, Marcel Robles, and Laura Lott Valenti.

Each year completed papers that are submitted for the program are considered for the

Irwin/McGraw Hill Distinguished Paper Award. This year’s distinguished paper was awarded to Jon M. Croghan and Tammy L. Croghan from Northwestern State University. They will present their paper on Thursday, March 9 at 8:30 a.m. Also, congratulations to Susan Evans Jennings from Stephen F. Austin State University, who has been named the 2017 Federation of Business Disciplines Outstanding Educator Award.

In these proceedings, you will also find information on previous program chairpersons, Distinguished Paper Award recipients, and recipients of the Outstanding Research and Outstanding Teacher awards.

Please make plans to join us next year in Albuquerque, New Mexico for the 2018 Conference on March 7-9, 2018. The call dates for next year’s papers and presentation proposals are October 1, 2017.

The 2017 conference program should prove to be quite engaging and informative. It will also provide opportunities to interact with new colleagues in our field and allow you to explore future collaborative research partnerships.

Carol Wright

Editor

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Future International, National and Regional Meetings

**2017 – 2018**

**For more information visit:**

**http://businesscommunication.org/conferences**

2017 Western U.S. Regional Conference

March 30–April 1, 2017  
Orem, Utah, USA

The 15th ABC Asia-Pacific Conference

June 9-11, 2017  
Hong Kong SAR

Association for Business Communication 81nd Annual Convention

October 18–21, 2017

Royal Marine Hotel, Dun Laoghaire, Dublin, Ireland

Association for Business Communication-Southwestern United States

March 7–9, 2018  
Albuquerque, New Mexico, USA

# ABC-SWUS Program Chairpersons 1973 - Present

2016-2017 Laura Lott Valenti

2015-2016 Susan Evans Jennings

2014-2015 Kathryn S. O’Neill

2013-2014 Traci L. Austin

2012-2013 Randall L. Waller

2011-2012 Lucia Sigmar

2010-2011 Margaret Kilcoyne

2009-2010 Faridah Awang

2008-2009 Marcel Robles

2007-2008 Ann Wilson

* 1. Carolyn Ashe
  2. Harold A. Hurry
  3. Lana W. Carnes
  4. Marsha L. Bayless
  5. Betty A. Kleen
  6. William Sharbrough
  7. Carol Lehman
  8. William P. Galle, Jr.
  9. Anita Bednar
  10. Timothy W. Clipson
  11. Debbie D. Dufrene
  12. William J. Wardrope
  13. Roger N. Conaway
  14. Donna W. Luse
  15. F. Stanford Wayne
  16. Beverly H. Nelson
  17. Marian Crawford
  18. Marlin C. Young
  19. Sallye Benoit
  20. Tom Means
  21. Lamar N. Reinsch, Jr.
  22. Sara Hart
  23. Betty S. Johnson
  24. Larry R. Smeltzer
  25. Daniel Cochran
  26. Nancy Darsey

1980-1981 John M. Penrose

1979-1980 R. Lynn Johnson

1978-1979 Raymond V. Lesikar

1977-1978 Jack D. Eure

* 1. Phil Lewis

1975-1976 Dale Level

1974-1975 Bette Anne Stead

1973-1974 Sam J. Bruno

# Call for Papers

**Federation of Business Disciplines**

**Association for Business Communication**

**Southwestern United States**

**Albuquerque, New Mexico**

**March 7 - March 9, 2018**

Please submit a proposal or paper related to **business communication topics** for presentation at the 2018 ABC-SWUS Conference in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Research papers or position papers related to **business communication topics** in the following areas are encouraged:

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Communication Technology |  | Technology and Education |  |
|  | Innovative Instructional Methods |  | Business Education Issues |  |
|  | International Business Communication |  | Paradigm Shifts in Communication |  |
|  | Training and Development/Consulting |  | Interpersonal Communication |  |
|  | Nonverbal Communication |  | Executive/Managerial Communication |  |
|  | Legal and Ethical Communication Issues |  | Organizational Communication |  |

* Papers or proposals should include a statement of the problem or purpose, methodology section (if applicable), findings (as available), a summary, implications for education and/or business, and a bibliography.
* If you are submitting a proposal only, it should contain 750 to 1,500 words and must be submitted on the ABC website: <http://www.businesscommunication.org>. Click on the link for the **2018 ABC-SWUS Conference**.
* If you are submitting a completed paper, please submit your proposal online as indicated above. Then e-mail the completed paper to Kelly Grant at [kgrant@tulane.edu](mailto:kgrant@tulane.edu) by **October 1, 2017**. All submissions must be in Microsoft Word.
* Personal and institutional identification should be removed from the body of the paper. Identify yourself and your institution only on the cover page. Submissions will be anonymously reviewed.
* A cover page is required with the title of the paper and identifying information for each author: name, institutional affiliation, address, phone and fax numbers, and e-mail address.  
  For your research to be considered for the Richard D. Irwin Distinguished Paper Award, you must submit a completed paper rather than a proposal by the submission deadline, **October 1, 2017**.
* Submitted papers should not have been previously presented or published, nor should they be under consideration or accepted for presentation elsewhere.

**FBD Statement of Academic Integrity**

Your paper should not have been previously published or previously presented at FBD. Please indicate to the Program Chair if your paper is currently under submission to another FBD association. If your paper is later accepted by another FBD association, it is your responsibility to notify the appropriate Program Chairs.

* Upon receiving notice of acceptance, all authors and co-authors are expected to **pre-register for** **ABC-SWUS and FBD** at http://www.fbdonline.org.

**Deadline: Papers and proposals must be received by** **October 1, 2017.**

**The deadline for submitting accepted papers to the Proceedings will be January 16, 2018.**

For information, contact Kelly Grant, Program Chair, via e-mail at kgrant@tulane.edu

# Prentice-Hall and Thomson Learning Outstanding Educator Awards

for

The Association for Business Communication

Southwestern United States

To be eligible for the award, recipients must have received the ABC-SWUS Outstanding Educator Award, must not be a previous recipient of either the Prentice-Hall or Thomson learning awards, must be a member of the Association for Business Communication, and must teach in the business communication discipline. This top tier ABC-SWUS award began in 2001 to honor outstanding educators in ABC-SWUS who were already recognized by our association. The award was sponsored by Prentice-Hall in 2001 and 2002, and by Thomson Learning in 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, and 2007. The award winner must also have been recently active in the association as evidenced by attendance at recent ABC-SWUS conferences. The award winners are listed below:

2015 Lucia Sigmar, Sam Houston State University

2014 Margaret S. Kilcoyne, Northwestern State University

2013 S. Ann Wilson, Stephen F. Austin State University

2012 Marcel M. Robles, Eastern Kentucky University

2011 Harold A. Hurry, Sam Houston State University

2010 Geraldine E. Hynes, Sam Houston State University

2009 Roger N. Conaway, Tecnológico de Monterrey,

campus San Luis Potosí

2008 Bobbye J. Davis, Southeastern Louisiana University

2007 Betty A. Kleen, Nicholls State University

2006 William Wardrope, University of Central Oklahoma

2005 Betty S. Johnson, Stephen F. Austin State University

2004 Marsha L. Bayless, Stephen F. Austin State University

2003 Lillian H. Chaney, University of Memphis

2002 Debbie DuFrene, Stephen F. Austin State University

2001 Anita Bednar, University of Central Oklahoma

The Association for Business Communication

Southwestern United States

# Outstanding Researcher and Teacher Awards

These awards were developed and first awarded in 1992 to recognize the accomplishments of the region’s members. Nominated candidates are evaluated by a panel of previous award winners. No awards were given in 1998, 2001, 2003, 2007 or 2013. The association began alternating the awards every other year in 2000 between researcher and teacher. In 2011 the Outstanding Teacher Award was renamed the Marlin C. Young Outstanding Teacher Award in honor and memory of his contributions to the ABC-SWUS organization. The recipients below each received a plaque and award of $100 (the award was changed to $200 in 2008):

2016 Geraldine Hynes, Outstanding Researcher Award

2015 Margaret Kilcoyne, Marlin C. Young Outstanding Teacher Award

2014 Lucia Sigmar, Outstanding Researcher Award

2013 Brenda Hanson, Marlin C. Young Outstanding Teacher Award

2012 Susan Evans Jennings, Outstanding Researcher Award

2011 S. Ann Wilson, Marlin C. Young Outstanding Teacher Award

2010Margaret Kilcoyne, Outstanding Researcher Award

2009 Harold Hurry, Outstanding Teacher Award

2008 Roger N. Conaway, Outstanding Researcher Award

2008 Geraldine E. Hynes, Outstanding Teacher Award

2006 Janna P. Vice, Outstanding Researcher Award

2005 Bobbye Davis, Outstanding Teacher Award

2004 William Wardrope, Outstanding Researcher Award

1. Marcel Robles, Outstanding Teacher Award

2002 Lillian H. Chaney, Outstanding Researcher Award

2002 Jeré Littlejohn, Outstanding Teacher Award

2000 William Sharbrough, Outstanding Researcher Award

1999 William Wardrope, Outstanding Teacher Award

1. Betty Kleen, Outstanding Researcher Award

1998 Robert Olney, Outstanding Teacher Award

1997 Al Williams, Outstanding Teacher Award

1996 Betty S. Johnson, Outstanding Researcher Award

1995 Marsha L. Bayless, Outstanding Researcher Award

1995 Anita Bednar, Outstanding Teacher Award

1994 Nelda Spinks, Outstanding Teacher Award

1993 Timothy W. Clipson, Outstanding Teacher Award

1993 F. Stanford Wayne, Outstanding Researcher Award

1992 Debbie D. DuFrene, Outstanding Researcher Award

1992 Beverly H. Nelson, Outstanding Teacher Award

The Association for Business Communication

Southwestern United States

# Irwin/McGraw-Hill Distinguished Paper Award Recipients

2017 Jon M. Croghan and Tammy L. Croghan

Improving Performance Evaluations: The Role of Intrapersonal Communication,

Message Strategy, and Age

2016 Melissa A. Barrett and Geraldine E. Hynes

*The Little Creamery that Could: Weathering a Crisis and Maintaining Brand Loyalty*

2015 Mark Leonard, Marsha Bayless, and Timothy Clipson

*Media Selection in Managerial Communication: Exploring the Relationship between Media*

*Preference, Personality, and Communication Aptitude*

2014 Kathryn S. O’Neill and Gary L. May

*Using Business Cases to Foster Critical Thinking*

2012 En Mao, Laura Lott Valenti, and Marilyn Macik-Frey

*Status Update – “We’ve Got a Problem” – Leadership Crisis Communication in the Age of Social*

*Media*

2011 Betty A. Kleen and Shari Lawrence

*Student Cheating: Current Faculty Perceptions*

2010 Jose Guadalupe Torres and Roger N. Conaway

*Adoption and Use of New Communication Technologies in an International Organization: An Exploratory Study of Text Messaging*

2009 Susan Evans Jennings, S. Ann Wilson, and Judith L. Biss

*Is Email Out and Text Messaging In? Communication Trends in Secondary and Post-Secondary Students*

2008 Debbie D. DuFrene, Carol M. Lehman, and Judith L. Biss

*Receptivity and Response of Students to an Electronic Textbook*

2007 William J. Wardrope and Roger N. Conaway

*Readability and Cultural Distinctiveness of Executives’ Letters Found in the Annual Reports of Latin American Companies*

2006 Janna P. Vice and Lana W. Carnes

*Professional Opportunities for Business Communication Students That Go Beyond the Course Grade*

2005 Lillian H. Chaney, Catherine G. Green, and Janet T. Cherry

*Trainers’ Perceptions of Distracting or Annoying Behaviors of Corporate Trainers*

1. Patricia Borstorff and Brandy Logan

*Argumentativeness and Verbal Aggressiveness: Organizational Life, Gender, and Ethnicity.*

2003 Ruth A. Miller and Donna W. Luce

*The Most Important Written, Oral, and Interpersonal Communication Skills Needed by Information Systems Staff During the Systems Development Process*

2002 Roger N. Conaway and William Wardrope

*Communication in Latin America: An Analysis of Guatemalan Business Letters*

2001 Annette N. Shelby and N. Lamar Reinsch Jr.

*Strategies of Nonprofessional Advocates: A Study of Letters to a Senator*

2000 Donna R. Everett and Richard A. Drapeau

*A Comparison of Student Achievement in the Business Communication Course When Taught in Two Distance Learning Environments*

1999 Susan Plutsky and Barbara Wilson

*Study to Validate Prerequisites in Business Communication for Student Success*

1998 Jose R. Goris, Bobby C. Vaught, and John D. Pettit Jr.

*Inquiry into the Relationship Between the Job Characteristics Model and Communication: An Empirical Study Using Moderated Progression Analysis*

1996 Beverly Little, J. R. McLaurin, Robert Taylor, and Dave Snyder

*Are Men Really from Mars and Women from Venus? Perhaps We’re All from Earth After All*

1995 Bolanie A. Olaniran, Grant T. Savage, and Ritch L. Sorenson

*Teaching Computer-mediated Communication in the Classroom: Using Experimental and Experiential Methods to Maximize Learning*

1994 James R. McLaurin and Robert R. Taylor

*Communication and its Predictability of Managerial Performance: A Discriminant Analysis*

1993 Mona J. Casady and F. Stanford Wayne

*Employment Ads of Major United States Newspapers*

1992 Betty S. Johnson and Nancy J. Wilmeth

*The Legal Implications of Correspondence Authorship*

1991 Rod Blackwell, Jane H. Stanford, and John D. Pettit Jr.

*Measuring a Formal Process Model of Communication Taught in a University Business Program: An Empirical Study*

# Conference Program

|  |
| --- |
| **ASSOCIATION FOR BUSINESS COMMUNICATION**  **SOUTHWESTERN UNITED STATES** |

**2016-2017 OFFICERS**

**President**                                           **Susan Evans Jennings,** Stephen F. Austin State University

**President-Elect and Program Chair**  **Laura Lott Valenti,** Nicholls State University

**Secretary/Treasurer** **Kelly Grant**, Tulane University

**Historian**                                           **Gerald Plumlee**, Southern Arkansas University

**Proceedings Editor**                           **Carol Wright,** Stephen F. Austin State University

**Immediate Past President** **Kathryn S. O’Neill,** Sam Houston State University

**Program and Paper Reviewers** **Debbie D. DuFrene**., Stephen F. Austin State University

**(The best paper was chosen by a** **Kelly Grant**, Tulane University

**subset of the reviewers.) Margaret S. Kilcoyne,** Northwestern State University

**Kathryn S. O’Neill,** Sam Houston State University

**Gerald Plumlee,** Southern Arkansas University

**Marcel Robles,** Eastern Kentucky University

**Laura Lott Valenti,** Nicholls State University

**Carol Wright,** Stephen F. Austin State University

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| --- |
| **Congratulations!**  **Recipient of the 2017 McGraw-Hill Education Distinguished Paper Award**  ***Improving Performance Evaluations: The Role of Intrapersonal Communication, Message Strategy, and Age***  **Jon M. Croghan**, Northwestern State University  **Tammy L. Croghan**, Northwestern State University  **Recipient of the 2017 Federation of Business Disciplines Outstanding Educator Award**  **Susan Evans Jennings**, Stephen F. Austin State University |

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| **ASSOCIATION FOR BUSINESS COMMUNICATION**  **SOUTHWESTERN UNITED STATES** |

**March 9, 2017 (Thursday)**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 8:00 a.m. – 8:30 a.m. | Riverview (CC) |

**ABC – SWUS and ABIS Joint Breakfast**

All ABC – SWUS and ABIS presenters and members are invited to enjoy a delicious breakfast

**ABC-SW or ABIS Association Name Badge REQUIRED for Attendance at Breakfast**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 8:30 a.m. – 10:00 a.m. Joint Session with ABIS | Riverview (CC) |

**ABC-SWUS and ABIS Joint Session - Best Paper Presentations**

Co-Session Chairs/Association Presidents: **Susan Evans Jennings and James (Skip) Ward**

**ABC-SWUS Best Paper:***Improving Performance Evaluations: The Role of Intrapersonal Communication, Message Strategy, and Age*

**Jon M. Croghan**, Northwestern State University

**Tammy L.. Croghan**, Northwestern State University

**ABIS Best Paper:**

*Towards Meeting the Need for Data Analytics Skills in Business Students*

**Lori Soule,** Nicholls State University

**Ronnie Fanguy,** Nicholls State University

**Betty Kleen,** Nicholls State University

**Ray Giguette,** Nicholls State University

**Sherry Rodrigue,** Nicholls State University

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 10:00 a.m. – 10:30 a.m. | Governor’s Hall 1 (SHCC) |

**FBD Coffee Break**

Please make plans to visit the exhibits for information on the latest books and newest educational

technologies. Let our exhibitors know how much we appreciate their presence and continued support!

Great Door Prize Drawings take place at **10:15 a.m.** in the Exhibit Area. *Must be present to win.*

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| **ASSOCIATION FOR BUSINESS COMMUNICATION**  **SOUTHWESTERN UNITED STATES** |

**March 9, 2017 (Thursday)**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 10:30 a.m. – 11:45 a.m. | Ouachita (CC) |

**Communication and Sustainability in a Globalized Context**

Session Chair: **Laura Lott Valenti,** Nicholls State University

*Engaging Students Globally Without Leaving the Comforts of Home*

**Margaret S. Kilcoyne**, Northwestern State University

**Begona Perez-Mira**, Northwestern State University

**Carmella Parker,** Northwestern State University

**Weiwen Liao**, Northwestern State University

**Connie Jones**, Northwestern State University

**Lynn Woods,** Northwestern State University

*It’s Not Easy Being Green: How Healthcare CEO Letters Discuss Corporate Social Responsibility Issues*

**Danica L Schieber**, Sam Houston State University

**Roger Conaway**, University of Texas, Tyler

**Brent D. Beal**, University of Texas, Tyler

*Making the Most of Your ABC Membership*

**Debbie DuFrene**, Stephen F. Austin State University

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 11:45 a.m. – 1:30 p.m. **Lunch on your own** |  |

**ABC – SWUS Executive Board Meeting and Luncheon**

**By Invitation Only (Riverview (CC))**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 1:30 p.m. – 3:00 p.m. | Ouachita (CC) |

**Evolved Communication Considerations**

Session Chair: **Sandra Bevill**,Arkansas State University

*What Communication Characteristics and Behaviors Make a Dynamic and Effective Leader?*

**Marcel Robles**, Eastern Kentucky University

*Responding to Negative Online Views: Defining Effective, Recurring Genre* *Characteristics and Strategies*

**Junhua Wang**, University of Minnesota

*Competing with Communication: Filling the Gap We’ve Created*

**Laura Lott Valenti**, Nicholls State University

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| **ASSOCIATION FOR BUSINESS COMMUNICATION**  **SOUTHWESTERN UNITED STATES** |

**March 9, 2017 (Thursday)**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 3:00 p.m. – 3:30 p.m. | Governor’s Hall 1 (SHCC) |

**FBD Coffee Break**

Please make plans to visit the exhibits for information on the latest books and newest educational technologies. Let our exhibitors know how much we appreciate their presence and continued support!

Great Door Prize Drawings take place at **3:15 p.m.** in the Exhibit Area. *Must be present to win.*

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 3:30 p.m. – 5:00 p.m. | Ouachita (CC) |

**Communication in Augmented Realities**

Session Chair: **Kelly Grant**,Tulane University

*The Effects of Work-Life Balance, Topic Avoidance, and Listening on the Relational Satisfaction of Marital and Cohabiting Couples*

**Leslie Ramos Salazar**, West Texas A&M University

**Thao Nguyen**, West Texas A&M University

*You Can Put the Oral Communication Class Online: One Perspective on the Process*

**Carol S. Wright**, Stephen F. Austin State University

**Timothy Clipson**, Stephen F. Austin State University

*We are in Crisis –Now What? How Should a Leader Communicate Crises Using Social Media?*

**Laura Lott Valenti**, Nicholls State University

**En Mao**, Nicholls State University

**Marilyn Macik-Frey**, Nicholls State University

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 5:30 p.m. – 7:00 p.m. | Governor’s Hall 1 (SHCC) |

**FBD Presidential Welcome Reception**

Everyone is invited to attend this FBD conference-wide social event. Visit with long-time friends and make new ones as you enjoy light appetizers and live music. A cash bar is available and a limited number of drink tickets will also be distributed. Stop by to relax and wind down from the day’s conference activities before heading out to other association and cultural events or dinner.

***ENJOY YOUR EVENING IN LITTLE ROCK!***

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| TBA | Meeting Room # |

**Poster Sessions**

*Business Dining: Putting your Best Fork Forward*

**Susan Evans Jennings**, Stephen F. Austin State University

**Judith Lynn Biss**, Stephen F. Austin State University

Business etiquette is often a skill found lacking in employees. This study looked at what students thought they knew about business dining and then at what they actually knew. Suggestions for teaching dining etiquette will also be presented.

*A Case of Adaptive Curriculum Design in a Senior-Level Business Management*

**Kayla Sapkota**, University of Arkansas at Little Rock

A case presentation on the innovative curricular adaptation of a senior-level, undergraduate business course to address identified student needs in the areas of basic research methods, career preparation and success, and career exploration; and discussion of resulting implications of the changes.

*A First Experience in a Business Communications Class: Video Clips That Help Students Establish a Continuum of Success*

**Victoria McCrady**, The University of Texas at Dallas

What is the power of a mirror neuron response? This natural response to nonverbal cues is one that can, in the context of the first class of the semester, help establish students' sense of themselves as moving forward along a continuum of success.

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| **ASSOCIATION FOR BUSINESS COMMUNICATION**  **SOUTHWESTERN UNITED STATES** |

**March 10, 2017 (Friday)**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 8:00 a.m. – 8:30 a.m. | Arkansas Ballroom (M) |

**ABC–SWUS and ABIS Joint Breakfast**

All ABC – SWUS and ABIS presenters and members are invited to enjoy a delicious breakfast

**ABC-SW or ABIS Association Name Badge REQUIRED for Attendance at Breakfast**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 8:30 a.m. – 10:00 a.m. | Ouachita (CC) |

**Innovative Instructional Methods**

Session Chair: **Debbie DuFrene**,Stephen F. Austin State University

*Using a Blackboard Learning Journal to Teach Interpersonal Skills to Business Students*

**Kathryn O'Neill**, Sam Houston State University

**Michael Power**, Sam Houston State University

*A Comparison of SME-Peer Learning Process*

**Margaret S. Kilcoyne**, Northwestern State University

**Marcia McLure Hardy**, Northwestern State University of Louisiana

**Begona Perez-Mira**, Northwestern State University of Louisiana

*Assessing the Business Communication Course: Students' Perceptions*

**Julie McDonald,** Northwestern State University

**Margaret Kilcoyne,** Northwestern State University

**Begona Perez-Mira**, Northwestern State University

**Tammy Croghan**, Northwestern State University

*Writing as a Soft Skill: Students’ Perspectives on a Revise and Resubmit Policy for Improving Written Communication Skills*

**Benjamin Garner**, University of North Georgia

**Nathan Shank**, Oklahoma Christian University

|  |  |
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| 10:00 a.m. – 10:30 a.m. | Governor’s Hall 1 (SHCC) |

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| **ASSOCIATION FOR BUSINESS COMMUNICATION**  **SOUTHWESTERN UNITED STATES** |

**March 10, 2017 (Friday)**

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| 10:30 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. ABC Business Meeting | Ouachita (CC) |

**ABC SWUS Business Meeting**

Presiding: **Susan Evans Jennings**, ABC-SWUS President

Stephen F. Austin State University

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| 12:00 p.m. – 1:30 p.m. **Lunch on your own** |  |

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| 1:30 p.m. – 3:00 p.m. | Ouachita (CC) |

**Using Communication to Prepare Students for Graduation & After**

Session Chair: **Gerald Plumlee,** Southern Arkansas University

*An Innovative Approach to Workplace Communication: Implementing Business Communication Skills beyond the Classroom*

**Ann Wilson**, Stephen F. Austin State University

**Marsha L. Bayless**, Stephen F. Austin State University

*Executive Perceptions of Communication and Other Soft Skills and Student Preparedness for the Workplace*

**Kristen King**,Eastern Kentucky University

**Marcel Robles**, Eastern Kentucky University

*An Examination of the Impact of McGraw-Hill’s Connect™*

**Lucia Sigmar**, Sam Houston State University

**Traci Austin**, Sam Houston State University

*Enhancing Professional Presence through Business Etiquette*

**Sandra H. Bevill,** Arkansas State University

**Karen McDaniel**, Arkansas State University

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| **ASSOCIATION FOR BUSINESS COMMUNICATION**  **SOUTHWESTERN UNITED STATES** |

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| 3:30 p.m. – 5:00 p.m. | Conway (CC) |

**FBD/ABC-SWUS *Choice Pick* Session**

**Communication Skill Sets in the Workforce**

Session Chair: **Carol Wright**, Stephen F. Austin State University

*Millennials as Managers: Exploring Communication Preferences*

**Ashley Hall**, Stephen F. Austin State University

*Relational Communication as a Factor in Past and Present Workforce Scheduling Research 1974-2015: The Impact on Employee Satisfaction and Organizational Commitment*

**Lorelei Amanda Ortiz**, St. Edward's University

**John Loucks**, St. Edward's University

*Building Experiential Models of Negative News Delivery through Digital Simulation*

**Robert Clapperton**, Ryerson University

*Leadership Institute: Lessons Learns and Methods to Increase Student**Engagement*

**Marilyn Young**, University of Texas, Tyler

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# Improving Performance Evaluations: The Role of Intrapersonal Communication, Message Strategy, and Age

## Jon M. Croghan

## Tammy L. Croghan

The task of managing, maintaining and improving superior/subordinate relationships within organizations is of significant concern to communication and business scholars. Job performance is the most widely studied criterion variable in the organizational behavior and human resource management. Most organizations have some form of performance evaluation for its employees. These performance evaluations can take many forms including performance feedback, pay administration, as well as counseling (Campbell, 1990; Latham & Wexley, 1981; Peck, 1984; Schmidt & Hunter, 1992). Peck (1984), in a survey of more than 500 corporations, found that 90 percent tied merit pay raises to performance evaluations; 87 percent and 79 percent used them to evaluate performance and set future goals, respectively. Pardue (1999) contends performance appraisals are “one of the most critical human resource issues in the 21st century.” Despite the prevailing perception that the evaluation process is one of the most efficient methods for increasing employee productivity and measuring employee progress, research suggests that many managers find the process ineffective or biased (Antonioni, 1994; Elvira & Zatzick 2002; Fernandez & Fernandez-Mateo 2006; Petersen & Saporta, 2004).

Much of the communicative research on the evaluation process address communication strategy issues related to employee performance improvement. For example, two of the eight steps recommended by the U. S. Office of Personnel Management (2016) in counseling sessions for improving employee performance relate to the supervisor’s communication strategy: “be positive; seek cooperation, not confrontation.” Most human resource training on the evaluation process is centered on the “moment of the meeting” communication. Unfortunately, limiting communication to the interpersonal interactions that occurs in the counseling meeting inhibits some of the possible benefits of these training sessions.

The emphasis on dyadic “moment of the meeting” communication has focused attention away from communication processes that should preceed the feedback or counseling sessions. The importance of intrapersonal communication is acknowledged by the United States Office of Personnel Management (2016) that posits that one of the six steps preceding a successful counseling session is “…practice saying what acceptable performance in the job would mean. Listen to yourself. If it doesn't make any sense to you, it won't make any sense to the employee.” Because both superiors and subordinates are likely to mentally rehearse their conversations with their coworkers, it is vital to the evaluation process to address intrapersonal communicative processes. Since supervisors need to get the most out of these performance appraisals and achieve a higher level of performance and/or behavioral change, new communication strategies and techniques need to be developed and implemented.

1. In addition to diversifying the organizational communication model to acknowledge the importance of intrapersonal communication, organizations must address the challenges of a changing workforce. The most significant demographic change facing organizations is an aging workforce. The population of the United States of America is graying: in 2014, 46 million Americans were over the age of 65 and the total number of older adults in the U.S. will double from 35 million of the total population in 2000 to 74 million by 2030. The American workforce is experiencing a similar phenomenon. In 2000, 13% of older adults (65 and older) continued to participate in the workforce, but that number will jump to 20.6% by 2030 (U. S. Census Bureau and the Federal Interagency Forum on Aging-Related Statistics, 2016). The "new normal" for the American workforce bears little resemblance to that of the late 20th century.

The current study analyzes the role of intrapersonal communication, message strategy, and age in performance evaluations. Specifically, this study examines the effects of superiors’ age and use of message strategy on the intrapersonal communication of subordinates during the period between the announcement of an “in the office meeting” and the actual meeting. It is expected that the type intrapersonal communication (i.e., imagined interactions) reported would help identify whether subordinates’ perceptions differ based on a manager’s age or message strategy use. To isolate individual variables, vignettes were posited that elicited an imagined interaction with a “25-year-old manager” or “65-year-old manager” using a neutral or verbally aggressive message strategy.

THEORY AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

Intrapersonal Communication/Imagined Interactions

Imagined interactions (IIs) may have promise in assisting researchers in better understanding intrapersonal communication within organizations. IIs offer insight into the motives, attitudes and expectations of subordinates upon their entrance into an “in the office” meeting. IIs allow for a new perspective from which to analyze the effects of age and use of verbal aggressiveness in the workplace.

Imagined interactions allow for focus on the subordinates’ “power” in determining the outcome of the meeting. The content of the subordinates’ imagined interaction could affect how prepared he or she is for the meeting. These factors can have a significant effect on the outcome of the meeting. In other words, IIs may give researchers a greater insight into the nuances of the power dynamic of the superior/subordinate relationship.

By using IIs to research the effect of age and verbal aggressiveness on the use of these IIs, an improved understanding of the superior/subordinate relationship can be gained. While human resource literature has considered the impact of demographic variables (Castilla, 2008; Greenhaus, Parasuraman, & Wormley, 1990; Igbaria & Baroudi, 1995) on performance evaluations, there has been a dearth of scholarship on age in this arena. This understanding of how the managers’ demographic characteristics (age) and communication methods affect employee thought and attitude would be useful for manager training programs.

Imagined interactions are defined as “a process of social cognition through which individuals imagine themselves in anticipated or recalled interactions with others” (Edwards, Honeycutt, & Zagacki, 1989). Proactive IIs involve visualizing or rehearsing interactions, which may occur in the future. Retroactive IIs involve rehashing previous interactions, judging them and determining what one should or should not have said (Honeycutt, 2003; Honeycutt, 2009). There are a number of other characteristics of IIs, in addition to the proactive or retroactive, including frequency (regularity of use of IIs), variety (number of differing people or topics addressed), discrepancy (comparison to actual interaction occurred or to occur), and valence (degree of emotional affect associated with II) addressed (Honeycutt, 2003; Honeycutt, 2009).

Proactive imagined interactions can increase communication competence by encouraging reflective thinking, enhancing communication sensitivity, and increasing confidence allowing individuals to plan strategies, reduce tension, and create opportunities for external input. While the proactive imagined interaction might not reflect the actual interaction, confidence is gained by having a general idea of what to expect. Retroactive IIs can increase understanding, strategizing, and reduced tensions letting individual's increase their awareness of underlying motives and ability to strategize about similar situations in the future. This leads to reducing tensions regarding possible similar interactions the individual expects to encounter (Honeycutt, 2003; Honeycutt, 2009).

Despite the value of using intrapersonal communication, like IIs, they tend to be underreported by individuals (Kroll-Messing, 1992). It is possible that this underreporting is more systematic and representative of the population overall. Specific contexts, like the one used in this study, may elicit more imagined interactions and raise the individuals’ awareness of the imagined interactions they experience.

Hypothesis 1: When given a specific context, individuals will have a greater frequency of imagined interactions.

Gender and Planning in Imagined Interactions

Edwards, Honeycutt and Zagacki (1989) focused on sex differences in IIs. They found that females had more frequent and more pleasant IIs than men. Therefore, women used more IIs when the situation was uncertain. Because of the prevalence of gender research within organizational communication contexts, this study can be particularly beneficial to the study of imagined interactions within the organizational setting.

Although imagined interaction research has previously focused predominately on personal rather than professional relationships, there is potential value in organizational research. Edwards et al. (1989) found that people reported having imagined interactions both with authority figures and with co-workers. Just as the personal relationship IIs could affect how we manage personal relationships, these inter-organizational IIs may affect organizational relationship management. One possible use of a greater insight into IIs within the organizational setting is an increased understanding of superior/subordinate relationships.

Message Strategy/Verbal Aggressiveness

Communication is defined as aggressive “if it applies force …symbolically in order, minimally, to dominate and perhaps damage, or maximally, to defeat and perhaps destroy the locus of attack” (Infante, 1987, p. 156). The model of aggressive communication developed by Infante (1987) consists of four communication traits--argumentativeness, assertiveness, verbal aggressiveness, and hostility.

The negative aggressive communication trait is hostility, a global communication trait and includes messages related to irritability, negativity, resentment, and suspicion (McCrae & Costa, 1999). While hostility has obvious communicative consequences, verbal aggressiveness has received more attention in communication literature. Infante and Wigley (1986) conceptualize verbal aggressiveness as an “attack on the self-concept of another person, instead of, or in addition to, the person’s position on a topic of communication” (p. 61). Verbal aggressiveness is the communication trait that measures an individual’s use of messages that transcends discourse about an issue and extends the attack to the other interlocutor(s).

Numerous studies have found a correlation between the biological sex of the respondent and verbal aggressiveness. Males are more likely to use verbally aggressive messages than women (Infante & Rancer, 1982; Infante & Wigley 1986; Kinney, Smith & Donzella, 2001; Nicotera & Rancer, 1994). Nicotera and Rancer (1994) found that perceptions of aggressive communication differed dramatically when the target was a member of the opposite sex.

There has been only limited research focused on verbal aggressiveness with regards to organizations. Infante and Gorden’s (1991) study centered on subordinates’ perceptions of consistently verbally aggressive supervisors. Subordinates who worked under superiors whom the subordinates perceived as verbally aggressive were less satisfied with their superior, their job, and the organization. These subordinates have lower levels of organizational commitment than other subordinates. The numerous negative consequences associated with verbal aggressiveness within the organizational environment, such as economic reprisals, were found to be effective in suppressing verbally aggressive behavior (Infante, Myers, & Buerkel, 1994).

Negative message strategies have several implications on the context of IIs within organizations. First, the subordinate’s perception of the superior will affect the type and tone of their imagined interaction. If the superior uses a verbally aggressive message, the subordinate is likely to view that superior in a negative way. Secondly, the fact that the subordinate feels pressure to avoid displaying verbal aggression will have an effect on their imagined interactions. Regardless of which type of imagined interactions takes place, the imagined interaction will inevitably have an effect on the subordinate’s attitude upon entering the meeting.

Finally, it is important to note that trait verbal aggression may affect the amount and extent of imagined interactions an individual has. Because imagined interactions are so closely related to the communication style of the individual experiencing them, a trait verbally aggressive individual, who is aware that their communication style must be suppressed, may reduce the frequency of his/her organizationally-related imagined interactions. This feeling of “communicative pointlessness” is likely to discourage the use of imagined interactions for trait verbally aggressive individuals. By extending the findings of Edwards et al. (1989) to the organizational setting, the following hypothesis is posed:

Hypothesis 2: High trait verbal aggressiveness will be negatively associated with the variety, frequency, valence and proactivity characteristics and positively associated with the discrepancy characteristic of imagined interactions.

Hypothesis 3: Women will have a greater number of imagined interactions and will rehearse more when the message is neutral or verbally aggressive than will men.

Group Membership/Age

While imagined interactions and message strategy are important considerations in organizational contexts, group membership (age, in particular) may also play a role in understanding of the interpersonal elements of business. The effect of age within the supervisor-subordinate relationship can be addressed within the context of Social Identity Theory. Social Identity Theory centers on how individuals are shaped by the social group in which they belong and where those groups fit into their societal structure (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Membership within a particular group provides a foundation for part of the individual’s self-concept.

Self-categorization based upon demographic characteristics (e.g. age, race, ethnicity, and gender) and their related objective physical traits (hair, skin color, body type) is probably the most easily discernible category upon which to base group membership as ingroup or outgroup (Harwood, Giles & Ryan, 1995). Age, while a demographic characteristic in the present (a 23-year-old is a member of the young adult ingroup), is a complex demographic phenomenon and poses unique research challenges in SIT because, unlike race or biological sex, individuals change group memberships involuntarily.

Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) is an extension of social identity theory and examines the communicative elements of social interaction (Giles, Coupland & Coupland, 1991). CAT is particularly useful because it considers the communication implications and the strategies that individuals use to express either individual or group preference. To examine an individual’s motivations and topic choice in a communicative endeavor, Coupland, Coupland, Giles, and Henwood (1988) modified previous CAT conceptions to consider the consequences of communicative behaviors in intergenerational communication. This modification increased the emphasis placed on motivation prior to the outset of the communicative interaction and the consequences for the receiver of the messages being sent.

The work on communication accommodation theory was important for the creation of the Stereotype Activation Scale. The Stereotype Scale has 8 superordinate categories (3 positive and 5 negative): Perfect Grandparent, John Wayne Conservative, Golden Ager, Severely Impaired, Shrew/ Curmudgeon, Despondent, Vulnerable, and Recluse. The total number of traits making up these superordinate categories is 97 (Hummert, Shaner, & Garstka, 1995). This scale tests for stereotypes associated with age.

The Stereotype Activation Model (SAM) in conjunction with Social Identity Theory allow for a fuller examination of communication strategies in relation to positive or negative stereotype activation. One trait that has been researched extensively in communication literature and falls logically into one superordinate category (shrew/curmudgeon) of SAM is verbal aggressiveness. An examination of verbal aggressiveness in the SAM might facilitate a more thorough understanding of both the role of this trait in stereotype activation, but also the role and importance of aggressive communication and communication overall in stereotype activation. The research on attributions which found that individuals receiving verbally aggressive messages from outgroup members tended to account for this type of message production as a negative personality disposition would also suggest that verbally aggressive messages would activate more negative stereotypes. Verbally aggressive messages, even in familial relationships, are deleterious to the relationship. The attributions of individuals receiving verbally aggressive messages from outgroup members to personality dispositions would also suggest that verbally aggressive messages would activate more imagined interactions than would age (Coupland, Coupland, Giles, & Henwood, 1988; Wiener, 1995; Williams & Giles, 1996; Williams & Nussbaum, 2001). On the basis of these findings the following hypotheses were posed and tested:

Hypothesis 4: High trait verbal aggressiveness will be negatively correlated with positive stereotypes and positively correlated with negative stereotypes.

Hypothesis 5: The message strategy will be more strongly associated with the activation of the functions of imagined interaction than will age (older or younger adult).

Hypothesis 6: Message strategy will have a greater effect on the activation of imagined interactions than will age.

METHODS

##### Participants

Questionnaires from 191 participants were collected from students enrolled in Business and Professional Communication courses at a large Southern University. Seventy-six (39.8%) of the respondents were male; 113 (59.2%) were female, while 2 (1.0%) participants did not respond to the item. The average age of the participants was 20.02 years of age (sd = 2.18). The ethnic composition of the participants was 79.1% European American, 7.9% African American, 2.6% Asian American,.1.0% Latino/a, .5% Native American (tribal membership not included), .5% reported as “other” (listed several ethnicities from the ethnicities included in the questionnaire), and 16 (8.4%) students did not respond to the question. Eighty-five percent of the participants had more than a year of work experience and 24.1% had more than five years of work experience.

Instrumentation

The instrumentation for this study was composed of five major parts. The first section was comprised of demographic questions about the research participants’ sex, age, enrollment status, country of origin, ethnicity, academic major, and state of residence.

The second section assessed the participant’s perceptions of the individual in the vignette using the Stereotype Scale (Hummert, Garstka, Shaner, & Strahm, 1994). The Stereotype Scale (1994) has 8 superordinate categories (3 positive and 5 negative) across age groups: Perfect Grandparent, John Wayne Conservative, Golden Ager, Severely Impaired, Shrew/ Curmudgeon, Despondent, Vulnerable, and Recluse. The total number of traits making up these superordinate categories is 97. To reduce the possibility of respondent fatigue, the 97 items from the Stereotype Activation Scale plus an additional item labeled verbally abusive were reduced to 12 positive and 12 negative traits. All superordinate categories were represented but the aggregate positive and negative stereotypes consisted of the much smaller item pool. Because some superordinate categories had only one item representing them, no statistical tests were completed on Perfect Grandparent, John Wayne Conservative, Liberal Matriarch/Patriarch, Severely Impaired, Shrew/Curmudgeon, Despondent, Vulnerable, and Recluse. The aggregate scores for positive and negative stereotype activation were averaged across all twelve items utilizing a 5-point Likert scale. The negative stereotype aggregate had a reliability coefficient of (.73) on the 12-items that measured this construct. The positive stereotype aggregate had a reliability coefficient of (.85) on the 12-items measuring this construct.

The third section of this study assessed the participant’s trait verbal aggressiveness using a modified version of Infante and Wigley’s (1986) Verbal Aggressiveness Scale consisting of the 10 positively worded items. For the current study the Verbal Aggressiveness Scale had a reliability of .85.

The fourth section of the instrument measured the characteristics of imagined interactions using a modified version of the Survey of Imagined Interactions (Honeycutt, 2003). The participants completed the twenty-six item scale that measured discrepancy, variety, frequency, valence, and proactivity on the 7-point Likert scale. The reliability coefficients for characteristics of IIs of were discrepancy (.77), variety (.80), frequency (.76), valence (.74), and proactivity (.72).

The final section of the questionnaire asked the participants to imagine themselves in a scenario where two independent variables (age and message strategy) that research suggests effect imagined interaction activation were randomized. The randomization of these 2 independent variables required the construction of 4 separate scenarios. All participants had a vignette in which the message strategy was either verbally aggressive or neutral. Each vignette also had the age of the supervisor as either 25 years-old or 65 years-old. After the vignette, the participants completed a 30-item scale that measured the rehearsal, catharsis, conflict, and communication satisfaction functions of IIs on the 7-point Likert scale adapted from the Survey of Imagined interactions (Honeycutt, 2003). These 30 items also included the items measuring the frequency characteristics because it had been hypothesized that message strategy would affect it. The reliability coefficients for the functions of IIs were rehearsal (.84), catharsis (.84), conflict (.86), and communication satisfaction (.85) The frequency characteristic of IIs had a reliability of .85.

RESULTS

The first hypothesis considers the role of context in eliciting imagined interactions. This hypothesis was tested by comparing the number of imagined interactions that participants had in general with the frequency of imagined interactions after getting a specific context for which they had to prepare. Participants had more frequent imagined interactions in response to specific contexts (M = 5.29, SD = 1.06) than the participants did in general (M = 4.20, SD = 1.20; t = 69.08, p < .001, d = .95).

The second hypothesis asserts that there should be a negative relationship between high trait verbal aggressiveness with the variety, frequency, valence, and proactivity characteristics and a positive relationship between high trait verbal aggressiveness and the discrepancy characteristic of IIs. This hypothesis was partially supported. A regression analysis was conducted in which verbal aggressiveness regressed on the respective II characteristics. Though high trait verbal aggressiveness was negatively associated with variety at a statistically significant level (B = -.46, t = -6.66, p < .001) and approaching significance for proactivity (B = -.15, t = -1.89, p = .06), the imagined interaction characteristic of valence was not statistically significant (B = -.11, t = -1.75). Though it was hypothesized that frequency would be negatively related to high trait verbal aggressiveness, it was positively associated (B = .19, t = 2.51, p = .01) at a statistically significant level. The variance-inflation factors for all variables were significantly less than the standard cutoff of 4.0 indicating no multicollinearity among the II characteristics as predictor variables.

Hypothesis 3 measured the relationship between biological sex and both the frequency and rehearsal functions of imagined interactions regardless of the message strategy. Male respondents had less frequent imagined interactions (M = 5.02, SD = 1.09) than the female participants (M = 5.47, SD = 1.01; t = 2.93, p < .01). Males also rehearsed less (M = 5.05, SD = 1.21) after the scenario than did the female participants (M = 5.40, SD = .94; t = 2.11, p = .02).

The fourth hypothesis measured the correlation between stereotype activation and verbal aggressiveness. The hypothesis contends that there should be a negative correlation between high trait verbal aggressiveness and positive stereotype activation and a positive correlation between high trait verbal aggressiveness and negative stereotype activation. The hypothesis was supported. The correlation between high verbal aggression and positive stereotype activation is -.13 (p = .04). The correlation between high verbal aggression and negative stereotype activation is .24 (p < .001).

Hypothesis 5 assumes a stronger relationship between message strategy and activation of the functions of IIs than the relationship between age and the activation of the functions of IIs. This hypothesis was supported. A 2 X 2 MANOVA measuring the effect of age (25-yr-old or 65-yr-old) and message strategy (neutral message and verbally aggressive message) on the functions of IIs revealed a significant multivariate effect for message strategy, but not age (F(4,184) = 5.44, p < .001, Wilks’ Λ = .894; F(4,184) = 1.21, p = .30, Wilks’ Λ = .97) respectively (Table 1). A Bartlett test of sphericity for this MANOVA was significant and revealed that the multivariate analysis was appropriate to use (Bartlett sphericity test (9) = 93.38, p < .001). There was also a difference between message strategy and age on 2 of the 4 functions of imagined interactions. For communication satisfaction, the message strategy versus age was F = 10.57, p < .01; F = 3.81, p = .07, respectively, and for conflict the message strategy versus age was F = 17.21, p < .001; F = 2.70, p =.10, respectively. The other functions of IIs (catharsis and rehearsal) were not significant for either message strategy or age.

Hypothesis 6 assumes a larger effect size for message strategy than age on the activation of the functions of IIs. The effect size of message strategy (ὴ2 = .11) on activation of function of IIs was larger than age (ὴ2 = .03) (Table 1). According to Cohen (1988), these ὴ2 levels indicate that message strategy had a moderate effect on activation of imagined interaction functions; age had only a small effect on the activation of the functions of imagined interactions.

Table 1

Multivariate Analysis of Variance of Message Strategy and Age on Imagined Interaction Activation

### Multivariate Tests

Independent Variable df F p eta² power Wilks’ Λ

Message Strategy 4/184 5.44 .000 .11 .97 .89

Age 4/184 1.12 .30 .03 .38 .97

### Message Strategy

Dependent Variable df F p eta² power

Catharsis 1 1.42 .24 .01 .22

Conflict 1 17.07 .000 .08 .98

Rehearsal 1 .27 .61 .00 .08

Communication Satisfaction 1 9.37 .00 .05 .86

Age

Dependent Variable df F p eta² power

Catharsis 1 .44 .51 .00 .10

Conflict 1 2.68 .10 .01 .37

Rehearsal 1 .15 .70 .00 .07

Communication Satisfaction 1 3.37 .07 .02 .45

DISCUSSION

Little previous research has examined the role of aggressive communication and age on imagined interaction activation. The primary focus of this investigation was to examine the effects of message strategy and age on imagined interaction activation. The results of this investigation provide some valuable insight into the role of perceptions of aggressive communication, age, and IIs. The research implications fall into two areas; 1) characteristics and experiences of the participants; and 2) the relationship between message strategy and age on IIs.

Characteristics and Experiences of the Participants

Individuals underreported their use of imagined interactions. Also, many imagined interactions may be contextually based. Specific contexts forced individuals, even those who in general have very few imagined interactions, to use imagined interactions to fulfill organizational obligations. Within the organizational environment, this means that the context that supervisors set forth for their employees may have a significant impact on the number of imagined interactions their employees’ experience.

This investigation found partial support for the impact of high trait verbal aggressiveness on perpetuating more “negative” imagined interactions. The results from this study support the idea that high trait verbal aggressiveness adversely affects relational dynamics as individuals high in verbal aggressiveness have less pleasant imagined interactions.

This study found that biological sex plays a role in the use of imagined interactions, especially planning. Women had more frequent imagined interactions than men and utilized imagined interactions for rehearsal. Women seem to use imagined interactions in organizational settings to rehearse more than their male counterparts. The idea that women utilize the rehearsal function of imagined interactions more frequently than men within organizations may be related to the concept of a “glass ceiling”. This mindset may lead women to more closely analyze their upcoming interactions than male counterparts to prepare more thoroughly and allow for contingency planning. The “glass ceiling” mindset may push women to utilize the rehearsal function in order to feel adequately prepared for the upcoming communication event.

Relationship between Message Strategy and Age on IIs.

The results of this investigation supported previous research that trait verbal aggressiveness perpetuated negative stereotype activation and suppressed positive stereotype activation. The results supported the negative consequences of high trait verbal aggressiveness on group dynamics including in-group dynamics.

While an individual's age can be salient in many situations, message strategy should be more important in organizational contexts. Verbally aggressive messages had a stronger relationship than did age on the activation of functions of IIs. Hostile communicative behaviors are deleterious to an individual’s orientation and conceptions of her/his communicative partner.

Verbally aggressive messages should have a greater impact on the activation of IIs than age. Therefore, verbally aggressive messages should have a greater effect size on the activation of negative stereotypes than will age. This hypothesis was partially supported. Message strategy (with a moderate effect size) had a larger effect size than age (which was not statistically significant and had a small effect size). These findings found that communicative behaviors play an important role in imagined interaction activation. Differences in message strategy accounted for approximately 11 percent of the variation in imagined interaction activation.

Conclusion

The findings from this study have two important implications. First, the type of message strategies that individuals choose to employ can influence the subsequent encounter. The implication for organizational communication is that message strategy does count. Verbally aggressive messages often increase dissatisfaction among subordinates, leading to withdrawal or retaliation. This could result is a reduction in production and an increase in employee turnover. The knowledge of the relationship between hostile communication and IIs can be useful in fostering more satisfying organizational communicative interactions, especially those related to the performance evaluation.

Additionally, education and training in intrapersonal communication, like imagined interactions, would assist both employees and the organization as a whole. For employees, intrapersonal communication could be an invaluable tool for managing inter-organizational communication and relationships. For organizations, intrapersonal communication could assist organizational efforts to improve their employees’ communication abilities both within the organization and with external stakeholders.

Organizations spend millions of dollars each year on communication training. These expenditures generally have one fatal flaw, they only focus on the actual communicative interactions. The results of this study suggest that understanding the role of intrapersonal communication within organizations could offer businesses new insights into their employees as individuals as well as the organization as whole. In the global economy, organizations need to adapt or die. Intrapersonal communication, like other types of communication, and message strategy are essential for the health of any business.

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# Engaging Students Globally Without Leaving the Comforts of Home

## Margaret S. Kilcoyne

## Begona Perez-Mira

## Carmella Parker

## Weiwen Liao

## Connie Jones

## Lynn Woods

Abstract

To meet the needs of and preparing our graduates to enter the 21st century business environment higher education institutions have realized that global learning is now an essential part of the knowledge and skill sets needed by business graduates. Global competency is no longer a luxury. Universities and colleges must strive to provide opportunities and experiences that prepare their business students to succeed in the global economy.

This article describes how a regional higher education institution has implemented active learning projects and assessments that integrate global competencies in core and elective courses. Students can complete these projects and assessments without leaving the comforts of their homes, the campus, or the U.S. and still get a global experience.

# It’s Not Easy Being Green: How healthcare CEO letters discuss corporate social responsibility issues

## Danica L Schieber

## Roger Conaway

## Brent D. Beal

CEO letters are used as a way to share earnings information with varied audiences, and give insight into the companies’ organizational practices. With the current focus on sustainability, many companies are searching for ways to reduce their carbon footprint and to become more sustainable. While some studies have focused on the tone and structure of CEO letters (Conaway and Wardrope, 2010), very few studies have focused on companies’ corporate social responsibility (CSR) and sustainability efforts, and how that is represented in CEO letters. CSR, as originally defined by Bowen (1953), as “It refers to the obligations of businessmen [and business-women] to pursue those policies, to make those decisions, or to follow those lines of action which are desirable in terms of the objectives and values of our society.” This study analyzes the words and phrases used in healthcare CEO letters that represent how the companies view sustainability. Search terms gleaned from previous studies, such as Beal’s (2014) book Corporate Social Responsibility, include: green, environment, sustainability, responsible management.

Our approach to this project will be to use data science in management. According to George et al (2016), data science is an interdisciplinary field that combines statistics, data mining, machine learning, and analytics to understand and explain how we can generate analytical insights and prediction models from structured and unstructured big data.

Methodology- We are using the language parsing tool in the Wharton Research Data Services (WRDS) database from the University of Pennsylvania to search for words and phrases in CEO letters that may indicate discussion or mention of sustainability. Drawing on stakeholder theory and systems theory, and using the CSR pyramid, we will analyze words or phrases that may indicate how the CEO of the company wants the company to be portrayed. We will organize our findings according to theme, and discuss how the language used represents the healthcare companies.

Implications for business and teaching will be discussed. Our findings may be used to help students better understand how CEO’s in healthcare present sustainability information.

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# Making the Most of Your ABC Membership

## Debbie DuFrene

Background

Many ABC-FBD attendees are members of the Association for Business Communication, while others are not. Even among those who are members, many have limited knowledge of the benefits, services, and opportunities for participation in the association.

Purpose

The purpose of this presentation is to provide an overview of ABC, focusing on member benefits and opportunities.

ABC Mission and Vision

The Association for Business Communication (ABC) is an international, interdisciplinary organization committed to advancing business communication research, education, and practice. The Association for Business Communication (ABC) seeks to become the foremost authority in the field of business communication by promoting excellence in teaching, increasing knowledge within the discipline, enriching business communication classes to better prepare students, and improving the quality of communication in the workplace. Because we recognize the importance of globalization, the Association seeks to continue to expand its international membership as well as its international point of view. To reach all members, we plan to incorporate many technologies for enhanced communication and provision of the services they most need.

The values and responsibilities of the Association are outlined in a code of professional ethics adopted in October 2005. The priorities of the Association are detailed in the strategic plan adopted in February 2015.

Strategic Goals

ABC’s three primary goals for the next five years (2015−2020) are to

1. Strengthen the discipline of business communication.

2. Manage and expand our vibrant, diverse ABC community in support of our common goal: excellence in business communication research, pedagogy, and practice.

3. Bolster ABC’s connections with workplace professionals.

Officers and Directors

The Association for Business Communication is governed by a Board of Directors composed of 12 members at large, a vice president from each region, the immediate past president, a president, a first vice president, a second vice president, and the Executive Director of the Association.

The Executive Committee is composed of the immediate Past President, the President, the First Vice President, the Second Vice President, and the Executive Director of the Association. The Executive Committee is responsible for carrying out the wishes of the Board.

The Regional Vice Presidents are responsible for representing the best interests of members from their regions at all meetings of the Board and for fostering the objectives of the Association among members from their regions. Directors at Large represent the interests of the entire membership.

Publications

ABC publishes two quality peer-reviewed journals:

• Business and Professional Communication Quarterly (BPCQ) publishes scholarship that advances knowledge about business communication pedagogy in both academic and workplace settings. Articles in BPCQ present a variety of theoretical, applied, and practical approaches and perspectives, including program design and assessment, the impact of technology, global and multicultural issues, qualitative and quantitative research on classroom teaching, and case studies of best practices.

• The International Journal of Business Communication (IJBC) publishes manuscripts that contribute to knowledge and theory of business communication as a distinct, multifaceted field approached through the administrative disciplines, the liberal arts, and the social sciences. Accordingly, IJBC seeks manuscripts that address all areas of business communication including but not limited to business composition/technical writing, information systems, international business communication, management communication, and organizational and corporate communication. In addition, IJBC welcomes submissions concerning the role of written, verbal, nonverbal and electronic communication in the creation, maintenance, and performance of profit and not for profit business.

Awards

ABC sponsors a number of awards for members:

• ABC Rising Star Award

• Fellow of the Association

• Bernadine P. Branchaw Spirit of ABC Award

• ABC-SE Clarice Brantley Service Award

• Distinguished Member Award

• Meada Gibbs Outstanding Teacher-Scholar Award

• Kitty O. Locker Outstanding Researcher Award

• Francis W. Weeks Award of Merit

• Graduate Student Travel Scholarships

• Ambassador Travel Award

• Award for Excellence in Communication Consulting

• Distinction in the Practice of Diversity and Inclusion Award

• Pearson Award for Innovation in Teaching with Technology

• Business Communication Impact Award

• Pearson Award for Innovation in Teaching with Technology

• Business Communication Impact Award

Several publication awards are also given annually:

• Distinguished Publication on Business Communication

• Outstanding Article in the International Journal of Business Communication

• Outstanding Article in Business and Professional Communication Quarterly

• Outstanding Dissertation

Members may also apply to receive the following research grants:

• C.R. Anderson Research Grants

• Marty Baker Graham Research Awards

Student Writing Contest

ABC invites undergraduate students to enter an annual Student Writing Contest by submitting a written response to a case scenario. The writer of the winning entry will receive a plaque and a $150 award at the annual ABC conference. The winning student's instructor will also be recognized at the annual conference. The Student Competition Committee is responsible for the Student Writing Contest.

Committees and Special Interest Groups

Members are encouraged to participate on one or more of the following committees:

• Academic Environment

• Business Practices

• Conference Procedures

• C.R. Anderson Research Fund

• Diversity and Inclusion

• Employment Opportunities

• Graduate Studies

• International Issues

• Marketing and Membership

• Modern Language Association Liaison (MLA)

• Nominating

• Publications Board

• Research

• Student Competition

• Teaching

• Technology

• Undergraduate Studies

• Finance Committee (ad hoc)

• National Communication Association Liason (ad hoc)

• Proceedings Editorial Review Board (ad hoc)

A number of special interest groups are also available for member participation:

• Business Writing and Speaking Centers

• Community College

• Consulting

• Intercultural Communication

• MBA

• Rhetoric

• Teaching with Technology

Membership

Membership fees are based on a sliding income scare and are determined by reported annual income as follows:

• Under 24,999: $25 US. Receives electronic access to the International Journal of Business Communication and Business and Professional Communication Quarterly. Print subscription available for $35.

• $25,000 - $49,999: $40 US: Receives electronic access to the International Journal of Business Communication and Business and Professional Communication Quarterly. Print subscription available for $60.

• $50,000 - $79,999: $80 US. Receives electronic access to the International Journal of Business Communication and Business and Professional Communication Quarterly. Print subscription available for$100.

• $80,000 - $109,999. $110 US. Receives electronic access to the International Journal of Business Communication and Business and Professional Communication Quarterly. Print subscription available for$130.

• 110,000 and above. $130 US: Receives electronic access to the International Journal of Business Communication and Business and Professional Communication Quarterly. Print subscription available for$150.

Student fees are $30 a year, which includes registration fee waiver for the annual conference. Fees for retired members are $25 annually with electronic journal access, or $30 to receive print copies.

Members enjoy a number of valuable benefits:

• Subscription to ABC's two publications:

o The International Journal of Business Communication, devoted to theory and cutting edge research in business communication

o Business and Professional Communication Quarterly, devoted to the practice and teaching of business communication

• Automatic membership in one of ABC's nine geographic regions at no additional cost. Regional activities and meetings allow you to participate in professional activities at the local level, and give you an opportunity to form regional networks of educators and practitioners with common interests and goals.

• Affiliation opportunities in any of ABC's interest groups, which provides professional development and networking opportunities focusing on a particular academic interest or issue.

• Members-only discounts.

• Members-only savings on registration for ABC conferences. Members may attend any conference for any region.

• Members-only areas of the ABC web site, where you can search the electronic membership directory, review teaching materials and other resources produced by ABC interest groups, and more.

• Access to the ABC job board to post or access available business communication jobs.<br />• Networking with colleagues through forums and private ABC Facebook group.<br />• Unique opportunities to make valuable contacts with business communication educators and practitioners and to make valuable contributions to the field by participating in ABC publications, conventions, and committees.

To access membership information on the ABC website, visit http://www.businesscommunication.org/page/membership<br />

# What Communication Characteristics and Behaviors Make a Dynamic and Effective Leader?

## Marcel Robles

Purpose of the Study  
In past and present businesses and political arenas, many top leaders have portrayed outstanding communication skills, resulting in favor to the public or high demand of a product or service throughout the country or even the world.

If a business leader properly communicates and delivers a presentation well, the result will enhance the value of the firm in tangible and intangible ways. Generally top management, or the dominant figure (e.g., CEO, Manager), is considered the leader in the business organization. These leaders should have excellent communication skills to sell their ideas or products, to hire and retain good employees, to satisfy their shareholders and make the public and stakeholders content. Therefore, it is crucial to determine characteristics behind their excellent communication skills.   
Hence, this research is undertaken to discover the factors or characteristics associated with excellent communication in leaders. To accomplish this task, the researcher studied the communication characteristics of some of the top business and political leaders followed by a survey-interview among five business executives.

Statement of the Problem  
Leadership capacity is a vital quality in today’s world. Leadership is equally important in both business and politics. Much like a political leader, many business people have exceptional communication skills. Such people possess special characteristics that put them among the best leaders in the world. Due to their abilities, such as convincing people of something, effective leaders are able to lead the largest entities in the world. For example, Steve Jobs (Apple), Warren Buffet (Berkshire Hathaway), Bill Gates (Microsoft), Jeff Bezos (Amazon), and Marissa Ann Mayer (Yahoo) are several of the popular leaders in today’s business world. Political and/or religious figures include John F. Kennedy, Abraham Lincoln, Winston Churchill, and Martin Luther King, Jr. When thinking of these leaders, one might ask what common communication characteristics they possess that commands their audiences’ attention for long periods of time and what attributes attract people so strongly.

Research Objectives  
The purpose of this research was to discover the communication qualities and behaviors of ten successful leaders. To determine effective communication factors in these leaders, this research encompassed the following research objectives:

1. To gain insight into ten of the world’s top business, political, and/or religious leaders, past and present.  
2. To discuss the communication traits of these top leaders.  
3. To determine the communication skills that make these leaders’ effective speakers.

Method and Procedures Used  
Ten leaders (i.e., Steve Jobs; Warren Buffet; Marissa Ann Mayer; Rupert Murdock; President Abraham Lincoln; President John F. Kennedy; President Ronald Reagan; Sir Winston Churchill; Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr.; Nelson Mandela) were selected for analysis of their unique communication skills. These ten leaders were selected by googling various internet sites for the greatest orators, business leaders, and political leaders over the past few hundred years.   
The primary data source for this study was a hybrid interview-survey aimed at identifying associations between important and historical figures and the qualities they possess. The interview-survey included both qualitative and quantitative questions and included segments that were in person, as well as results that were collected electronically.

Findings and Analysis   
This study has been divided into two parts: (1) secondary data analysis of ten successful leaders and their communication skills, and (2) primary data analysis among five business executives’ perspectives regarding characteristics of excellent communication skills.

Summary and Conclusions  
Effective communication is one of the most important characteristics evident in top leaders. Communication skills are required for business and political leaders to maintain good relationships with the public, press, and employees. Lack of good communication skills in top leaders will inevitably create a problem with the public or media and even with the employees. Business leaders such as Warren Buffett and Bill Gates did not have good communication skills at an earlier age. However, through practice, their communication skills increased exponentially in later years. Now their charismatic communication skills attract millions of people worldwide.

Steve Jobs’ communication skills were so strong that he could demand the audience’s attention for long periods during his presentations. Jobs was known for communicating in a simple way without using any jargon or technical words, and by giving examples, demonstrating, and storytelling. He spoke normally in an informal, relaxed, and comfortable manner; and he never ceased working to enhance his communication skills.

Respondents had a strong belief that the ability to speak publicly with confidence, authenticity, and ease are important to building communication skills. Good listening, business knowledge, and awareness of the capacity of the audience are also skills needed to enhance the communication capacity of business leaders. Several conclusions and recommendations are made in the research paper.

Implications  
Based upon the findings and analysis of the primary and secondary research, the recommendations are made for business leaders to achieve excellence in their communication skills. In college business communication classes, instructors can emphasize the recommendations from this study. Further, current business and political/religious leaders can use the suggestions to enhance their communication skills with their employees and the public.

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# Responding to Negative Online Views: Defining Effective, Recurring Genre Characteristics and Strategies

## Junhua Wang

With the advancement of consumer-empowering technologies, consumer online reviews are becoming a powerful agent to transform consumer decision making. Research on online reviews attracted much scholarly attention in the past decade because of the positive relationship between review valence and sales (Ghose & Ipeirotis 2011). Cockrum (2011) maintains that the viral power of online reviews exerts much more influence on consumers’ decision making than traditional forms of advertising, because online reviews are perceived to be more credible and trustworthy than traditional marketing communications (Akehurst 2009; Flanagin & Metzger 2013). Cross-disciplinary research on online reviews has been conducted in fields such as marketing, economics, tourism, computing and information sciences, and language and discourse studies; however, most of the current research focuses on examining online review itself, instead of strategies in responding to online reviews, especially negative online reviews. While quick guidelines exist on how to respond to negative online reviews (Guffey & Loewy 2014), this new genre has not been systematically addressed in academic literature. In the field of business and professional communication, little research has been conducted to examine the rising genre of consumer online reviews; even less has examined the rhetorical strategies for adjustment messages that manufacturers or service providers could adopt to publicly respond to negative online reviews. This study seeks to address this crucial gap through examining negative online reviews and company responses gathered from the e-commerce and online review websites in order to recommend effective adjustment strategies to respond to negative online reviews.

A literature review was conducted to explore theories on the Internet genre and the public online context that reconfigures genre settings to which new genres respond. The reconceptualization of genre defines genres as “typified rhetorical actions based in recurrent situations” (Miller, 1984); the new perspective puts emphasis on a rhetorical situation perceived as a combination of purpose, audience, and social context (Coe & Freedman, 1998). This social perspective treats genre as typified social action responding to social situation instead of conventional formulas. Because genre is situated in recurring social situations and the situations are not exactly the same as previous ones, when “contexts change over time, genre, too, must change over time” (Devitt, 2004, p. 89). As Miller (1984) maintained, “Genres change, evolve, and decay” (p. 163). Berkenkotter and Huckin (1995) also noted, genres are always sites of contention between stability and change” (p. 6). The genre change perspective enables us to have access to the rhetorical contexts and allows us to examine the relationship between genre and rhetorical situations. As Devitt (2004) posited, since genre mediates between text and context, genres are developed to fulfill new functions in changing situations and “typically show marks of the contexts with which the genre interacts” (p. 53); as a result, “contextual changes can result in new genres developing or in old genres developing new qualities” (p. 101). Devitt (2004) also maintained that the relationship between genre and situation is reciprocal and dynamic, and “Genre and situation are reciprocal, mutually constructed, and integrally interrelated” (p. 25). That is, a change of the rhetorical situation calls for a new act that reflects the contextual changes in genre’s textual features. The social understanding of genre and the genre change perspective provide a theoretic foundation to understand how the new public online context shapes and reshapes a rhetor’s way of interpreting and reacting to a recurrent rhetorical situation—publicized negative online reviews. Current literature on online reviews (esp. negative ones) and approaches of responding to negative reviews were also examined.

Following the literature review, 40 recent business responses to online negative reviews were gathered from multiple e-commerce and online review websites such as Amazon (various consumer products), Tripadvisor (hotels), Yelp (restaurants), and Angie’s List (service). To facilitate the understanding of the responses, 40 corresponding negative online reviews that companies respond to were collected. The reviews and responses were selected across multiple industries and products, with the reviews being categorized into four major categories following the research findings of Sundaram et al. (1998): bad product performance, failing problem recovery, unfair pricing policies, and unfriendly/low expertise customer service personnel.

A genre-based rhetorical analysis of the selected responses were conducted to analyze the online discourse community context and specific communicative functions/purposes that enable and construct the new online genre—adjustment response to negative online reviews, followed by identifying the new genre’s recurrent characteristics in comparison with traditional offline adjustment messages’ genre conventions. Final recommendations on effective genre structure to respond to negative online reviews were provided at the end of the research.

This study responds to the need to perform systematic analyses in order to facilitate the production of effective responses to negative online reviews (Park & Allen 2013; Sparks & Bradley 2014). From an academic standpoint, the research will advance theoretical understanding of new genre characteristics of adjustment messages that respond to online negative reviews; from a practical perspective, the current research will provide constructive feedback to companies responsible for the dissatisfying consumption demonstrated in negative online reviews.

# Competing with Communication: Filling the Gap We’ve Created

## Laura Lott Valenti

Keywords: flipped classroom, learning quality, classroom communication, learning platforms, learning activity, digital learning, active learning, higher education

ABSTRACT

Students today have access to a variety of resources that facilitate and enhance the learning experience. Online learning management systems, like Moodle and Blackboard, support course instruction through technology while providing remote access to teaching resources. Instructors can post PowerPoint presentations, relevant journal articles and website links for students to access, refer to and share. Better enhancing class participation and group discussion exists through discussion boards, forums, wikis, and workshops that integrate peer reviews and learning cohorts with traditional teaching. Tying industry to academia can be facilitated through these learning management systems with their ability to communicate relevant course information within minutes, like featuring Ted Talks followed up with a choice poll in Moodle to quickly gauge student learning or facilitate decision-making. There are intercultural effects, too. Creating global communication networks is the result of online degree programs that have maximized the use of learning resources where students feel satisfied with the capabilities of using their toolbox to establish communication and enjoy the cultural exchange of information (Çiftçi, 2016).

In a digital, technology-driven marketplace, reading the course textbook has become irrelevant to the student. There is little research that assesses students’ perceptions of textbooks but the creation and use of software like LearnSmart, McGraw Hill’s interactive study tool that directly refers to the published text, combats the textbook issue by adaptively assessing skill and knowledge levels by tracking weakness and confidence levels of concepts. Bragging rights of this platform include a 69.8% pass rate compared to 57.3% in test bank question assignments and a 10% retention rate over the same control group (McGraw Hill, 2015). The concern is that with all of these learning assets students have too many options and resources to choose from that their learning experience becomes diluted. Are we crippling students inadvertently?<br />Student attention rates decrease after first 10 minutes of class and remember only about 20% of the lecture material (Gilboy, Heinerichs & Pazzaglia, 2014). Active learning requires students’ thinking be challenged, solving practical problems and encouraging direct application of material with the instructor present (Gilboy, Heinerichs & Pazzaglia, 2014) and there is a realized opportunity cost of switching between teaching methods (Roach, 2014). Promoting student learning and holding students accountable are ways instructors can mitigate the consequences of technology-based instruction, but how to do this today is a challenge.

Retention is increasingly a concern for universities with a 25% dropout rate of college freshmen in the United States before they end their first semester (McGraw Hill, 2015). Today’s full time student reports spending only 14-15 hours per week studying compared to 24 hours per week in 1971 (McGraw Hill, 2015), and some universities have lifted the full time student credit hour limit by three credits. Induced with the pressure to do more with more, students have responded unfavorably to juggling full time jobs, family obligations and their studies.

Students may be reluctant to novel teaching approaches like the flipped classroom because of their residual passive learning habits the traditional classroom has instilled up on them (Chen et al, 2014). Students may also feel the course load is heavier when extending instruction beyond traditional instructional methods. Accountability of faculty is an additional concern where impact is being measured by accrediting bodies that consider student evaluations as a means for addressing effectiveness, and gauging this is inconsistent with the sanction of academic freedom in higher education. If there exists a more traditional way to facilitate teaching while also enhancing learning performance, would students be more inclined to participate?

This study is based on a pilot project conducted at Nicholls State University located in Thibodaux, Louisiana with an undergraduate marketing principles course. Building on the flipped classroom model while capitalizing on the strengths of traditional lecture, students are using learning worksheets to better understand course material. Thus far, the average exam scores have increased more than five percent, rendering the project a useful communication vehicle that is competing in a landscape of multi-functional, technology-based resources.

The purpose of this study is to assess the effectiveness of learning worksheets, identify affordances and constraints of the medium and understand the role communication plays while teaching. Data in this study will review survey responses that first analyze descriptive data, and follow through with in-depth analysis. This research contribution will be discussed in the areas of communication, teaching and technology literature.

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# The Effects of Work-Life Balance, Topic Avoidance, and Listening on the Relational Satisfaction of Marital and Cohabiting Couples

## Leslie Ramos Salazar

## Thao Nguyen

The work-life balance (WLB) literature has devoted much attention to the relational satisfaction outcome of marital and cohabiting relationships. Work-life balance is defined as the “satisfaction and good functioning at work and home, with a minimum of role conflict.” (Clark, 2000, p. 751). Because of the rise of female employment and dual-income couples in this globalized society, couples must face work-life conflict issues, which may impact their relational well-being (Bach, 2005). Previous work-life balance studies have noted an association between relational status (e.g., cohabiting vs. married) and perceived relational satisfaction , and it has found that working married couples report being more satisfied in their relationship in comparison to cohabiting couples (Gatzeva & Paik, 2011; Brown, 2000). Furthermore, working marital couples report being more committed, intimate, and similar to each other in comparison to cohabiting couples (Brandau-Brown & Ragsdale, 2008; George, et al., 2015). Organizational studies also suggest that employees in stable and satisfied relationships report being happier with their jobs (Rogers & May, 2003).

On the other hand, work-life conflict issues may negatively impact romantic relationships. For instance, couples who engage in negative interpersonal communication patterns such as topic avoidance about work-life issues (e.g., division of labor) and poor listening behaviors during work-life interactions, may negatively impact their partner’s relational satisfaction. Previous communication studies suggest that couples who engage in topic avoidance about conflict report being less satisfied in their relationship in comparison to couples who openly discuss difficult topics (Caughlin & Afifi, 2004; Worley & Samp, 2016). More specifically, Caughlin and Afifi (2004) used Petronio’s communication privacy management theory to ground the link between topic avoidance and relational dissatisfaction. Consequently, topic avoidance about work-life conflict is a fruitful area of research that deserves investigation.

Another important interpersonal communication skill is the ability to listen effectively to one’s partner when discussing work-life conflict issues. Studies have shown that married individuals who perceive their partners engaging in effective listening behaviors when discussing difficult issues report being more satisfied in their relationship than cohabiting individuals (Pasupathi, Cartensen, Levenson, & Gottman, 1999; Doohan, 2007). However, when individuals perceive poor listening behaviors from their partners, they report being less satisfied in their relationship than individuals who perceive effective partner listening behaviors (Doohan, 2007). Further, when partners listen to individuals’ day-to-day problems, this supports their “partner’s face,” which protects their partner’s identity and experience (Metts, 1997, p. 379). Thus, exploring whether marital and cohabiting couples differ in their perceived listening satisfaction about work-life conflict issues may fulfill the current gap in the work-life literature.

Given the previous literature findings, topic avoidance and listening satisfaction during work-life conflict discussions may associate with relational satisfaction in marital and cohabiting relationships. Thus, the purpose of this study is trifold. First, to examine the effects of work-life balance and topic avoidance on the perceived relational satisfaction of marital and cohabiting couples. Second, to examine whether differences exist in the listening satisfaction about work-life conflict issues among married and cohabiting couples. Third, to explore how listening about work-life issues moderates work-life balance and relational satisfaction.

This study employed a survey interview approach and it included a national sample from the National Center for Family and Marriage Research (2010), which included (50% women and 50% men, n = 1250) a total of 1,075 couples. The average age of the adult participants was 44 years old (SD = 11.95; range = 18-64). The racial background of the participants was comprised of 80.5% White, Non-Hispanic, 5% Black, Non-Hispanic, 7.8% Hispanic, 1.8% 2 or more Races, Non-Hispanic, and 4.9% Other. The educational background of participants comprised of 34.8% Bachelor’s degree or higher, 36.6% some college, 23.3% high school, and 5.3% less than high school. The marital status of the participants include 69.4% married, .2% divorced, .9% never married, and 29.4% living with a partner. Of these participants, 70% reported being married and 30% reported cohabiting in the household. When indicating about the amount of children under the age of 18, 59.9% of the couples reported being childless, while 40% reported having at least one child or more in the household. The sample’s employment status included 60.7% working (as a paid employee), 9.9% working (self-employed), 1.6% not working (on temporary layoff), 6.8% not working (looking for work), 5% not working (retired), 5.8% not working (disabled), 10.3% not working (other). Lastly, the average household income of the sample ranged from $50,000 to $59,999.

The hypotheses of this study were analyzed using a series of multiple regression models and an independent t-test. After controlling for age, sex, and ethnicity, the findings revealed support for topic avoidance and work-life balance as significant predictors of relational satisfaction. In addition, it was found that working marital and cohabiting couples differed in their perceived listening satisfaction about work-life issues. Lastly, this study found support for listening satisfaction as the moderator of the relationship between work-life balance and relational satisfaction.

Several relational and organizational implications and recommendations can be derived from the findings of this work-life balance study. First, couples in married or cohabiting relationships may consider developing work-life balance skills to maintain their relational satisfaction. Second, working couples should circumvent engaging in topic avoidance about work-life conflict issues because it may negatively impact their satisfaction within the relationship. Third, working couples should actively listen to each other when discussing work-life conflict issues to maintain a satisfying relationship. Fourth, organizations may spread awareness about the value of developing work-life balance skills within an organization by supporting working couples through work-life integration policies such as flex-pay, paid vacations, and paid parental leave for both partners. Organizations may also cultivate a ‘work-life balance’ culture that enables the spousal involvement process during special social work events and/or activities. Fifth, organizations may develop and offer work-life balance workshops to empower individuals in their relationships, which may in turn, positively impact their relational satisfaction. To conclude, this study examined whether work-life balance, topic avoidance, and listening impacted marital and cohabiting couples’ perceived relational satisfaction. The findings of this study can benefit dual-earning couples who may struggle with the work-life integration process. The findings of this study also suggest that additional research is needed in the business communication areas of topic avoidance and listening in marital and cohabiting relationships in the work-life balance literature.

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# You Can Put the Oral Communication Class Online: One Perspective on the Process

## Carol S. Wright

## Timothy Clipson

Online education is becoming more prevalent as it seems more online course offerings are being offered. In 2012, 77% of college administrators indicated that the quality of online classes was the same or better than face-to-face classes. This opinion may explain why in 2013, 70.7% of post-secondary institutions offered at least some online classes (Allen & Seaman, 2015).

Teaching a course online bring unique challenges as students and instructors must learn to adjust to a different format than they likely learned from in the past. Business communication courses are no different. Historically a writing-intensive class, the basic business communication class has a relatively-easy transition to the online environment and many instructors have found a way to offer the course online. Business communication usually includes both written and oral communication, but the challenge is adding the oral communication component. Moshiri and Cardon (2014) surveyed instructors of business communications and found the majority of instructors included at least one presentation, and one-third require at least three oral presentations. The continue, “Therefore, the picture that emerges of a typical business communication course allows the students to get extensive practice in writing and some practice in presenting materials orally” (pp. 318-319).

Thill and Bovee (2013) state that employers expect employees who can organize and express ideas, listen effectively, communicate with those of diverse backgrounds, use acceptable standards of quality writing, and utilize communication technology. The ability to communicate effectively upon graduation is a key to business success. Oral communication is one important skill students need, but when students take the class online, they have may have fewer chances to practice these oral skills. This suggestion leads to the question of how do students learn the necessary speaking skills to be successful in their careers?

Purpose and Objectives: The purpose of this study is to present one instructor’s experience on putting an oral communication course completely online.

Methods and Procedures: Leadership Communication is an upper level business communication class with a focus on oral communication and allowing students many opportunities to practice and improve upon their verbal skills as leaders. At the regional university being studies, the class has historically been offered as a face-to-face seminar-style course by the same instructor. However, some students were unable to take the class because of scheduling conflicts or because they needed online courses. Therefore, the need to develop a fully online course became apparent.

The leadership communication course has been taught by the same professor for many years and the class receives many positive reviews from students. The problem arises when trying to capture the best activities and sense of camaraderie in the online format. Following the face-to-face class as closely as possible, the course was redesigned as a fully online course, approved by the university’s office for online education, then delivered online in Summer 2016. The course included one exam (multiple choice and short answer questions), five online presentations, self and peer evaluations, and a reflective journal. At the end of the semester, students were asked to complete an online survey using the university’s learning management system.

Findings: Overall, student feedback on the course was positive. Although there were five presentations due within a five-week schedule, all students indicated that the number was appropriate for the course. In fact, several students indicated on their text responses that they believed the presentations should could more in their final grade. Students enjoyed the evaluations in that 50% liked evaluating themselves and others, 36% liked evaluating others but not themselves, and 14% liked evaluating themselves but not others. The reflective journal was not as popular, and only 64% of students liked have it as a component of the class. <br /><br />Summary: Adapting the elusive oral communication course is possible and can still offer similar experiences for students and instructors. Special challenges arise with balancing the types and amounts of assignments and ensuring the right technology is available. <br /><br />Implications for Education: The findings from this study provide up-to-date curriculum support for online business education. Specifically, this information can be used by faculty to better prepare students for future employment because it uses real, practical experiences in a safe environment to help build skills for success. The experiences shared by the instructor and students provide encouragement to those who still express doubts about the quality of online education.

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# We are in Crisis –Now What? How Should a Leader Communicate Crises Using Social Media?

## Laura Lott Valenti

## En Mao

## Marilyn Macik-Frey

Keywords: crisis communication, leadership, social media use, leadership competence, trust, communication medium  
  
Abstract  
Crisis overload is probably an accurate description of the global environment in the past two decades. The 9/11 terrorist attack marked the onset of the new millennium. Since then, we have seen an increasing number of mass shootings, police violence, political unrest, and natural disasters ranging from earthquakes, tsunamis, and hurricanes, to flooding. Many economic sectors have been affected by drastic downturns, including housing, oil, and higher education. Coincidentally, we saw the rise of social media in merely over a decade. Facebook came into existence in 2004, Twitter in 2006, Instagram in 2010, and most recently WeChat and Snapchat in 2011. These social media sites/apps grew rapidly in their user bases. Today, according to Statista, Facebook has 1.71 billion users, Twitter 313 million, Instagram 500 million, WeChat 806 million, and Snapchat 200 million.

People and media serve as the two types of communication channels (Sung & Hwang, 2014) and when the influence of each become more balanced or shared, the convergence elicits a dramatic transition with communication. The innate diffusion process of social media beckons the question: how can a leader use social media in crisis communication to their advantage? Recent research has shown that during a crisis the dissemination of information affects the diffusion process overwhelmingly in the early stages, which motivates online users to become a participating member (Husain et al, 2014). Prompt responses are also required, creating an innate framework for leaders utilizing social media in crisis-induced situations. It is found that using social media in the earlier stages of the crisis is imperative, but once traditional news reports appear, social media takes a back seat (Sung & Hwang, 2014).

The rapid growth of smartphones has further fueled the growth of social media and its use in crisis communication. Mobile phones have changed some fundamental aspects of communication. As a result, individuals are now habitually seeking online sources for news during a crisis (Veil, Buehner, & Palenchar, 2011). Organizations have also become reliant on social media for crisis communication. While some have done better, others have suffered when it is misused. Southwest was a notable example of how they effectively utilized social media to communicate the disastrous landing of one of its planes in July 2016 (Fisher, 2016). Southwest was honest, timely, and frequent in its communication to the public. They were widely praised for their social media communication in its landing crisis.

While social media provides means to share and discuss information, it differs from traditional media in that the discovery, distribution and communication of information occurs electronically. Negatively influencing readership of traditional newspapers, dropping more than 50% (Sung & Hwang, 2014), social media has a different agenda with considerable leadership and persuasive capabilities. This communication ability can determine whether or not an organization is able to maintain relationships with stakeholders, and crisis-induced situations are no different (perhaps more critical). What makes social media communication a go-to source is its accessibility, rate of usage, and direct and quick access to others. The social experience is maintained by web users who are not necessarily professional journalists who have become comfortable in their online social space (Husain et al), 2014). With 79% of executives expecting a crisis in a 12 month timeframe (Sung & Hwang, 2014) we should anticipate social media to be a major source of communication, but most executives do not feel confident in handling new media during a crisis (Sung & Hwang, 2014).

Social media itself compounds the importance of leadership communication. Negative content is found to spread faster than positive content (Pangburn, 2015). Left unmanaged, crises can spread fear and uncertainty to the mass at a rapid pace because of its sometimes biased and non-factual nature. Prior research validated the role of clear, relevant, and high trust communication from leadership in traditional media. There is little research on crisis communication using new communication media though. We intend to study crisis communication from two different perspectives: leader to follower as well as peer-to-peer crisis communication.

UNIVERSITY NAME, with a student body of more than 6,000 students, has been subjected to state budget cuts that attribute to its now 75% self-funded position (versus being 35% self-funded in 2011). With new leadership and the evolution of social media, UNIVERSITY took to Facebook to communicate about the threat of further budget cuts in the 2016-2017 academic year that could have paralyzed the university. The option to close campus for up to two weeks was briefly considered. Additionally, the TOPS (Taylor Opportunity for Students) scholarship was revoked, creating chaos for parents and students who rely on the state award for affording tuition.

On January 19, 2016 newly elected Governor John Bel Edwards announced in his public address that higher education would be affected by the nearly $2 billion dollar budget deficit which included a $700 million dollar shortfall from 2015. Forty-two million dollars cut from the state’s higher education budget would mean some universities would be forced to declare bankruptcy, implement massive layoffs, cancel classes and shut down athletic programs with student athletes not eligible to play. Immediately following the Governor's live statewide address that called for a legislative special session, UNIVERSITY first communicated on Facebook with a “Speak Up for Higher Education” infographic that garnered more than 600 likes and 1,830 shares the same day. Unlike the previous budget crisis, this was a unified message at the University of Louisiana system level that urged stakeholders to voice their support for the future of higher education in Louisiana. A video posted to Facebook of UNIVERSITY President, Dr. Murphy, followed a few days later and received more than 35,000 views, 540 shares and 370 likes. Also relevant is the UNIVERSITY mascot who traveled with the student body to the state’s capital, featuring an image-based post, stating “Louisiana needs more graduates.” This post received 1,400 likes and 415 shares. Although a temporary budget fix was implemented to address the fall 2016 semester TOPS scholarship and minimize higher education budget cuts, the spring 2017 budget has not been fully funded; therefore the university community has sustained an on-going crisis situation.

We have developed a research model that studies the various factors that influence leadership communication effectiveness during the budget crisis with a particular interest on the social media impact. We also include the emotional perception of people in crisis as it relates to the leader and University’s communication effectiveness and the general tendency to seek out information through specific communication means. Frequency, preferences and types of communication media usage during the crisis as well as the communication’s effect on the stakeholders willingness to act or participate in the process of dealing with the crisis are incorporated into the study.

Data will be collected using an online survey. We will present the descriptive data at the first stage of our analysis. Then, we will use SmartPLS to analyze our data in two steps. First, the measurement model will be assessed followed by structural assessment.

Our research contribution will be discussed in the areas of communication, information systems, and leadership literature.

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# Using a Blackboard Learning Journal to Teach Interpersonal Skills to Business Students

## Kathryn O'Neill

## Michael Power

Using a Blackboard Learning Journal to Teach Interpersonal Skills to Business Students

In a professional career, expertise and knowledge in your discipline is usually not enough to insure success on the job. Employers also look for candidates who bring superior interpersonal skills to the table. The 2015 Job Outlook Survey by NACE (2015) lists “leadership” and “ability to work in a team” as the first and second most desirable candidate attributes. Additionally, 61% of respondents list “interpersonal skills/relates well to others” as a desirable attribute. The Management Education Task Force of the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) (2002) identified the importance of interpersonal skills to the success of managers. According to their report, “Alumni rate interpersonal, leadership and communication skills as highly important in the business world, yet they often rate these skills as among the least effective components of business school curricula” (AACSB, 202, 19). Adding this instruction to the curriculum, then, is important for producing graduates who succeed in their chosen careers.

To answer this need, business schools have acted to add instruction, especially with the development of Emotional Intelligence (EI) theory (Goleman, 2006a, 2006b) and its adoption by corporate learning functions as a way to improve management and group performance. The foundation of Goleman’s model is personal competence, including self-awareness, self-regulation and motivation (2006b). Corporate training and development functions embraced the theory since it offers the possibility of improving individual performance through changes in behavior. Because the foundation of the theory is behavioral, learners must examine their own behaviors to determine what to change and what to keep.

To create this self-awareness, as well as strategies for improvement, textbooks and instructors turn to theories from psychology, sociology, and management for explanations of communication style, self-esteem, values and ethics, attitudes, motivation approaches, self-disclosure, emotional balance, conflict management and gender roles. Without an effort to apply these theories to their own circumstances, however, students acquire knowledge that, alone, does not assure the changes in behavior that result in self-awareness. In brief, knowing is not doing. To facilitate this self-examination, instructors must use strategies of reflective learning to engage students and to foster learning.

Castelli (2011) reviews the stream of research through the 1980s and 1990s that expanded and formalized the process of reflective learning, along with related concepts such as critical reflective learning and transformative learning. She offered a model (2011, 21) for incorporating reflective learning into adult instruction that applies very well to the college classroom, Among other issues, her model particularly addressed the following issues:

• Providing a safe environment for self-examination

• Creating awareness—“How does this learning impact me?”

• Fostering critical thinking and reflection to determine meaning

• Discovering alternative approaches/views that lead to new behavior. (2011, 21)

One approach to enabling this insight and critical thinking is the use of a Learning Journal as a reflective device. When the subject matter is complex and the objective of learning is a change in behavior or customary practice, the journal can assist students in thinking through how concepts apply to their own lives and actions. Many disciplines already incorporate this activity to achieve their learning goals, including service learning (Manring, 2012), study abroad (Gabauden, 2016), online learning (Hwang, Hsu, Shadiev, Chang & Huang, 2015), nursing (Ibarreta & McLeod, 2004; Zori, 2016), teacher education (Hatton & Smith, 1995; Spiker, 2014; Corbin Frazier, 2015), outdoor learning (Dyment & O’Connell, 2003), and therapeutic approaches (Scheck, Hoffmann, Proctor &Coulliou, 2013; Kreuter, 2015; Mims, 2015).

In the business curriculum, disciplines other than business communication have incorporated journals as well, especially accounting (McGuigan & Kern, 2009) and marketing (Fisher, 1990; Muncy, 2014). As a skills-development course, business communication is well suited to incorporating instruction in emotional intelligence, especially through a written exercise such as a learning journal. Myers and Tucker (2005) proposed strategies for incorporating work on EI into the already-crowded agenda for business communication. They proposed two assignments, one of which includes journaling based on students’ assessment of their EI and an improvement plan they design for themselves.

Cooper (2006) explored the use of journal writing by career and technology educators as a part of developing problem solving and critical thinking skills so highly valued by employers. He cited Moon’s (2006) definition for a learning journal as “an accumulation of material that is mainly based on the writer’s process of reflection…written over a period of time, not in ‘in one go’” (72). He also described the purpose of the learning journal as “a means for students to contemplate material that has been introduced in the classroom…opportunities for students to examine their self-development as well as their evolving professional development.” (73). Finally, Cooper (2006), drawing on Moon (2006), described the difference in structured and unstructured journal assignments. The structured format focuses the students’ thoughts on specific concepts and clearly outlines what to include in the journal entry, thus relieving them of the responsibility of determining the direction of their responses.

Using learning journals presents several challenges. Muncy (2014) described his use of learning journals in the context of an online blog versus a hard copy notebook. He used the terms “blog” and “online journal” interchangeably, and noted the ease of online journaling. Moving the journal to an online format gives both the student and the instructor more command over the timing of responses. The instructor can open and close journal availability, and time reflection assignments to correspond with the classroom lessons. Using an online journal also speeds up the feedback cycle to the student and eases the grading burden. The instructor is relieved of collecting hard copy notebooks, transporting them home for grading, and then re-delivering them to the student. Instructors can check online journals for progress, and grade them quickly.

If the instructor assesses journal submissions for a grade, the feedback requires special sensitivity to preserve the “safe space” that enables honest reflection. Cooper (2006) enumerated several difficulties. He provided several guidelines, including avoiding suggestion of judgments and indicating places where more thinking might be appropriate. Students may feel a sense of ownership since they are conveying private thoughts, and may view instructor comments as intrusive. A formative approach to feedback provides students with feedback on their work and thinking as they progress through the class. A firm foundation of criteria for completeness or quality will assist both instructor and student.

In view of the literature, the presentation will provide a case of how use of a learning journal in a university-level elective interpersonal skills course promoted insight and learning. The presenter will describe the course content and the use of the Blackboard LMS, including a rubric, to carry out the journal assignments. The presentation will describe the specific structured journal assignments, including the integration with course content through the semester, and grading guidelines.

# A Comparison of SME-Peer Learning Process

## Margaret S. Kilcoyne

## Marcia McLure Hardy

## Begona Perez-Mira

\*\*The pilot study for Subject Matter Expert (SME)-Peer Learning Process was originally conducted in 2014. The results were presented at the 2016 Academy of Business Information Systems (ABIS) conference in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. The 2016 Presentation entitled: SME-Peer Learning: A Continuous Improvement Process and its results ONLY will be submitted for consideration to Journal for Research in Business Information Systems (JRBIS).\*\*

The Proposal to Present to the ABC Southwestern U.S. conference is a separate research project. Since the fall of 2014, investigators have identified three additional sample populations, have collected and are analyzing three additional data sets to be used as comparison groups. This study will include the analysis and results from three separate populations over time (2014-2016).

Investigators are expanding the research beyond the original study for the purpose of validating the efficacy of the SME-Peer Learning teaching methodology and to determine if the SME-Peer Learning teaching model is repeatable and will produce similar, measurable, positive outcomes as those achieved in 2014 pilot study.

Abstract

Does the SME-Peer Learning strategy effectively impact student learning outcome? The goal of this study is twofold: (1) to answer the question and (2) to determine if there is a repeatable, statistically significant and valid increase in the students’ knowledge of key concepts and theories in the various functional areas of business due to the inclusion of the SME-Peer Review Process in the MGT 4300-Capstone course. The intervention will require each student be designated as a Subject Matter Expert (SME) in one of the assigned disciplines for the duration of the MGT 4300-Capstone course. All students will experience a peer learning classroom environment. For the purposes of this study, this learning process will be referred to as the SME-Peer Learning process.

The investigators will introduce the SME-Peer Learning strategy to students in the School of Business. This teaching strategy will be replicated in a study design utilizing the SME-Peer Learning process as the intervention teaching methodology across four separate student populations. It will be determined if the teaching intervention can achieve similar, positive learning outcomes among the groups.

Overall results should conclude that the classroom learning experience engaging students in the SME-Peer Learning process across the School of Business disciplines is repeatable and a valid, successful, learning strategy.

# Assessing the Business Communication Course: Students' Perceptions

## Julie McDonald

## Margaret Kilcoyne

## Begona Perez-Mira

## Tammy Croghan

Introduction

According to Du-Babcock (2006), “Business communication has established itself as an important subject area and has become an integral component of business school curricula” (p. 254). In many schools of business, it is a course that is required for all the majors (e.g., accounting, computer information systems, and business administration etc.). The business communication course equips students with communicative skills and techniques and prepares them to work in the 21st century workplace.

The introductory business communication course is an important part of the undergraduate business curriculum. For this reason, a periodic assessment of the course needs to be conducted to make sure that the course is keeping us with current pedagogical and programmatic developments. Examples of past published assessments (audits) include those by David, 1982; Glassman & Farley, 1979; Nelson, Luse, & DuFrene, 1992; Nixon & West, 1993; Ober, 1987; Ober & Wunsch, 1983, 1991, 1995; Persing, Drew, Bachman, Eaton, & Galbraith, 1976; and Wardrope & Bayless, 1999. These audits provide valuable information for both internal and external stakeholders, allowing them to evaluate the status of the introductory business communication course.

As Wardrope and Bayless (1999) noted, audits should not be used as independent

benchmarks for justifying or altering decisions about teaching or administering the business communication course. Rather, institutions should use these audits, along with systematic feedback from relevant stakeholders directly and indirectly impacted by the introductory course including the students themselves.

While periodic assessments of the business communication course are necessary, they may not take into consideration the perceptions of the students enrolled in those courses. Meaningful and timely assessments are very important to the teaching and learning process. Assessments help both the teacher and the learner understand when more effort is needed to ensure a positive learning experience.

Student surveys or course evaluations are often used to get the necessary information or feedback about the business communication course. Some of these are standard forms used for all courses and for all professors at the university. Some, as in the case of this study, are created with the specific objectives of the business communication course in mind.

Student evaluations of courses are often thought to be ineffective or of questionable value. However, the student assessment of courses can be a powerful tool in assessing the business communications course. According to Patton (2015), John A Holland, director of the writing program at the University of Southern California, said “We want students to know that their opinions do matter.” Student opinions are only one measure, but they are one that we can use to try to improve both the content and the methods of delivery used in the business communication course.

Problem

To meet and maintain accreditation standards, College of Business programs are expected to determine the effectiveness of their undergraduate programs and to determine if student learning has occurred. Are our students learning; specifically, are the implemented teaching strategies assisting students in the learning process? What strategies do they like? What strategies are not working?

Purpose

The purpose of the proposal is (1) to determine which teaching strategies are engaging students in the learning process; (2) to determine which teaching strategies the students like; and to determine which strategies the students do not like. This will be an exploratory study to examine the perceptions of past students of the Business Communications course in a rural, regional, four-year university.

Population

The population for the study is past students enrolled in the Business Communications course (BUAD 2200); specifically, those students who have already earned a grade in the course. Only a sample of past students will be used in this exploratory study.

Methodology

The data was collected using an online survey/questionnaire created in SurveyMonkey at the end of each semester. All identification categories were removed by a non-teaching professor. The responses were then downloaded into an Excel spreadsheet for analysis. We will use a Word Analysis program (ATLAS Ti) to analyze the text. Some descriptive data will also be reported.

Implications for Education

This data can be used to enhance and redesign the Business Communications course taught in the College of Business. It can be used as a model for other courses. Hopefully, when viewed through a cautionary and critical lens, the findings from this audit can aid stakeholders in designing and delivering an introductory course that motivates students, enables them to achieve academic learning outcomes, and improves their business communication competencies in the 21st century workplace.

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# Writing as a Soft Skill: Students’ Perspectives on a Revise and Resubmit Policy for Improving Written Communication Skills

## Benjamin Garner

## Nathan Shank

Introduction

One of business leaders’ perennial complaints about new graduates in today’s workforce is a lack of soft skills, and one soft skill that employers seek in new graduates is effective written communication (Andrews & Higson, 2008; Robles, 2012). Effective writing in the workplace affects not only the credibility of the individual, but it also influences clients’ views of the company itself. Workplace writing takes many forms, from emails to 1-page reports to more complex documents. The ability to write effectively is a prized skill in a new hire in part because the supply of effective writers is low while the demand is high.

Business schools, as well as other fields such as engineering and information systems, have begun to recognize the need for writing in and across their curriculum (Lentz, 2013; Pulko & Parikh, 2003; Russell, Russell, & Tastle, 2005). Analyses of some graduate programs also cite the need for improved writing skills; some have reported that MBA students’ writing skills are below employers’ desired levels (Neelankavil, 1994; Rice-Bailey & Baker, 2016). Soft skills such as writing are linked to graduate employability (Andrews & Higson, 2008). The need for improved communication in business curriculum has resulted in many business schools recruiting faculty from communication and writing fields to teach these competencies, and this includes MBA programs (Rice-Bailey & Baker, 2016). Some business schools, such as the university where the researcher works, only require one communication course (business communication) as a requirement for the business curriculum. It may be specious to assume that having a single course dedicated to writing or business communication (a course which is often a divided between written and oral communication) will in fact be a magic bullet solution to the epidemic of poor student writing.

Another option is to encourage faculty across the business curriculum to assign more written work. Of course, one of the main challenges of improving students’ writing is that papers are time-consuming to grade (Lentz, 2013), and faculty often cite increasing class size as a barrier to assigning significant written work. Despite these challenges, students need the opportunity to practice and improve their writing skills (Ambrose, Bridges, DiPietro, Lovett, & Norman, 2010), and revision is one option to help them practice their mastery of grammar, organization, and clarity.<br />Studies of revision often fall within the umbrella of viewing writing as a process rather than a product. Traditional understandings of the writing process have often focused on teaching grammar and style and then having students compose a draft edited only for mechanical problems, while process pedagogies emphasize the ability to write—rather than solely focus on having a good product at the end (Anson, 2014). A common division among some is to divide the writing process into three parts: prewriting, writing, and revising (Guffey & Loewy, 2016). One of the earliest and perhaps most cited aphorisms of this approach is Murray’s injunction to spend 85% of the writing process prewriting, 1% writing, and 14% revising (Anson, 2014). Other theorists have argued that writing is actually a nonlinear process (Sommers, 2011). Experienced writers find their meaning in revision, rather than drafting, a point which highlights that a recursive view of writing is not just useful but imperative for good writing (Sommers, 2011). Offering a more precise categorization of the moves students make during revision, Flower and Hayes (2011) have charted the different stages of the writing and revising process, including planning, translating, and reviewing. They suggest that revision is a significant amount of the work in writing, and this view emphasizes revision’s vital role to students not just in improving their process but in creating more effective written products. Many of the applied practices for teaching revision stem from these roots and recommend collaborative revision, individual exercises that revise their drafts by responding to questions, and requiring assignments that build on the initial material in order to give students extended exposure to ideas that they can then revise globally across weeks and months.

One strategy, then, is to emphasize revision as a part of the curriculum. Davis (2009) contends that allowing students to complete rewrites can improve student learning and encourage students to pay close attention to a professor’s comments. Further, giving students multiple opportunities to practice helps learning more than one large assignment (Ambrose et al., 2010). Further, some analyses suggest that professor-to-student feedback should be given promptly and often for the most effective student learning (Ambrose et al., 2010).

Teaching Approach

In three sections of a business communication course, the instructor initiated a “Revise and Resubmit” policy with two major writing assignments and a handful of smaller assignments. The two major written assignments included a Self-Analysis and a Recommendation Report. After students received their grade, the professor returned extensive feedback and offered students the opportunity to revise their papers and correct the marked changes by the following class period. For these significant written documents, the professor required students to write a “Revisions” sheet with a bullet list describing the changes made. The professor offered 10% possible improvement (2.5 out of 25 possible points) for the self-analysis and less for the final research paper (2.8%, or 2 out of 70). The professor tracked revision participation for major assignments, and 59/87 (67.8%) completed the Self-Analysis revisions while 74/86 (86%) of students revised the Recommendation Report. The professor also offered students the opportunity to revise shorter assignments for extra credit, including as a resume, cover letter, and an email assignment.

Method

At the end of the semester, the professor surveyed students (N=84, 41 Male, 35 Female, 8 Blank) across three business communication courses to gauge their perceptions of the efficacy of the “Revise and Resubmit” policy and how it influenced their writing skills (See Appendix A for survey questions). When asked “Compare the writing feedback you received in this class compared to your typical college class,” the mean for student responses was 4.58 (N=76) on a 5-point scale, where 1 = Much less feedback and 5 = much more feedback. Students were also asked several opened-ended questions about their perceptions of this policy for their learning, and students generally reported that the revision opportunity was helpful for learning. Those that didn’t find it helpful reported that they did not take advantage of the opportunity. Positive representative student comments included:

• I found it helpful to go back and fix your mistakes. That is a great way to learn.

• Helpful b/c you see your mistakes & get to correct them.

• It would have been great if I had actually done it.

• It gave the incentive to seriously sit down & critique my own work and learn from mistakes. At times I would even catch mistakes that hadn't been noticed.

Negative student comments regarding the revision opportunity usually related to the challenging feedback and the harshness of the grading. For instance, the average grade for the first writing assignment (74.3%) and the abundance of written feedback left many students feeling overwhelmed, something that the literature says can happened when providing abundant feedback (Ambrose et al., 2010; Davis, 2009). Some representative student comments from this perspective noted:

• It was very challenging, but the class will help with future experiences with writing.

• Kind of nit picky but overall helpful.

• Sometimes having a lot of critique can be discouraging but people want to overcome a challenge

Another theme was that students were surprised by the amount of feedback. Representative comments included:

• My ENGL 1101 professor would just write a letter grade at the end of the papers.

• This is the only class that I've fully understood what mistakes I've made on a paper. Most papers you get back and never fix or even look at again.

Conclusion

In sum, grading student writing is challenging because of the time-consuming process of grading and the discouragement some students feel when their paper is severely marked up with corrections. This research project aimed to cataloging student perceptions of a “Revise and Resubmit” policy. Overall, students found feedback overwhelming, but they appreciated the opportunity to learn from their mistakes. Further, the high participation rate of optional rewrites suggests that motivating students with extra points was successful. However, this did increase the overall grades in the course, so the temptation to grade inflation is also a consideration. Limitations and implications for future research will be discussed.

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Appendix A: Survey Questions

1. Describe your response to the “Revise & Resubmit” writing opportunity.

2. In what ways was the "Revise & Resubmit" helpful or not helpful for your learning?

3. Compare the writing feedback you received in this class compared to your typical college class.

a) much less feedback than typical

b) less feedback

c) about the same

d) more feedback

e) much more feedback than typical

4. In what ways was this writing feedback helpful? Challenging?

# An Innovative Approach to Workplace Communication: Implementing Business Communication Skills beyond the Classroom

## Ann Wilson

## Marsha L. Bayless

Introduction

From college professional advisory boards to employers hiring recent college graduates, the message has been received by higher education that there is a soft skills gap in new college graduates. Business communication focuses on many skills that are known as soft skills.

According to LiveCareer (2016) the top ten soft skills in demand for today’s job market are (1) communication skills, (2) computer and technical literacy, (3) interpersonal skills, (4) adaptability, (5) research skills, (6) project management skills, (7) problem-solving skills, (8) process improvement expertise, (9) strong work ethic, and (10) emotional intelligence. When asked about the importance of soft skills in the workplace, 77% of recent college graduates and 80% of employers agree that soft skills are important for workplace success (Bridging the soft skills gap, 2015.)

All business professionals, including new business graduates, need to communicate effectively. Learning how to communicate is something that is addressed in a variety of business communication courses. However, learning about business communication may not extend to actual practice and knowledge about using business communication in the workplace. There is a gap in perceptions between recent college graduates and employers on preparedness for soft skills where 14 % of employers say recent graduates are extremely or very prepared compared to 63% of graduates themselves (Bridging the soft skills gap, 2015.) In addition, students may not link the business communication skills they have learned to the actual workplace. To combat this problem a regional AACSB accredited university has launched the Student Success Passport—a four-year program designed to enhance students’ soft skills and career readiness.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study is to examine the types of communication skills and information offered through an extra-curricular program known as the Student Success Passport Program at a regional AACSB-accredited university. The goal for the program is for students to improve “soft skills” they learned in the business communication classroom in order to succeed in the work environment. The study will examine the types of skills that are typically known as business communication skills and determine how many students are learning about these skills and the types of activities they are doing to enhance their soft skills. Records from 2015-2016 will be examined for the students involved in the program. Counts will be completed of types of activities that are defined as communication activities.

Review of Related Literature

In recent years, the needs of companies and the knowledge and competencies graduating seniors possess have become out of alignment making the role of higher education come under greater scrutiny (Closing the skills gap, 2014.) Burning Glass Technologies (2015) define the top baseline skills of communication, writing, and organizational skills commonly requested across nearly all jobs families and skills levels. Therefore, it has become the college’s job to teach not only academic content, but also to ensure that graduates are career ready with marketable skills to launch their futures. The need for this awareness and training is substantiated in a survey of recent college graduates where seven out of 10 said they would have invested significant time in soft skills training while in college (Bridging the soft skills gap, 2015).

Description of methodology and/or procedures

In an effort to better prepare our students and develop their marketable/professional skills including communication skills, our college of business has launched the Student Success Passport. This four-year plan designed to provide a formalized strategy for communication skill building, leadership development (personal branding) and career launch begins in the freshman year. Brightspace (D2L) is the course management software used to deliver a program designed to enhance student professionalism with minimal manpower. Incentivized by significant scholarships, this program allows students to participate in several career readiness activities relevant to their classification and major, and most importantly, it gets students thinking about their futures on day one of college. The Student Success Passport Program also progresses through all four years of college introducing new modules as a student advances closer to his/her graduation date.

Since business communication is one of the key soft skills required, we will be analyzing the Student Success Passport Program to determine how the communication skills are integrated throughout. This presentation will explain communication skills integrated into the Student Success Passport Program and report on known successes. Examples of the curriculum and modules included in each classification level will be detailed. Participants will leave with a better understanding of our model and enough knowledge to build similar models at their own institutions customizable to their needs and preferences.

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# Executive Perceptions of Communication and Other Soft Skills and Student Preparedness for the Workplace

## Kristen King

## Marcel Robles

Introduction

In today’s rapidly changing and increasingly innovative business environment, technical, or “hard” skills alone are simply not enough to gain and keep employment (James & James, 2004). Rather, for some time, employers have emphasized the need for individuals not just with technical skills, but those with interpersonal, or “soft” skills. Soft skills have been conceptualized and discussed throughout years of research, and are a combination of both interpersonal (people) skills and personal (career) attributes that can also be defined as “applied” skills (Gewertz, 2007; Robles, 2012). Research has long identified the need for soft skill development in in business education curriculum, as they have consistently shown a direct link to employment and organizational outcomes, including job success and productive performance (John, 2009; Nealy, 2011; Wellington, 2005).

With an increasing demand from employers for professional individuals that possess a broad and developed set of these “soft” or “applied” skills, it falls to the responsibility of business programs to identify, encourage, and develop them within students. The purpose of this study is to determine the spectrum of communication and soft skills that employers desire in today’s business world, and to assess how business curriculum can prepare graduating students to excel in those areas, while also identifying emerging soft skills desired by employers.

Methodology

Twenty-five industry professionals from multiple industries and states in the US who were directly involved in hiring new employees at some point in their career were contacted and interviewed to identify what soft skills they would deem as important employability traits. The initial list of skills discussed included those as had been identified in prior work as most important soft skills in the workplace, including integrity, communication (in general), courtesy, responsibility, social skills, positive attitude, professionalism, flexibility, teamwork, and work ethic (Robles, 2012). Each professional interviewed indicated that this list was indeed still valid and relevant in today’s workplace, with over 75% of them ranking general communication (of most importance oral communication and written communication), integrity, and listening as most important for success. This comes as no surprise, as prior research has also supported this notion, along with support for aforementioned soft skills (Mitchell, Skinner, & White, 2010; Weldy & Icenogle, 1997). In an attempt to further understand the specific *communication* skills needed as a part of an overall soft skill set, respondents were also asked to identify specific communications skills needed for success. From that discussion, a subset of specific communication skills were identified, including oral communication (e.g., presenting, giving feedback), written communication, active listening, conversing, and non-verbal communication.

In addition to a discussion regarding the importance of those communication and soft skills identified in the interview questions, respondents were also asked to identify other soft skills they deemed important, particularly in today’s modern workplace. Several interesting discussions took place, and from those, six additional soft skills were identified as needed for success: trustworthiness (a derivative of integrity), the ability to synthesize and summarize information, the ability to prioritize projects, empathy, effective use of technology, and being a life-long learner.

A survey was then comprised with student assessment in mind to answer two research questions. First, do students have a clear indication and are they in agreement as to what employers find desirable with regard to soft skills, and second, how do they rate their own accomplishment and mastery with regard to the same set of skills? Each skill (empathy, general communication, non-verbal communication, written communication, active listening, conversing, oral communication, the ability to synthesize/summarize information, being a life-long learner, the ability to prioritize projects, effective use of technology, flexibility, teamwork, interpersonal skills, courtesy, having a positive attitude, integrity, professionalism, work ethic, responsibility, and trustworthiness) was divided in to two question sets, where students were asked to rank both their perception of employer importance and their own self-assessment of the soft skill. The questions were each ranked on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from Not Important at All (1) to Very Important (7) and Not Skilled at All (1) to Very Highly Skilled (7), respectively.

The survey was disseminated to students in the fall semester of 2016 who were enrolled in a variety business classes at a southeastern US university, including Introduction to Business, Managerial Reports, and Professional Communication. 173 unique responses were collected, with the final count of respondents as *n* = 166 after incomplete responses were removed.

# An Examination of the Impact of McGraw-Hill’s Connect™

## Lucia Sigmar

## Traci Austin

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the impact of McGraw-Hill’s Connect™ LearnSmartAchieve on student writing outcomes. Toward that end, this study examines the writing quality of online and face-to face students before and after the introduction of McGraw-Hill’s Connect™ LearnSmartAchieve selected course ancillaries in a required 3000-level business communication course at an AACSB-accredited business school during 2015 and 2016. In addition, the study investigates whether Connect™ LearnSmartAchieve improved student confidence in writing and in the writing process.

For subscribers, McGraw-Hill’s Connect™ LearnSmartAchieve provides students the option of working at their own pace to improve their knowledge of topics with learning resources on: the writing process; critical reading; the research process; reasoning and argument; grammar and common sentence problems; punctuation and mechanics; style and word choice; and a section for multi-lingual writers. However, for purposes of this study, students were assigned learning resources that addressed those areas in which they seemed to be the most challenged: grammar and common sentence problems, and punctuation and mechanics. By assigning these activities to be completed outside of class, the authors hoped that students would be better able to identify their technical and grammatical weaknesses and improve the overall quality of their writing.

INTRODUCTION

Business schools recognize the importance of having graduates who have content knowledge in their disciplines and the ability to communicate that knowledge effectively. As a result, in addition to the writing instruction students receive in the required 3000-level business communication course, the business school in this study has made writing competency a central focus in its curriculum by instituting a college-wide writing initiative. Yet for many of these regional business students, grammar and mechanics, along with sentence-level errors, pose a major challenge and obstacle to effective writing. Moreover, strategic writing objectives in the business communication course leave little opportunity for review or additional instruction by faculty of these basic skills. The McGraw-Hill ancillaries allow grammar and mechanics instruction to be incorporated into the course with little or no class instruction time devoted to these basic writing topics.

METHODOLOGY

For this study, the authors identified grammatical, mechanical, and sentence-level errors that employers and educators have identified as the most egregious (Hairston, 1981; Conners & Lunsford, 1988; Beason, 2001; Gray & Heuser, 2003; Lunsford & Lunsford, 2008; Sigmar & Austin, 2013 & 2015). These concepts also challenge many business students:

Status-Marking Errors

• Nonstandard verb forms in past or past participle: brung instead of brought, had went instead of had gone

• Lack of subject-verb agreement: we was instead of we were, he don’t instead of he doesn’t

• Double negatives: He didn’t have no money left after shopping.

• Objective pronoun as subject: Him and Richard were the last ones hired.

Very Serious Errors

• Sentence fragments: The company is prepared to raise prices. In spite of administrative warnings.

• Run-on sentences: He concentrated on his job he never took vacations.

• Non-capitalization of proper nouns: I was last employed by texas instruments company.

• Non-status-marking subject-verb agreement errors: Enclosed in his personnel file is his discharge papers.

• Misspelling: She wishes the presentation would of gone better.

• A comma between the verb and its complement: Cox cannot predict, that street crime will diminish.

• Non-parallelism: Good police officers require three qualities: courage, tolerance, and dedicated.

• Faulty adverb forms: The manager treated his employees bad.

Serious Errors

• Verb form errors: The situation is when the patient ignores warning symptoms.

• Dangling modifiers: When leaving college, clothes suddenly become a major problem.

• “I” as object pronoun: The boss told Sue and I about the changes.

• Lack of commas to set off interrupters: A convicted felon no matter how good his record may not serve on a grand jury.

• Lack of commas in a series: The museum bought a valuable old marble statue.

• Tense switching: The client refused to pay the filing fee and then cancels his court date.

• Use of a plural modifier with a singular noun: These kind of errors are troublesome. (Hairston, 1981).

In this study, the authors reviewed a writing assignment submitted by 100 students before the McGraw-Hill Connect™ LearnSmartAchieve activities were implemented in the course. The number and severity of the errors in these samples were compared to assignments submitted by an additional 100 students after the McGraw-Hill Connect™ LearnSmartAchieve assignments were implemented. In their analysis of these errors, the authors determined whether the McGraw-Hill Connect™ LearnSmartAchieve activities had a positive impact on the learning, retention, and application of these basic writing skills on student writing outcomes.

# Enhancing Professional Presence through Business Etiquette

## Sandra H. Bevill

## Karen McDaniel

Introduction

The topics to be included in a business communication course have evolved over the years with the invention of technology. The importance of developing strong interpersonal communication skills has remained an important business communication topic and includes developing professional presence.

What is professional presence? Anna Bass (2010) writes the “… intangible quality called ‘professional presence’… sets an individual apart and instills a sustainable, competitive advantage” (p. 57). Soft skills, sometimes called employability skills, social skills, or emotional intelligence, have become more important over the years and help create one’s professional presence. These soft skills include a variety of interpersonal skills including a positive attitude and tack (“IQ gets you hire; EQ gets you promoted, 2008). Helen Wilkie (2003) compares establishing one’s professional presence—or positioning oneself as a professional—to the vital and complex marketing activity of positioning products in customers’ minds. Having a positive professional presence involves getting along with and interacting well with others (Kirch, Tucker, & Kirch, 2001). A component of interacting well with others is the knowledge of business etiquette including business dining guidelines.

Fifteen years ago, I co-authored an Association for Business Communication—Southwest Division proceedings article about our experiences designing and conducting a business etiquette dinner for our university’s College of Business students. One colleague, Dr. Terry Roach, and I presented on business etiquette to a standing room only crowd; in fact, because of fire code limits, many attendees were not allowed into the room and stood outside the door.<br /><br />Over the years, business etiquette, an important part of one’s professional presence, has continued to increase in importance as today’s workday often includes conducting business over breakfast, lunch, or dinner. Estimates are that half of all business deals are closed over a meal (Hamilton-Wright, 2004). Closing a business deal or making a good impression on a prospective client is difficult enough without having to stress about one’s table manners (Mah, 2004).

Purpose

The purpose of this presentation will be to provide updated information on business etiquette guidelines. While the primary focus will be American business dining, other timely topics may be addressed including cell phone use and texting, courtesy, and respect, as time permits.

Implications for education

This presentation is targeted to business faculty who may want to do one or more of the following.

1. Help their students develop stronger interpersonal skills/professional presence

2. Prepare their students for a job interview that takes place over a meal

3. Prepare their students to conduct business over a meal

4. Enhance their own knowledge of business etiquette

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# Millennials as Managers: Exploring Communication Preferences

## Ashley Hall

Introduction

According to the Pew Research Center, Millennials now constitute the largest generation in the United States workforce at more than 1/3 of workers (Fry, 2015). The generational breakdown of today’s workforce includes multiple generations – the Silent Generation, Baby Boomers, Gen Xers, and Millennials (Gesell, 2010). Generation Z is also starting to infiltrate the workplace as well. Table 1 below shows the birth years for each generational category (Bump, 2014; The Center for Generational Kinetics, n.d.); however, there is disagreement among generational researchers on the exact years, as there is often spillover between the generations and their respective label.

Generation Birth Years

Silent or Greatest Generation Until 1946

Baby Boomers 1946-1964

Gen X 1965-1984

Millennials 1982-2004

Generation Z 1996 – present

Table 1. Birth years for each generational category

Inherent with varying generations working alongside each other is various approaches and attitudes toward work. Differences in perceptions of appropriate behavior for the workplace can exist as well, sometimes resulting in conflict among the generations. According to Gesell (2010), the mixture of generations in the workforce increases the complexity of leadership today.

Purpose

It has been estimated that approximately 10,000 Baby Boomers are hitting retirement age every single day (Green, 2016). With a growing number of Millennials in the workplace, an increasing number are filling managerial roles given the wave of retirements of Baby Boomers. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics data (as cited in Green, 2016), Millennials constitute approximately 20% of all management jobs, a rise from 3% in 2005. As such, their view on management and how they lead will have significant ripple effects in the workforce of the near future.

The purpose of this study was to investigate communication styles of Millennials as managers and to explore differences that may exist among different generations within the workforce. As is typical, academic research lags behind practitioner publications. There is quite a bit of practitioner-based research available on Millennial managers; however, scholarly research on Millennial managers is lacking. As such, a major purpose of this study was also to add to the academic knowledge base on this timely topic.

Literature Review

Millennials as employees have changed the workplace. It has been noted that the Millennial generation is the best educated generation in the workforce (Zemke, Raines, & Filipczak, 2000). Previous studies noted that Millennials want “frequent, positive, and open communication in the workplace” (Chou, 2012, p. 75) and are also willing to share information with others (Chou, 2012; see also Gursoy, Maier, & Chi, 2008; Hill, 2002; Howe & Strauss, 2007; Marston, 2007; Martin, 2005; Tapscott, 1998; Zemke et al., 2000). In addition, this generational group tends to desire open communication and for their ideas and perspectives to be heard and valued (Cahill & Sedrack, 2012).

Given the differences that are apparent with Millennials as employees, it is logical that Millennials as managers will shake up the status quo of managing as well. A November 2015 Inc. article identified seven ways that Millennials who are employed as managers will change the working world (Stillman, 2015). Examples include insisting on flexibility, relying on metrics to determine the productivity of subordinates, supporting employee growth, and doing away with annual performance reviews in exchange for more frequent coaching and rapid feedback (Stillman, 2015). Millennials have experienced a high level of change within their lifetimes. As such, they may be better prepared to adapt quickly to change in the workplace (Taylor, 2014). In fact, Taylor (2014) noted that “Millennials have grown up seeing and embracing major innovations in technology and communication” (p. 54).

Regardless of the age of the manager, managerial communication is crucial in the workplace. Managerial communication plays a key role in employee job satisfaction. Madlock (2008) found that the manager’s communication competence is the best predictor of the employee’s job satisfaction. Unfortunately, according to Cahill and Sedrak (2012), a large number of leaders “have made generational issues a low priority” (p. 4). Given that “early life experiences contribute to generational differences that are deeply imprinted in individuals’ beliefs, values, preferences, and behaviors and are not easily changed” (Cahill & Sedrack, 2012, p. 4), it is essential that managers recognize different generational preferences as they seek to lead a diverse workforce, especially one in which subordinates may be significantly older than the Millennial manager.

Methodology

During the spring 2016 semester, students enrolled in four sections of business courses offered at a regional comprehensive university in the southwestern part of the United States had the choice to complete a survey regarding their expectations and preferences in the workplace. All of the targeted classes were at the undergraduate level, and the university’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved the survey administration prior to data collection. Qualtrics® was used to administer the survey online and students were informed that there would be no penalty if they opted not to complete the survey.

After the conclusion of the data collection period, the survey responses were reviewed for completeness. Any incomplete surveys were discarded and not used in subsequent data analysis. The responses to open ended survey questions were then open coded to allow for the highlighting of themes among survey responses. This involved copying the data, adding it to a transcript, and coding it. Miles and Huberman (1994) noted that data reduction is the process of “selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming the data into something meaningful and manageable” (pp. 10 – 12).

Findings

In the spring 2016 survey administration, 86 completed surveys were received from Millennials (birth years 1982 – 2002). Any responses received from individuals with birth years outside of that date range were excluded from subsequent data analysis. The majority of respondents were female (65%). Survey participants were asked about their current employment status and 49 (57%) reported currently being employed. Of those, the majority (78%) were employed part-time. For approximately 41% of participants, their part-time job was related to the career they would like to have after college graduation.

Of the 86 completed surveys received, 29 (34%) participants reported previous or current work experience as a manager or supervisor. Open ended data was collected from those with managerial experience related to their approach to management, their communication style with their employees, and their communication style with their superiors. Key themes that appeared related to approaches to management included being direct, open, helpful, and leading by example. When asked about their communication with their employees, responses centered around a more informal approach, open communication, high levels of relaxed communication, and encouraging two-way communication. Finally, when the participants were asked about their communication style with their superiors, key themes included being professional, formal, direct, and respectful.

Summary

As employees, Millennials are changing the workplace today and as more of them obtain management roles within organizations, even more changes will be apparent. This study investigated the approach to management of Millennials and inquired about their communication with subordinates as well as with supervisors. The findings are impactful, as there are significant differences between the downward and upward communication of Millennial managers.

Implications for Education and Business

It is essential that organizations acknowledge generational differences within the workplace and train employees on how to work well with others of various generations, as well as how to navigate conflict that may occur as a result of varying perspectives among the generations. In addition, as more Millennials assume managerial roles, it is important that they are properly prepared for the responsibilities of the roles, as well as how to lead others.

Given the changing dynamics of the workplace, educators can play a key role in preparing students for a changing workplace by helping them learn about generational differences. In addition, educators can help students acquire the skills needed to communicate with others in professional settings, regardless of their age. Learning from others, fostering two-way communication, leading people well, and communicating openly and honestly are just a few examples of skills and traits that will serve Millennial managers well.

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# Relational Communication as a Factor in Past and Present Workforce Scheduling Research 1974-2015: The Impact on Employee Satisfaction and Organizational Commitment

## Lorelei Amanda Ortiz

## John Loucks

This proposal supports the conference theme of paradigm shifts in communication. It presents a study of workforce scheduling and the role that employee preference and the quality of Leader/Member communication play in current scheduling models. Historically, workforce scheduling has been achieved through the use of scheduling software and algorithms that optimize the delicate relationship between labor need and labor cost, without much consideration for worker communication about needs or preferences. Recently, however, the value of cost optimization scheduling is being challenged by empirical evidence which suggests that this scheduling method can have a detrimental impact on employees’ quality of life (Golden, 2015; Kantor, 2014, Scheiber, 2015; Lambert, 2008).

According to Rousseau (1998), in order to encourage organizational commitment and job satisfaction from employees, scheduling should reinforce perceptions of organizational membership and demonstrate organizational care by strengthening Leader/Member communication around employee preferences and needs. Accommodation-based work scheduling would value employee-management communication as a means of reducing role conflicts, work-related stress, and improving overall work attitudes and organizational commitment (King, 2004).

The purpose of this study is to understand past and present workforce scheduling research, confirming whether greater emphasis on employee preferences is evident in recent research compared to previous years and what implications this has for relational communication, employee satisfaction, and organizational commitment. The study applies Social Exchange frameworks and mixed-methods elements of systematic content analysis and rhetorical analysis to 325 workforce scheduling research articles with a predominant focus on the emergence of thematic patterns that signify relational communication and emphasis on employee accommodation. The sample of workforce scheduling literature in this study spans across industries that include call centers, nursing/healthcare, petroleum, retail, telecommunications, financial services, manufacturing, transportation, education, law enforcement, hospitality, entertainment, food service, library services, postal/cargo, and construction.

The methodology for narrowing, culling, and reviewing articles utilized inclusion/exclusion criteria to assess relevance, similar to Bak-Klimek et al. (2015), Cooper and Koenka (2012), and Mikton and Butchart (2009):

1. Type of paper/publication: primary research published in English in peer-reviewed journals.

2. Date of study: primary research published between 1974 and 2015.

3. Focus: primary research whose focus is modeling systems for workforce scheduling.

This led to the operationalization of four categories for analysis to ascertain the degree of focus in the articles in the areas of employee accommodation, customer service, cost/efficiency, and Social Exchange (SX) and Leader/Member Exchange (LMX):

ACCOMMODATION—sample key words/phrases: employee choice, employee preference, employee accommodation, employee communication, worker accommodation, flexible shift lengths, scheduling flexibility, employee time preferences, staff preferences, employee scheduling preferences, flexible workplace agreements, employee time preference, seniority, seniority-based, desired work schedule, desired work hours, work preferences, attractive work schedule, employee scheduling preference

CUSTOMER SERVICE—sample key words/phrases: customer satisfaction, service, quality, customer demand, customer experience, quality service, reduce wait time, reduce customer wait time, reduce abandonment

COST/EFFICIENCY—sample key words/phrases: cost, optimization, efficiency, streamline operations, cost reduction, savings, profit, profit margins, cost per, maximize profitability, effective scheduling, waste reduction, maximizing productivity

SX/LMX—sample key words/phrases: employee health, safety, morale, employee satisfaction, working conditions, work environment, reducing negative impact on workers/employees, attractive work environment, maximize employee satisfaction, employee fatigue, employee stress, worker stress

Simple key word searches using a relational database (Namey et al. 2008; Henry et al., 2015) were executed in addition to close reading of the content through multiple passes, using what Dey (1993) calls a data-driven approach where the researcher “carefully reads and rereads the data, looking for keywords, trends, themes, or ideas in the data” (p.138).

Findings suggest an increase in employee accommodation and relational exchange communication trends in more recent workforce scheduling research. While the dominant focus continues to center on cost optimization rather than employee preference, there is an evident increase in focus on relational exchange and communication around employee choice. Findings also reveal the increasing practice of Social Exchange Theory, where indicators imply the reciprocity principal and the role that Leader/Member communication plays in establishing the perception of organizational support, given the prominent role that managers play in staffing and communicating the organization’s policies and practices.

Overall, the increase in accommodation focus from the 1970s to 2000s, while moderate, may signal a significant shift. Social perception, media coverage, and pressure from community action groups may be a factor in rising awareness of the effects of cost-centric models of previous decades and the need to update scheduling frameworks to more employee-friendly models that broaden the lines of communication between workers and their organizations. In addition, new scheduling software that allows for worker preference flexibility in the scheduling mix may also facilitate the increase of accommodation as a best practice.

From this presentation, ABC members will learn about the importance of relational communication in labor scheduling for fostering employee satisfaction and well-being. This presentation also has implications for industry, identifying emerging labor practices that prioritize employee work/life balance where deliberative Leader/Member communication is essential to the process of establishing harmony between organizational performance and organizational commitment.

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# Building Experiential Models of Negative News Delivery through Digital Simulation

## Robert Clapperton

Theme

The theme of my presentation is the use of simulations to more effectively teach students how to deliver negative news. The effective internalization of heuristics such as the buffer –bad news – alternative – goodwill closing require experience. I contend that simulations both in-person and digitally delivered allow students to more effectively develop mental models of heuristics commonly taught. Philip Johnson-Laird’s (2006) theory of mental models holds that strategies and tactics of reasoning are initially based on models before developing into intuitively accessed formal rules. In most business communication contexts, formal rules are only partially accessed and models developed through chains of conditionals mentally organized as diagrams are required to tactically navigate complex situations. I contend that by putting the student “in” the narrative, simulations develop the ability to formulate mental models in complex contexts such as the simulation described below.

Purpose

The purpose of my presentation is to introduce a digital and an in-class simulation platform to demonstrate how it develops a series of mental models around how to communicate negative news in a number of internal and external settings. The simulation utilizes IBM Watson artificial intelligence to create characters that communicate with the students.

Goals

The primary goal of my presentation will be the introduction of simulation pedagogy as a viable and effective alternative and /or compliment to traditional case-based learning. My secondary goal will be the generation of discussion on possible applications of simulation pedagogy in the teaching of business communication.

Methodology (Simulation Description)

There are three key elements to the simulation described as follows:

Narrative:

The narrative of a simulation is a combination of the story and situation in which the student has been placed. In some simulations, students play the role of junior associates at a communication consulting firm working through a 2-12-week training program that entails engaging with clients, partners and other stakeholders. In other simulation narratives, student play engineers, public relations professionals, or scientists. The narrative presents the story, or how the student came to be a consultant, engineer, and so on. It also presents the situation, in other words the context that surrounds what tasks the student has to complete in the project.

Projects:

Student work is organized as projects. Each project entails solving a problem for a stakeholder (most often in the “client” role).

Tasks:

Each project is organized as a series of tasks beginning with a scheduling task and ending with a reflection task. In between the student practices various communication activities towards the solution of the client problem.

The focus of my talk will discuss how the simulation develops experiential skill in delivering bad news. Students play a consultant role and are tasked with selecting a new vendor for a client. During the simulation the vendors (Watson based artificially intelligent characters) communicate frequently with the student. These communications range from general introductions to pleas for the business. Students develop a relationship with the vendors throughout the initial stages of the simulation. The student must select one of the vendors for the new contract and tell the others that they have not been selected. The simulation brings the heuristic to life making the use of a buffer a necessary practice as the student has developed a relationship of a sort with the AI vendor.

I am doing ethnographic research Fall 2016 where research assistants are participating in the simulation and gathering data through interviews with students on their experience of delivering bad news in the simulation. Data, through interviews is also being collected from students who are taking the traditional case based course in business writing. The goal is to have students describe their mental model of bad news delivery and compare the two groups.

Outcomes

Business communication situations that involve delivering bad news require the ability to develop mental models that involve complex chains of conditions that are dependent on audience, context, and business versus individual needs, to mention only a few. Simulation pedagogy brings reasoning and intuition into contact with context to a higher degree than traditional cases where the stakeholders in the case are mute. Mental models are more effectively developed through the interaction provided in a simulation. Attendees will leave the presentation with a new take on a pedagogical tool for developing the ability to form mental models of complex communication settings.

# Leadership Institute: Lessons Learns and Methods to Increase Student Engagement

## Marilyn Young

Session Description:

A leadership executive program at an institution Texas was found to be effective in that employees and management gave high ratings. This presentation will describe the 5-year program and lessons learned. This training was designed to be personal, high level of engagement, networking possibilities for the 25 participants. The company became listed as one of the Best Companies to Work for in Texas. The major objective of the leadership institute was to increase leadership effectiveness, as well as increased networking. Several techniques were developed over the 5-year period.

These include topics were concepts taught in a typical Organizational Behavior, as well as etiquette. Also, speakers presented topics, such as creativity from Disney Institute. An effort to increase networking among employees was initiated by using many venues such as luncheons, birthday and special event parties, class picture, and graduation ceremony. Student engagement was enhanced through multimedia, including cartoons, and YouTube videos.

Several examples will be shown using YouTube videos and other stories, websites, and animation to engage the leadership participants in a once-a-month seminar. This presentation will explore organizational behavior concepts through audience participation. Learning objectives will be examined with points and counterpoints. The workshop will address such processes as to when to use the particular venues. The following are examples of organizational behavior and leadership concepts, the multimedia venue, and concepts and learning objectives. Examples of the topics where the concepts include change management, motivation, team building, perception, stress management, and non-verbal communication. For instance, a short clip in christening and bringing the George H.W. Bush ship to life is an excellent example of an effective team. It shows synergy and complementary skills, as well as the importance of a clear mission.

The presentation will provide participants with multimedia methods which are tools developed to engage leadership participants, especially Millenniums. The presentation suggests that using these venues will improve the understanding and use leadership and behavioral concepts. Moreover, these concepts brought an excitement and energy to such topics as team building, stereotyping, motivation, and nonverbal communication

Methods to engage the audience and get their attention in a world of YouTube and other media is illustrated. Also, nine organizational concepts and YouTube and other venue which supports a theory. It shows methods to demonstrate knowledge in such areas as change management, job satisfaction, and others.

Objective: To provide the audience with lessons learned and tools for an effective management and leadership development training programs with multimedia methods which are tools developed for Generation Y participants. After the presentation, participants will discuss the major management concept and/or theories used. Attendees in this presentation will be provided a list of those used in a format they may use in the classroom.

The Institute included traditional methods, cases, and exercises. The following are the “finishing or personal touches” and extras to increase network opportunities among participants.

Network Opportunities

Introduction on 1st day by President, CEO

Representative of Executive Board present at each meeting

Guest speakers (etiquette, creativity from Disney Institute)

Luncheons

Each participant had a mentor

Class party

Graduation with certificates held at country club (President and Presenter spoke)

Class picture

Leadership Understanding

Pictures of leaders where they must apply theory

Multimedia venues which illustrate organizational behavior concepts

FISH Video

Movie Survey of top movies illustrating an organizational behavior

Implications for Hybrid/On Line Possibilities

# Poster Presentations

**For the second year in a row, Federation of Business Disciplines** is sponsoring the Poster Presentation venue for all organizations at the FBD conference. Poster sessions have become a significant communication style for presenting research results in professional association meetings.

Poster submissions may describe research projects, recently completed work, highly relevant results of work in progress, presentation of data, or speculative or innovative work in all areas.

Posters offer the opportunity to have substantive discussions with interested colleagues. The audience circulates among the posters, stopping to discuss papers of particular interest to them. Visitors to poster sessions see and hear more presentations than in the equivalent time dedicated to presented papers; moreover, the opportunity for close conversation between presenter and visitor is one of the most important ways that information can be shared among scholars.

This year’s poster presentations for ABC include:

**Business Dining: Putting your Best Fork Forward**

**Susan Evans Jennings and Judith Lynn Biss**

Business etiquette is often a skill found lacking in employees. This study looked at what students thought they knew about business dining and then at what they actually knew. Suggestions for teaching dining etiquette will also be presented.

**A Case of Adaptive Curriculum Design in a Senior-Level Business Management**

**Kayla Sapkota**

A case presentation on the innovative curricular adaptation of a senior-level, undergraduate business course to address identified student needs in the areas of basic research methods, career preparation and success, and career exploration; and discussion of resulting implications of the changes.

**A First Experience in a Business Communications Class: Video Clips That Help Students Establish a Continuum of Success**

**Victoria McCrady**

What is the power of a mirror neuron response? This natural response to nonverbal cues is one that can, in the context of the first class of the semester, help establish students' sense of themselves as moving forward along a continuum of success.