Communication Training as Described by Independent Practitioners: A First Look

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An in-depth survey of seventeen independent communication trainers provided descriptions of training practices, including types of clients (e.g., health care agencies, state institutions, insurance companies) and topics of sessions (e.g., business writing, business strategies, presentation skills, technical writing). Participants reported wide variation in the frequency of training sessions, length of the training sessions, rate of pay, as well as perceptions of preferred qualifications of and training methods for sub-contractors.

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Given that communication is vitally important to the success of organizations (DeWine, 2001) and given that every organization trains employees (Arnold & McClure, 1996), communication training is a thriving enterprise (Beebe, Mottet, & Roach, 2004). A complex and rich literature surrounds the activity of communication training (see review below). This literature is written both for and about three distinct types of communication trainers: (a) in-house trainers hired to provide training to fellow employees within the same organization, (b) trainers who work for training and consulting firms that in turn contract with other organizations to fulfill training needs, and finally (c) the independent and typically sole practitioner who similarly contracts with organizations to provide training. While much of the literature on communication training is equally applicable to all three types of trainers (e.g., Tsui, 1993, described a training program on oral presentation skills), no study to date has examined how the latter group, independent trainers, practice their profession. Despite a wealth of knowledge about communication training (see review of literature below), we know very little about the types of clients served or workshops offered by independent communication trainers. The purpose of the present project was to conduct a preliminary examination of training practices of independent communication trainers by gathering in-depth descriptions from a small but diverse sample of trainers. We believed that such descriptions could provide a glimpse into the professional practices of these trainers, thus allowing preliminary insights into the types of clients communication trainers may serve and the topics of workshops independent communication trainers may offer.

Literature Review

Training and development occurs in all jobs, companies, and organizations (Arnold & McClure, 1996). Organizations employ a variety of methods to train and develop employees including in-house training, contracted training, public workshops, as well as traditional and nontraditional college courses (Arnold & McClure, 1996). Altogether private industry spends approximately $58 billion per annum on employee training (Marchese, 1998). According to the American Society for Training and Development's 2006 State of the Industry Report, "U.S. organizations spend $109.25 billion annually in workplace learning and performance" www.astd.org/astd.[1]

Many executives realize that communication plays a vital role in the day-to-day management of companies (DeWine, 2001). What employee communication skills appear to benefit organizations? Companies (see Knapp, 1969; Meister & Reinsch, 1978) and scholars (e.g., Boyd, 1995; Hollwitz & Matthiesen, 1981; Scheiber & Hager, 1994; Tsui, 1993; Webb, 1989; Webb & Howay, 1987) acknowledge the importance of public speaking training for employees. In addition to presentation skills, businesses report a strong interest in team building, interviewing, and presentation skills (Davis & Krapels, 1999). In sum, organizations want their employees to utilize a variety of effective communication skills.

The published work on communication training comprises a complex and rich literature. Researchers have documented the benefits of specific types of communication training, including the appropriate use of computer-mediated communication in decision-making groups (Cornelius & Boos, 2003; Savicki, Kelley, & Ammon, 2002), conflict management skills for medical

clinicians (Vanderford, Stein, Sheeler, & Skochelak, 2001), interviewing skills for physicians (Stein & Kwan, 1999), nurse-to-patient communication training (Kruijver, Kerkstra, Francke, Bensing, & van de Wiel, 2000), leadership skills for executives (Pace & Easter, 2005), professional conversation skills for engineers (Freeman, 2003), and providing instrumental and emotional support for hospice workers (Egbert & Parrott, 2003). Further, reasoning from prior research and/or direct experience, other authors have articulated the need for training in a variety of settings including dialogue, reconciliation, and conflict resolution for international negotiators (Fisher, 1997); effective communication for health-care providers (Lee, Rosenberg, & Molho, 1998; Tierman, 2003; Weiner, Barnet, Cheng, & Daaleman, 2005); effective written communication for technologists (Steiner, 1994); electronic communication for employees (Hartman, Ogden, & Geroy, 2001); hazard communication for chemical workers (Klane, 2004); interpersonal communication for supervisors (Dee, 1965); lie detection for law enforcement professionals (Frank & Feeley, 2003); listening for hospice workers (Coffman & Coffman, 1993); skills to analyze miscommunication and its negative consequences for international relations workers (Gallois, 2003); story-telling and listening training in the workplace (Schwartz, 2004); improved intercultural communication for managers and workers in multi-national corporations (Charles & Marschan-Piekkari, 2002); and total-quality-management training for organizational members (Brown, 1992). Finally, another line of research documents the limitations (Kitzinger & Peel, 2005) as well as the efficacy and benefits of communication training (Abu-Nimer, 2001; Adelman & Christian, 1998; Barge, 2004; Bowles, Mackintosh, & Torn, 2001; Black, 2005; Irvine, Ary, Bourgeois, 2003; Timm & Schroeder, 2000; Wilkinson, Roberts, & Aldridge, 1998; Williams, Kemper, & Hummert, 2003).

While a review of the above cited scholarship documents the existence and benefits of communication training, yet another body of scholarship focuses on the "how to" of communication training. For purposes of this essay, we divided these descriptive, practical articles into five categories based on content: First, multiple articles describe how the college instructor can integrate training concerns into the traditional college classroom via case studies (e.g., Davis & Krapels, 1999) and class projects (e.g., Krapels, Ryan, & Lane, 1998). A second group of articles explicates specific training methodologies including CD-ROM (Irvine, Ary, & Bourgeois, 2003), distance learning (Wardrope, 2001), and web-based training (Driscoll & Reid, 1999; Sherry, 1999). A third set of articles articulates additional process concerns beyond technological method such as the use of drama and simulations (Lewis, 2005), integrating needs assessment into the content of training sessions (Woods, 2000), effectively evaluating training programs (Blakeslee, 1982; Little, 2007), and adapting to trainee groups, such as Mexican-Americans (Carson, Carson, & Irwin, 1995). A fourth group of articles informs selection of content in training sessions. For example, Krapels and Davis (2000) reported two human resources executives' opinions about communication skills particularly valued in their organizations. Krapels, Ryan, and Lane (1998) described differences between services offered by consulting groups versus in-house corporate training. Finally, a fifth group of publications describes the actual content of training sessions per se. In addition to books suggesting activities for communication trainers (Orey & Prisk, 2004; Withers & Lewis, 1993), multiple articles describe programs of training, e.g., a writing program for consulting engineers (Schillaci, 1996), multi-session approaches to presentation training (Boyd, 1995; Webb, 1989), models for multiculturalism/diversity training (Cornett-DeVito & McGlone, 2000; Lai & Kleiner, 2001; Lewis & Geroy, 2000; Sussman, 1997).

While the three types of trainers (i.e., in-house trainers, employees of training agencies, and independent trainers) may find the information provided by the above-described publications useful, independent trainers also may benefit from acquiring detailed descriptions of the professional practices of fellow independent communication trainers (Who are their clients? What are the topics of the training sessions? How many sessions do trainers conduct in a month?). Books (e.g., Holtz & Zahn, 2004; Florzak, 1999; Reynolds, Matalene, Magnotto, Samson, & Sadler, 1995) and reviews (e.g., Poe, 2002) explain business plans for beginning a consulting/training practice, and a few communication trainers have published detailed information about their individual practices (Beebe, 2007; Plax, 2006). However, we could locate no published research with the more narrow and specific focus of describing, even in a preliminary way, the reported professional practices of multiple independent communication trainers. Such information could prove useful to new practitioners beginning practice as well as current practitioners desiring to expand their practices. Additionally, detailed descriptions may prove particularly useful to two sets of full-time academics: First, professors who teach the college course in communication consulting and training (see Jarboe, 1989, for the description of one such course and see Dallimore & Souza, 2002, on the need to expand such offerings) typically assign reading from an existing textbook on communication consulting and training (e.g., Arnold & McClure, 1996; Beebe, Mottet, & Roach, 2004; DeWine, 2001).
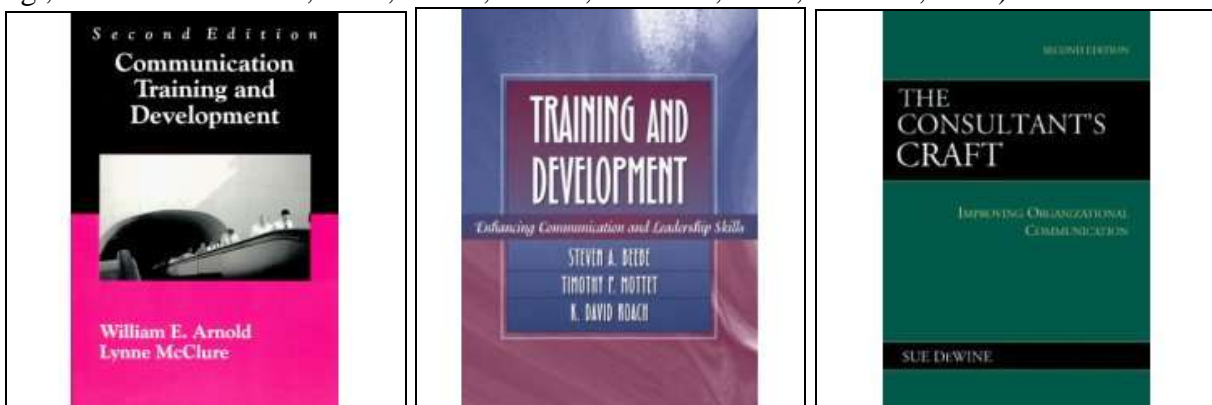
While these books provide a wealth of useful information, college instructors may desire to expand that information by providing their students with detailed descriptions of how a sample of independent communication trainers report practicing their profession.

Second, unlike full-time trainers, academics with potential or current part-time training practices rarely enjoy extensive networks and experiences that focus on training. Thus, published, detailed descriptions of independent communication training may serve as a primary source of realistic information for part-time trainers who also serve as full-time academics.

The purpose of the present project was to provide a first look at the professional practices of independent communication trainers by gathering detailed, in-depth descriptions from a small but diverse group of such trainers about their clients, characteristics of training sessions, and information about subcontractors. Please note that, in part, we undertook this project as an exploratory and preliminary examination. Prior to investing the more extensive resources necessary to survey a large and representative sample of independent trainers, we undertook this preliminary project to discover whether such trainers would be responsive to a survey about their business practices and to discover if we framed questions in a way that facilitated responses. In sum, we believed that our results would provide descriptive arrays of practitioners' activities to provide a first look at the phenomenon of communication training by independent communication trainers and that our findings might serve as the basis for later more comprehensive research.

The activities of communication training and communication consulting often go hand-in-hand. For example, a communication consultant may be hired to diagnose an organizational problem and propose solutions. The consultant may suggest employee training as the potential solution to a variety of communication problems. Indeed, most definitions and discussions of communication consulting include training skills as part of the job description (Ames, 2002; Plax, 2006). It is noteworthy that Plax's list of 25 "important services" offered by communication consultants begins with "teach or train others" immediately followed by "design training or instructional packages and modules" (2006, p. 243). Further, many communication consultants provide training and many communication trainers provide a variety of services on a consulting basis. However, for purposes of this project, we elected *not* to examine communication consulting generally, but rather to focus in considerable detail on one particular consulting activity, training. We limited our focus in order to obtain more detailed descriptions of training rather than more general descriptions of a wide variety of consulting activities. Future studies many provide detailed descriptions of additional consulting activities as well as identify successful strategies for tying together arrays of such activities.

Methods

Participants.
    Appropriateness. We could locate only one previous study that reported detailed information about communication professionals who practice independently, Little and McLaren's 1987 survey of technical writers in the San Diego area. Like Little and McLaren, we undertook a census of a narrowly defined professional association and asked participants for detailed information about their work product (i.e., training sessions, their clients, and their

subcontracts). We employed a purposive sample of communication trainers, specifically a census of the Association of Professional Communication Consultants (APCC) membership, as listed in the web directory.

Founded in 1983, APCC's current mission is "to create a professional community to help communication consultants increase their knowledge, grow their business, and achieve high standards of professional practice" (Consulting Success, 2008). As the only national professional association exclusively for communication consultants, APCC publishes an on-line quarterly newsletter (example articles: "What do clients really want?" "Brand Essence: Branding for Consultants"), offers an annual professional development workshop, recognizes professional excellence with annual awards, and maintains an active website (www.consultingsuccess.org) with (a) discussion lists, (b) a membership list of about 125 members (approximately a third claim affiliation with an institution of higher education), and (c) access to business tools such as sample contracts and proposals.

We elected to survey APCC members because of this particular professional association's specific and narrow focus on *communication* consulting and training as well as its policy of granting membership to any paying customer, regardless of his/her disciplinary training or training focus (e.g., speech communication, technical writing, negotiation training). Thus, APCC offered the communication-focus we desired more so than general training associations such as the American Society for Training and Development. Simultaneously, APCC provided a more diverse sample pool in terms of communication trainers' scholarly background than numerous more narrow professional associations who rightfully claim communication trainers as members (e.g., Academy of Business Education, Association for Business Communication, American Communication Association, Association of Teachers of Technical Writing, International Communication Association, National Business Education Association, National Communication Association, Organizational Behavior Teaching Society, Society for Technical Communication).

Size. We emailed the 118 individuals who listed e-mail addresses on the APCC membership list and invited them to participate in the survey. Seven members were not included in the sample because they conducted training solely outside the communication field, 24 email addresses were returned, and 66 members did not respond to the email. Of the 28 members who responded to the email invitation, 17 independent trainers elected to participate in the project.

While our response rate of 18% was less than ideal, it is typical of mail surveys. Despite the fact that "there is no generally accepted minimum response rate [for surveys]" (Frey, Botan, Friedman, & Kreps, 1992, p. 95) and the fact that mailed questionnaires tend to yield the lowest rate of response (Mendenhall, Ott, & Scheaffer, 1971), our response rate of 18% was consistent with the response rate of 17% for volunteer subjects' completion of a second-wave of mail surveys reported by Rosnow and Rosenthall (1997, p. 92) in their treatise on the use of volunteer respondents. Further, it is important to note that we employed multiple administration techniques commonly recommended to increase response rate, including prenotification of the survey (Fox, Crask, & Kim, 1988), describing "the purpose, sponsorship, and importance of the research" (Frey, Botan, Friedman, & Kreps, 1991, p. 194), sponsorship by a university (Jones & Lang, 1980), as well as follow-up letters (Mendenhall, Ott, & Scheaffer, 1971). Thus, we made reasonable efforts to increase response rate.

The limited response rate did not surprise us, given three characteristics of our project: First, many APCC members may be consultants rarely involved in training and thus perceived the survey as not relevant to them. Second, among the APCC members who are successful trainers, many may hesitate to reveal details of their professional practices to potential competitors. Third, the exploratory and qualitative nature of our project prompted us to develop a three-page instrument of open-ended questions. Such questionnaires require more time to complete than instruments employing a forced-choice format. Thus, many potential participants may have declined our invitation to participation because we asked them to complete a time-consuming task without monetary compensation.

However, the qualitative nature of our project mitigated the need for a large sample (Bostrom, 1998). We collected thick descriptions and in-depth reports from each participant that we later subjected to thematic analysis. We employed this qualitative approach for three reasons: First, as Bostrom posited, "one goal of [qualitative research] is to address a particular situation as openly as possible" (1998, p. 76). Given the dearth of previous research on our topic, we thought an open approach, with minimal preconceived notions, would best serve the purposes of our exploratory project. Second, Frey, Friedman, and Kreps posited that "open survey questions are … used with small samples about which the researcher wants to know a great deal" (1991, p. 202). Indeed, we wanted to know many details of our participants' professional practices to enable us to report descriptive arrays of reported behaviors thus providing a first look at the professional practices of independent communication trainers. Third, we desired to have our conclusions emerge from the words of our participants, the communication trainers themselves; we believed that the participants were better qualified than us to describe and convey the details of their independent training activities.

To assess the normality of our sample size for contemporary research projects on communication training, we conducted fourteen individual searches of the Communication Institute for On-line Scholarship (CIOS) database ComAbstracts[2] for articles published in 2004 through 2007 using the individual key words "train," "trainer," trainers," "training," "pedagogy," "teach," "teacher," "teachers," "teaching," "consult," "consultant," "consultants," "consulting," and "organization." The search uncovered only three articles published in communication journals on the subject of instruction in organizational settings (Barge, 2004; Black, 2005; Kitzinger & Peel, 2005). All three studies employed qualitative methodologies; one study

(Black, 2005) reported triangulating three types of data about one training protocol. Thus, the sample sizes reported in the three studies included interviews with five workshop developers and instructors from the same organization (Black, 2005), interviews with 13 workshop participants (Black, 2005), analysis of discourse during 13 separate training sessions covering the same material (Kitzinger & Peel, 2005), interviews with 21 managers who participated in training provided by the same organization (Barge, 2004), and open-ended questionnaires completed by 34 workshop participants in one of two workshops on the same subject (Black, 2005). In sum, these three articles reported five data collections, with sample sizes ranging from 5-34 and with an average sample size of 17.20. Thus, our sample size of 17 appeared within the norm for qualitative studies on communication training. Further, our participants represented a diverse sample of trainers; they were *not* employed by the same organization nor did they conduct training for the same clients groups or on the same topics. Also, it should be noted that Black's survey of 34 workshop participants employed an instrument with only four open-ended questions, thus gathering 136 potential responses to survey questions. In contrast, our 17 participants completed a questionnaire with 33 open-ended questions, thus providing 561 potential responses to survey questions.

Characteristics. Each participant (P) self-reported as an independent trainer who worked either full- or part-time as a trainer; no P in this project worked as an in-house trainer or for a training/consulting firm. All participants (Ps) claimed affiliation with a college/university or operated a practice without partners or employees. The sample contained three males and fourteen females. Ten of the seventeen Ps reported demographic information. Based on these results, Ps ranged in age from 35 to 61 ($M = 51.60$). The Ps varied widely in experience, reporting 3, 7, and 14 years working as a trainer; four Ps reported over 20 years experience as a trainer. All Ps claimed to be Caucasian and college-graduates. They reported their highest degree earned as follows: 20% Bachelor's degree, 50% Master's degree, and 30% Doctoral degree. Ps were from California, Indiana, Iowa, Oklahoma, Maryland, Massachusetts, Mississippi, Missouri, Texas, Wisconsin, Canada and New Zealand. Thirteen of our Ps completed and returned written surveys. An additional four Ps completed oral administration of the same survey instrument via telephone.

Instruments.

We developed a set of open-ended survey questions about communication training by repeatedly asking ourselves, "What is it I need to know to decide if I want to pursue communication training as a career choice?" Next, we grouped the questions into five categories: characteristics of the training company, trainer, employment, clients, and training sessions. A copy of the questionnaire is appended to this essay.

We employed nondirective (i.e., open) questions to "allow respondents to frame their answers" (Frey et al, 1991, p. 193). Such questions "evoke more information about the particular perspectives of individual respondents than closed questions, … allow wide latitudes regarding depth of information respondents can give, … [and] are therefore used with small samples about whom the researcher wants to know a great deal" (Frey, et al., 1991, p. 202). In sum, we wrote open-ended survey questions to provide the potential for the collection of rich, qualitative information.

To pre-test the instrument for readability and ease of completion, three volunteers (members of upper-management of various organizations) completed a written version of the survey. Results of the pretest indicated that (a) the volunteers easily understood the survey questions and (b) that they required about forty minutes to complete the survey.

Procedures.
We solicited Ps by e-mailing each APCC member a letter of participation explaining the project and inviting recipients to participate in the survey. The letter explained the purpose of the project as discovering specific details about the practice of communication training. To increase our response rate, we provided Ps the option of oral or written administration of the survey and indicated that both methods required approximately 40 minutes to complete. Finally, the letter asked the Ps to write back if they wished to participate and to indicate their preference for a written (*N*=13) or oral administration (*N*=4). Upon receipt of Ps' e-mail, either an oral administration was scheduled or a copy of the written survey was e-mailed to the Ps. A second letter of invitation to participate, sent to all members of APCC who failed to respond to the initial invitation, yielded no new Ps.

The survey was orally administered to four Ps via telephone by a 24 year old, female second-semester M.A. student in Communication. The four Ps received an emailed survey prior to the oral administration, allowing Ps to preview the questions and to follow along during the administration. During the telephone conversations, the interviewer read the survey questions to the Ps, one at a time, and recorded the responses, completing the survey instrument, as the P would have done, had the participant elected written versus oral administration. To ensure that the oral and written administrative procedures were comparable, Ps received no follow-up questions during oral administration. Following Krusiewicz and Wood's procedure, we compared data from the e-mail versus telephone administrations to discover "differences in length, detail, disclosiveness, anecdotal content, personal tone, or substantive richness" (2001, p. 790). Because our comparison revealed no notable differences, we combined the data and treated it as one sample for further analyses.

Analyses.
Based on Grounded Theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Strauss & Corbin, 1990), we employed systematic data collection, coding, and analysis of our qualitative data. The interviewer read the data in its entirety to gain familiarity with each response and to develop a holistic sense of the responses both to individual questions as well as across the data as a whole. Then, each Ps' response to the first question on the survey was read. On a separate sheet of paper, commonalties and differences among responses to the first question were recorded. Then data related to the second survey questions was analyzed in the same way. Whenever three or more Ps expressed the same idea, we report it below as a commonality.

Similar to any analytic inductive technique based on grounded theory, the interviewer/ analyst functioned as a textual critic interpreting language. "Thus, reliability is not established by intercoder agreement. Instead, integrity of the analysis is established through a constant comparison process" (Krusiewicz & Wood, 2001, p. 791). Insights from later responses

influenced noted commonalities and, when appropriate, prompted the reinterpretations of previously reviewed responses and/or recorded themes (Charmaz, 1983).

Results

Clientele.

      Ps reported numerous methods for obtaining clients, including primarily networking with other trainers and word-of-mouth among clients. Additional methods for recruiting clients included brochures, referrals, mail solicitation, and maintaining websites. Our Ps' clients included insurance agencies, manufacturing businesses, state police agencies, government agencies, health care professions, banks, military, and educational institutions. The majority of the Ps reported repeat business from clients. Many Ps reported out-of-state clientele who typically paid for travel to and from training sites with the trainers making their own travel arrangements.

Topics Covered in Training.

      Ps reported offering training on several topics, including the following listed from most to least frequent: business writing, business strategy, presentation skills, technical writing, organizational development/culture, grammar, intercultural communication, and team building. One P offered training in the area of marketing and technology. The above described common training topics may be a response to market demands. When asked what type of training clients wanted, most Ps reported that clients wanted training in business writing, management, leadership, presentation skills, interpersonal skills, as well as written and oral communication skills. When asked if they presented training on the same topics again and again, Ps consistently indicated that the topic(s) of the workshops varied from client to client, as Ps reported adapting the workshops to the clients' needs.

Characteristics of training sessions.

      We queried Ps about the frequency and length of the training sessions they conducted. Ps indicated that frequency varied widely, from as often as one or two times per month to as rarely as once every two or three months. Length of the training sessions also varied, typically depending upon the clients' needs. The shortest reported training period was a one-hour "lunch and learn" session. The longest session consisted of twelve separate meetings. Additional reported lengths included two, six, and eight hours as well as 1.5 and three days.

Rate of Fees.

      We elected to not collect detailed financial information about overhead and annual income, as we believed that Ps would be reluctant to reveal such private information. However, we inquired generally regarding the fees trainers charged clients. Ps reported a variety of pay rates including $200 to $300 per contact hour, $1000 per day, and an hourly fee based on the hours of contact. All but one P reported operating a financially successful business. The self-described unsuccessful trainer reported that, while there was not much money to be made, he/she nonetheless stayed busy with work. Every P indicated that he/she was evaluated regularly. Some trainers provided their own evaluation tools, while others employed clients' rating sheets.

Sub-contractors.

Plax advised communication consultants to "identify a core group of experts that bring added strength to your abilities and diminishes your limitation" (2006, p. 244). To this end, some Ps reported working on a sub-contracted basis for other trainers. Other Ps reported hiring sub-contractors. Ps reported that, when a trainer sub-contracted, the workers were recruited by word-of-mouth and through personal contacts. Ps indicated that sub-contractors must have knowledge of the subject matter, flexibility, experience with adult learners, and/or at least a bachelor's degree. Ps preferred sub-contractors with a wide range of experiences from college teaching to corporate experience. Specific skills preferred in sub-contractors included writing skills, public speaking skills, and up-to-date knowledge of communication theory. One P indicated that sub-contractors must receive positive client evaluations or they will not be rehired. We asked Ps what desirable qualities sub-contractors currently do *not* possess. The majority indicated that most sub-contractors did not have the ability to respond to questions and adapt to new situations. One P wished sub-contractors had more knowledge of the world of commerce and business; another P desired sub-contractors who displayed more humor and excitement.

We asked Ps if they provided their sub-contractors with training. One P had sub-contractors observe the lead trainer conducting a training session and then provided sub-contractors one-on-one coaching. Another P asked sub-contractors to watch the lead trainer conducting a session while taking notes on the training. Then, the same P had a videotape made of the two training together. Finally, this trainer provided the sub-contractor with feedback while they viewed the videotape. Another P reported hiring only experienced sub-contractors, and thus "no training was necessary."

Discussion

Summary of Results.

Ps were independent trainers who offered training on similar topics, primarily business writing, business strategy, presentation skills, and technical writing. They conducted training for the similar types of organizations, primarily health care agencies, state institutions, and insurance companies. Trainers varied in their preferred qualifications for sub-contractors (e.g., corporate experience, up-to-date knowledge of communication theory), how to train sub-contractors (i.e., no training to coaching), the frequency as well as the length of the training sessions (e.g., one hour sessions given monthly, two-day training sessions given once a month), and the rate of pay for services (e.g., $200-$300 per contact hour, $1000 a day).

Interpretation of Results.

The findings provide a first look at independent communication trainers' professional practices. Our sampling technique and our low response rate limit our ability to reasonably view these findings as widely generalizable or as *typical* professional practices. Nonetheless, our results reveal arrays of behaviors that can and do occur in the consulting practices of independent communication trainers. Indeed, these behaviors are largely consistent with previous reports (Beebe, 2007; Plax, 2006) from individual trainers describing their practices. Thus, the list of professional practices revealed in our analysis represents a list of behavioral options, albeit not a complete list of options, for those desiring to begin or expand an independent training practice.

Perhaps the most important finding of this project was that some trainers are willing and able to reveal detailed information about their professional practices, thus paving the way for future studies about communication training from the trainers' perspective. Our sample of

trainers reported that organizations desire training primarily for business writing, business strategy, presentation skills, technical writing, as well as other communication- related skills – thus confirming Beebe's characterization of training as focusing "more on the behavioral domain, … [and] achieving a certain level of skill attainment" (2007, p. 250) as well as Suchan's observation that "external consultants, who are often academics, … see changing communication practices as merely introducing new skills rather than altering the ways workers habitually think and talk about communication" (2006, p. 5).

Academics who are part-time trainers and desire to expand their practices, beyond providing training in the same subject areas as their classes, may find this list of training topics helpful in offering suggested areas of expansion. Consistent with previous reports of effective communication training (Beebe, 2007; Plax, 2006), our Ps reported adapting their training and materials to address their clients' needs. Further, independent consultants looking to expand their client-base may find the list of client types identified by our sample helpful. Finally, our sample of independent trainers reported sufficient demand for communication training that they remained in the business; recall that four Ps had been in practice over 20 years. While amount of compensation varied, the reported $300 per hour figure was consistent with Plax's (2006) recommendation fee of $4500 for a two-day seminar. While many trainers begin their practices by providing free services (Beebe, 2007; Plax, 2006), our Ps reported being consistently paid for their services.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research.
Because all Ps were independent trainers, the results do not provide insights into the professional practices of in-house communication trainers or communication trainers who work for training/consulting firms. Further, our diverse sample included Ps from only ten states and three countries, yet failed to include trainers from every U.S. state. Given our desire to gather detailed, in-depth descriptions from a small but diverse sample of independent communication trainers rather than survey a large number of trainers, we intentionally stopped collecting data when we finished collecting data from volunteer participants among the APCC membership. However, future researchers who desire to represent the broader training community may elect to survey trainers from a wide variety of professional associations (e.g., Academy of Business Education, American Communication Association, Association for Business Communication, Association of Teachers of Technical Writing, International Communication Association, National Business Education Association, National Communication Association, Organizational Behavior Teaching Society, Society for Technical Communication). Our more modest desire for a first look at the professional practices of a small but diverse group of independent communication trainers was met simply and straight-forwardly by surveying APCC members.

Another limitation of our project concerns the survey instrument. Despite its length, our survey failed to query Ps about many details of their training practices including the size of Ps' professional networks, the size of the markets in which they practice, as well as the size of their business in either gross dollars per annum or number of days worked per year. Further, given APCC's broad membership, we wrote the questionnaire to assess training practices in various venues, including large, corporate training firms rather than strictly entrepreneurs. Thus, some questions were irrelevant or inappropriate for our Ps. Future studies might employ various versions of a revised survey, each tailored to specific types of trainers, i.e., independent

practitioners, in-house trainers, trainers employed in consulting/training films. Further, future Ps may experience an increased sense of anonymity, if surveys were available for completion via a link within the text of the e-mail. Finally, the current data gathering project, limited in scope and sample, may provide the basis for developing a "second-generation" forced-choice questionnaire that could attract a larger and more diverse sample, given its anticipated ease of completion.

Conclusions

Despite its limitations, this project contributes to our discipline's understanding of communication training by providing detailed descriptions of the professional practices of a small but diverse sample of independent communication trainers, including a preliminary assessment of the types of clients as well as the content and characteristics of the training sessions. Thus, our results fill a void in our knowledge about communication training. Further, this project serves the heuristic function of providing the basis for future research. Finally, our project has real-world implications: It provides potential and current independent trainers with a preliminary list of session topics offered by other communication trainers as well as preliminary guidelines for other parameters of training (e.g., length and frequency of sessions).

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Endnotes

[1]The American Society for Training and Development issues its annual report in December of each calendar year. At the time of this writing, the 2007 report had not yet been released on-line and free to the public.

[2]CIOS's website provides access to ComAbstracts, its searchable, on-line data base containing the bibliographic entries (as well as typically abstracts and key words) for more than 50,000 articles published in 92 of scholarly journals and annuals in the communication discipline.

Survey Instrument

Characteristics of the training company.

1. What type of training work does your company do?

2. How long has your company been established?

3. How successful is your company?

4. Does the company promote within?

Characteristics of the clients.

1. What strategies do you use to get clients? Are trainers involved?

2. What kind(s) of clients do you work for? Can you give me the names of some of your most recent clients?

3. From what region do most of your clients come from?

4. Are any of your clients standing clients? If yes, can you tell me which ones?

5. What are the types of training which your clients looking for?

6. Do clients generally request a particular trainer?

Characteristics of employment.

1. How do you recruit and hire employees?

2. Do you have a minimum requirement to work for your company?

3. What kind(s) of prior experience do you prefer in a trainer?

4. What packages are offered to employees?

    What is the pay rate for trainers?

    How are trainers paid (i.e., salary, commission, per hour)?

    Is there commission as well as a flat pay rate?

    What are the company's benefits (i.e., insurance, 401K)?

5. How much travel is involved?

    Does the company pay for all travel expenses?

    Who takes care of travel arrangements?

6. Once you are an employee of the company, are there any other requirements (i.e., continuing educational training)?

    What are the additional requirements?

    If it is training, then who pays for the employee to receive the training?

7. What is expected of employees regarding office work (i.e., fill-out reports)?

8. On the average, how many seminars does an employee give per week?

9. How are trainers assigned to a particular client?

10. Are trainers rewarded for getting new clients?

11. What is the employee turn over rate?

Characteristics of the trainer.

1. Does the company train the trainers on how to conduct seminars/training? If yes, how does the company do so?

2. Does the company provide training materials for the trainers to use or are the trainers expected to provide his/her own materials for devising a program? If no, who is responsible for paying for any necessary materials?

3. How much notice is the trainer given before having to give a training session?

4. How quickly are employees expected to learn new material for training?

5. Do trainers usually cover the same topics?

6. After a seminar does the client typically evaluate the trainer?

7. What are some characteristics you look for in your trainers?

8. What would you like to see in trainers that your trainers do not currently possess?