24 Business Communication Skills: Attitudes of Human Resource Managers versus Business Educators

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the perceptions of human resource managers and business school instructors regarding the importance of 24 specific business communication skills. Previous studies indicated broad agreement regarding the importance of student/employee communication abilities to achieve successful job performance. Yet the literature also suggested that different objectives may elicit dissimilar opinions regarding specific types of skills that constitute the ability to communicate effectively. In response to the need for more precise communication skills characterization, Conrad (2003) developed three skills sets based on the widely accepted communication constructs of organizational, leadership and interpersonal communication abilities. The results from this study show that business leaders and business instructors agree on the importance of overall student/employee communication ability; however, they vary significantly regarding the importance of individual skills.

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Business communication is the sending and receiving of verbal and non verbal messages within the organizational context (Roebuck, 2001; Ober, 2001; Murphy, Hildebrandt, & Thomas, 1997). Hanna and Wilson (1998) expanded on this definition, indicating business communication is a process of generating, transmitting, receiving, and interpreting messages in interpersonal, group, public, and mass communication contexts through written and verbal formats. Hynes (2005) stated effective business communication is the key to planning, leading, organizing, and controlling the resources of the organizations to achieve objectives, and may be formal or informal in nature. Argenti (2007) discussed business communication functional aspects and found that over half of the heads of corporate communication departments oversee business communications functions that include media relations, online communications, marketing, special events, product/brand communications, crisis management, employee/internal communications, community relations, and product/brand advertising. The expanse and importance of business communication underscores the need for business education and business to collaborate in preparing business majors for the workplace.

It is widely accepted that business management and business educators perceive communication skills as highly valuable to employees and organizations alike. In business organizations, numerous sources have reported that communication skills are critical to career success and a significant contributor to organizational success (Du-Babcock, 2006; Roebuck, 2001; Certo, 2000; Dilenschneider, 1992; Rushkoff, 1999). In academia, research has shown faculty and administrators perceive that communication skills are very important to students' eventual career success (National Association of Colleges and Employers, 2001; Gray, 2010). Despite the agreement in business regarding the importance of communication skills, evidence exists that long-term employees and those just entering the work force from college still lack these skills. Pearce, Johnson, and Barker (1995) reported fair to poor (the lowest two categories on a 5- point scale) communication and listening skills of managers and employees. Fordham and Gabbin (1996) interviewed 84 business executives and concluded that business students with apprehension about communicating are less likely to practice the communication and, therefore, are less likely to develop communication skills.

Academicians appear to agree with their business counterparts. Lanier, Tanner, Zhu, and Heady (1997) found that most management faculty believe students are deficient in writing and verbal skills. Their study also revealed that although remediation in these skills is at the forefront of educational needs, students may not be receiving adequate education in these skills. Young and Murphy (2003) noted that accreditation requirements, academic research, and consistent feedback from employers, college recruiters, and alumni certainly suggest that communication skills should be identified as one of the key issues in marketing education. Brodowsky and Anderson (2003) found that even business students themselves perceive inadequacies in their communication education. So, despite agreement between business and academia regarding the importance of communication skills, a gap persist regarding desired versus acquired communication skills levels.

Several studies reveal that business education should be sensitive to, but may not understand, the communication skills needs of business employees (Roebuck, 2001: Tanyel, Mitchell, & McAlum, 1999; Lanier, Tanner, Zhu & Heady, 1997). Gray (2010) found graduates often begin their careers with inadequate oral communication skills, but there is a lack of well-

grounded empirical data concerning precisely what employers mean by "oral communication" and what specific skills they value most highly.

Sapp and Zhang (2009) suggested business professors think they know about their students' readiness for post-graduation employment, but the reality often is that professors know very little about how their students will perform professionally in relation to what industry expects. The authors argued that rarely do business faculty have the opportunity to incorporate feedback from industry insiders in order to facilitate their students' transition to full-time employment; that occasionally, academicians conduct alumni surveys or obtain feedback in program reviews or accreditation reports; but that most of the time, the information available about their students' communication skills performance outside the classroom is either anecdotal or based on a small sampling of student work. Thus, business faculty can only assume and hope that the career-oriented education they provide as business communication teachers will translate into successful job performance.

Although there is general agreement on the importance of business communication skills and on the need to include them in the business curriculum, research continues to show inadequately prepared entry-level employees. As an example, The National Commission on Writing (NCW) (2004) found that a significant proportion of firms reported one- third or fewer of their employees, both current and new, possessed the writing skills that are valued. The NCW study also estimated that firms spend $3.1 billion annually on remedial training in writing. Finally, the NCW study noted that a vast majority of firms assess writing skills when considering hiring or promoting, that writing skills of recent graduates are generally considered unsatisfactory, and that writing skills are the "gatekeeper" for individuals desiring to achieve higher level salaried positions. Although recent graduates' writing skills are generally inadequate, these skills are very important to their organizations and their own personal success. Anderson and Bacon (2004) surveyed employers and found they consistently ranked communication skills, in particular writing ability, among the most important skills for undergraduate business students to possess. However, they found improving writing skills, especially with respect to punctuation, grammar, and word choice, often requires substantial teacher time and effort, which may be a rare resource considering the abundance of content that must be covered in most business courses.

Regarding the other primary communication skill, oral communication, Maes, Weldy, and Icenogle (1997) found that oral communication was one of the top three competencies needed to succeed in a managerial position. Yet other studies over decades have demonstrated the unsatisfactory oral communication skills of recent graduates (Bolt-Lee & Foster, 2003; Reinsch & Shelby, 1997). Thus, it appears that preparing students' oral communication skills for the managerial workplace has not been highly successful.

In specialized fields of management, this same phenomenon appears as well. The accounting profession has taken a special interest in communication skills as accounting has evolved from a bookkeeping, number-crunching activity to an analysis, reporting, and advising profession (Siegel, 2000). In an extensive study of practitioners, Bolt-Lee and Foster (2003) found that communication skills are one of the key areas needing major improvement in the accounting profession. Stowers and White (1999), after their study showed minimal importance

attached to communication skills instruction, called for a more comprehensive approach in undergraduate accounting programs.

Other specialties demonstrating concern for communication skills deficiencies are information systems and public relations. In a study of information systems employers, Cappel (2002) found a significant gap between expected and actual communication skills. In fact, information systems employers rated the communication skills gap as much greater than the technical skills gap. In the public relations field, one focused on communications, Wise (2005) noted that public relations professionals overwhelmingly described the writing of entry- level employees as "bad" or "poor," and the most positive comments in his study included "very uneven," "average," and "fair," not a ringing endorsement of progress in teaching business communications skills.

Thus research and debate continue on what communication skills should be emphasized and how they should be taught (Pittenger, Miller & Mott, 2004; Russ, 2009; Blasczynski, Haras, & Katz, 2010). Numerous studies suggest that business educators must better understand and teach the communication skills business considers important. Tanyel, Mitchell and McAlum (1999) found significant differences between prospective employers' and faculty members' attitudes regarding the importance of expected communication skills among recent graduates. Ulinski and O'Callaghan (2002) found that MBA students and employers generally disagree on the order of importance of communication skills. Seshadri and Theye (2000) found that professionals judge writing on different criteria than do faculty. The NCW (2004) report stated that employers feel that the style taught in academics is often inappropriate for business writing. So, between academia and practitioners is some disconnect regarding the business communication skills new graduates need.

Although there are many possible explanations for this disconnect, one may be academics' emphasis on theories and models versus practitioners' emphasis on skills and abilities that produce practical outcomes. In addressing this gap, several studies have suggested a lack of focus in business communication curriculum on skills that relate to practical outcomes. Pfeffer and Fong (2002) concluded that the focus should be practical use of skills, not theoretical understanding or abstract knowledge. Pittenger, Miller and Mott (2004) proposed teaching communications with an emphasis on real-world standards and operational skills outcomes.

Business communication skill education instructional methods are widely discussed. Kerby and Romine (2009) promoted embedding communication assessment in course content, suggesting outcomes that are useful skills that employers want. Du-Babcock (2006) stated that teaching business communication theory and models without associated application materials is inadequate and will lead to students not being capable of applying communication skills in the future. As early as 1999, Murranka and Lynch demonstrated that a competency-based communication course focused on skills applications could be successful. Laster and Russ (2010) found pedagogical differences and similarities in how instructors from business and communication disciplines teach the introductory business communication course. By surveying 444 instructors teaching this course at colleges and universities across the United States, they found both complimentary and contradictory instructional approaches and called for more cross-disciplinary uniformity in contemporary business communication education.

Bennis and Townsend (1995), Rowley, Lujan, and Dolence (1997), and Rusk (1993) have argued that it is the responsibility of colleges and business to collaboratively understand what is important in education, identify if there is agreement on importance, and make attempts at remediation of these skills before the students graduate and seek employment . In this vein, research becomes necessary to identify if business and business education agree on the importance of specific skills in business to ensure that the skills business expects are those considered important in college business education.

At the graduate level, Bogert and Butt (1996) studied 55 MBA programs and found almost all of these programs concentrated on enhancing communication skills; in fact, several instructors stated clearly on their syllabi the premise that their students do know how to speak and write effectively. In addition, no school required a communication course that focused solely on organizational communication. Cyphert, Worley, and Dyrud (2002) looked at the integration of communication across the master of business administration (MBA) curriculum at the University of Northern Iowa. They found that although students felt that the communication-focused courses were worthwhile, the University still sought to better integrate communication skills across the MBA curriculum. The authors noted that one-unit courses do not offer enough opportunity for students to become familiar with the processes and protocols of business communication, particularly for those with no professional experience in the U.S. Finally, Bhatia and Hynes (1996) surveyed graduate business students' preferences for the business communication course curriculum. Of the 255 graduate business students who had taken a core course in managerial communication, 86% were employed. The most highly rated course topics were making presentations, writing memos and letters, listening and interpersonal communication, impromptu speaking, and business report formats. The topics rated least important were international business communication, using technology, and managing diversity. The most frequently suggested additional topics were job interviews, team building, and writing manuals/policies/procedures.

Scholars and practitioners alike have long argued that professional effectiveness is concomitantly linked to communication competence. Consequently, business school faculty have come to realize that they must equip students with the communication skills employers demand if their programs are to succeed. A number of audits published over 30 years have examined the evolutionary pedagogical and programmatic developments of the undergraduate business communications course (Russ, 2009). These audits serve as reliable barometers, yielding valuable information for both internal and external stakeholders and allowing them to evaluate the health of the introductory course, track pedagogical and administrative trends, benchmark best practices, and identify pedagogical opportunities. Although periodic audits of the business communication course are necessary, the last one was conducted a decade ago, warranting a contemporary audit.

Yu (2010) echoed these beliefs and stated the idea of learning from industry is not readily embraced; looking at industry to design assessment may thus be interpreted by some faculty as a degenerative slide into a vocational paradigm that replaces education with training. Yu concluded that if business faculty want to help students succeed in workplace communication, they must understand how employees and their performance are assessed and deemed successful in those institutions.

In summary, Waner (1995) concluded that on a regular basis, business communication faculty should survey and collaborate with other business faculty and business professionals to determine which business communication competencies are most important in the business world and which ones should receive the most emphasis in the business communication classroom. Research emphasizes the need for excellent communication skills in the workplace, but exactly which skills should receive the most emphasis in the business communication classroom must be based on information received from the customers.

Purpose of the Study

Several studies reveal that business needs communication skill competency and that business education must be sensitive to and understand the communication skill needs of business. Accordingly, ongoing research is needed to ascertain which specific communication skills business considers important and those college business educators consider important. Pressing beyond previous research, this study compares the communication skills business considered important and those business education considered important. The purpose is to determine if there is agreement or a gap between business and academic professionals regarding the relative importance of communication skills in business.

Discrepancies in perceptions of the relative importance of communication skills between business and business education specifically may affect the ability of education to teach what is important for business. Such discrepancies also may affect the ability of business to understand, appreciate, and utilize the skills that business education may consider important.

This study investigated perceptions of communication skill importance among business leaders and among college business teachers in Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota, to determine if there is agreement or a gap about the importance of communication skills for business. The Twin Cities are home to several colleges that grant 4-year business degrees as well as several large businesses. The study asks one foundational question: In Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota, are the communication skills business organizations consider important also those college business educators consider important?

Research Questions

This study asks and addresses the following research questions:
1. What communication skills does the literature indicate are needed in business?
2. How do business leaders rank the importance of the communication skills cited in the research literature?
3. How do college business teachers rank the importance of the communication skills cited in the research literature?
4. How do the communication skill responses of the business leaders compare with the responses from the college business teachers?

Communication Constructs and Skills
Identifying Business Communication Constructs

In business communication research and curriculum content, the most common constructs utilized include reading, writing, oral presentations, and listening. This foundation, no doubt, is derived from the historical core skills required to be considered an educated person. One might even argue that these skills are the foundation for becoming educated. However, it appears these skills alone are not sufficient in themselves to satisfy business practitioners' needs. Evidence to support this contention is embedded in the multitude of research suggesting that graduates still lack the communication skills necessary to be successful in business despite education's emphasis on the basic skills mentioned above. Examination of over 200 articles and books, and numerous discussions with practitioners revealed that the skills business most sought from their employees should be defined by communication behavior outcomes, such as the ability to negotiate a solution between two conflicting parties. Research was conducted to determine if such a set of outcome- based skills existed in the business communications literature.

A literature review sought to identify those communication skills management experts, leadership theorists, business education professionals, communication skills researchers, and business development writers identified as most needed in business organizations. During the review, it became obvious that a broad set of constructs was needed to frame the identification of the myriad individual skills that might be deemed necessary. Thus, the first step in identifying the skills set was to formulate broader constructs, thus forming the structure for identifying the individual critical skills.

Ober (2001), Angell (2004), and Roebuck (2001) have authored college undergraduate business communication skills text books and have determined that business communication skills fall in to three basic categories: "organizational communication skills," "leadership communication skills," and "interpersonal communication skills." Organizational communication skills are those skills an organization uses to effectively communicate with all internal and external stakeholders, permitting coordination among people and organized behavior. Leadership communication skills are those skills that allow business leadership to effectively communicate with employees and key external constituents employing communication methods including stories, informality, metaphors, openness, and strategic dialogue to create trusting and supportive relationships among colleagues and staff. Interpersonal communication skills are those skills that allow business organization members to effectively communicate to internal and external constituents on a personal, intimate, and one-on-one basis, exchanging thoughts in face-to-face verbal and non verbal contexts by sharing information, providing feedback, or simply maintaining a social relationship.

Identifying Business Communication Skills Sets

Once established, each construct was researched independently to assure that the communication skills cited were only the skills that make up that particular construct. For this study, 217 publications were reviewed for the identification of business communication skills. In all, 98 organizational and managerial publications; 77 leadership publications; and 42 business

communication skills publications were reviewed to accumulate the most frequently-cited business communication skills needed in business. Writers contributing to the communication skills inventory included recognized communication skills writers such as leadership experts Warren Bennis, Stephan Covey, Jim Kouzes, and Barry Posner; management theorists Peter Drucker, Richard Daft, and Peter Senge; and business communication skills writers Deborah Roebuck, Scot Ober, and Pamela Angell.

The communication skills found in the review of literature were examined, categorized, and tabulated for frequency of citation. A vast array of communication skills emerged from this review process. Only those skills cited by a majority of the authors were included in the final inventory. Thus, a cutoff point was determined when additional skills were cited by fewer than half the authors.

The inventory includes 24 skills that emerged from this mapping process: nine organizational communication skills, eight leadership communication skills, and seven interpersonal communication skills. The skills covered a range of business communication competencies in several business disciplines such as human resources, management and leadership, stakeholder relations, information management, communication technology, and specific verbal and written skills. Communication skills most frequently cited in the literature are these:

Organizational Communication Skills
1. Initiating open discussion
2. Resolving conflict
3. Creating information networks
4. Teaching important skills
5. Using information technology
6. Providing performance feedback
7. Negotiating
8. Writing business correspondence
9. Making convincing presentations.
Leadership Communication Skills
1. Arousing enthusiasm
2. Being a change catalyst
3. Creating group synergy
4. Building team bonds
5. Expressing encouragement
6. Providing motivation
7. Being persuasive
8. Building optimism.
Interpersonal Communication Skills
1. Active listening
2. Building rapport
3. Demonstrating emotion self control
4. Building trust
5. Relating to people of diverse backgrounds

6. Demonstrating respect
7. Building relationships

Methodology

This study used a cross-sectional survey design to collect information from subjects who were randomly sampled from two distinct populations. The 24 communication skills provided by the review of literature formed the basis of the 24 questions included in the survey. The survey listed all 24 communication skills in one column and for each one, provided check spaces for rating that communication skill to be either "trivial," "elective," "useful," or "essential."

The target populations were comprised of 180 business organizations and 3ll business teachers from nine business degree granting colleges in Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota. Within the businesses, the human resource managers led the human resources departments for their organizations and helped establish the selection criteria for job candidates, helped screen and select employees, and directed the education and training functions of their organizations. The business teachers were full-time professors who teach management, marketing, law, leadership, business communications, ethics, and other non quantitative courses.

A random sample of 45 managers and 45 professors was selected from the subject populations. Sample size was determined based on desired effect. Due to the population's inherent interest in the topic and the nature of the participants, a response rate well above 50% was anticipated. Business leaders and business professors received identical surveys. A response rate of 71% (32) of the managers and 78% (35) of the professors was achieved.

Validity and Reliability

To ensure content validity, the constructs of organizational communication, leadership communication, and interpersonal communication were researched independently and thoroughly to determine what communication skills constituted the domain of each construct. To ensure that the questions were representative and covered the business communication skills within the three communication constructs, academic professionals familiar with communication skills reviewed and approved them. To establish construct validity, the review of literature provided the communication skills business needed within the distinct constructs of organizational, leadership, and interpersonal communication skills.

This study sampled the actual population under study and used the data collected from selected business leaders and college business teachers. The subjects in this study were selected randomly, and the study obtained completed surveys from 32 of the business leaders and 35 of the business teachers, which exceeds the minimal number of 26 subjects needed from each group to make inferences concerning the population. The results are to be inferred only of the population defined in this study. Reliability of the survey instrument used in this study was established by using the Cronbach's alpha coefficient. The coefficient value for the business leader surveys was .8891 and for business teachers was .7634, both indicating above .70 reliability coefficient values.

Results

The results from this research study indicate that most of the communication skills included in the survey may be considered of importance by a majority in both subject groups. Between business leaders and business teachers, there were many similarities in responses because the two groups lacked statistically significant differences in perception in a majority of the skills. However, the study did uncover some statistically significant differences between business and business education in perceptions of communication skill importance on some skills, detailed in the following section.

Comparison of Business Leaders' and Business Teachers' Perceptions

In summary, this research study showed no statistically significant differences between the subject groups on a majority of the communication skills, indicating that business leaders and business teachers agree on the importance of the communication. Despite few differences in the two groups' perceptions of communication skill importance, any discrepancies are important.

Twenty skills showed no significant differences in business leaders' and business teachers' perceptions of communication skill importance with p values greater than .05. Only using information technology (.004), writing business correspondence (.048), creating group synergy (.008), and demonstrating respect (.019) had p values less than .05, reflecting a statistically significant difference between the subject groups, with business leaders placing greater importance on these skills than did teachers.

Appendix A reports the communication skill frequency of subject responses for business leaders and business teachers and the chi-square values measuring the relationships in communication skill responses between the business leaders and business teachers. The following table shows the skills reflecting a statistically significant difference.

For question number 5, the ability to use information technology, $\chi^2(2, N = 67) = 10.950$, $p = .004$. The probability of a statistically significant difference between the subject groups was $p < .05$. , indicating a significant discrepancy with business leaders perceiving the skill to be more important for business than did business teachers. Perhaps intense global business competition and communication demands of customers have created a greater need to communicate more efficiently and effectively as business seeks to align itself with information technology that increases the speed and availability of information and data to all key stakeholders. In contrast, this study shows business education believes information technology is important, but not to the extent that business does in believing this communication skill will enhance business effectiveness.

For question number 8, the ability to write business correspondence, $\chi^2 (1, N = 67) = 7.764$, $p = .005$. The probability of a statistically significant difference between the subject groups was $p < .05$. This indicates a statistically significant difference in responses between the subject groups with business leaders placing greater importance on the communication skill and reflects the possibility that business leaders in this study value the ability to effectively write business documents and correspondence to a greater extent than does business education.

Possibly intense business competition has created a greater need to communicate more efficiently and effectively as business seeks to align itself with all key stakeholders by assuring that all written correspondence is clear, error-free, and explanatory. Although this study shows business education believes the ability to write business correspondence is important, it is not to the extent that business does in believing this communication skill will enhance business effectiveness.

<u>Comparison of Communication Skill Importance Between Subject Groups</u>

$N = 67$

Communication skills	Trivial		Elective		Useful		Essential		
	B	T	B	T	B	T	B	T	χ^2
<u>Organizational communication skills</u>									
5. Ability to use information technology	0	0	1	3	8	21	23	11	10.950*
8. Ability to write business correspondence	0	0	0	0	6	18	26	17	7.764*
<u>Leadership communication skills</u>									
12. Ability to create group synergy	0	0	1	4	12	23	19	8	9.623*
<u>Interpersonal communication skills</u>									
23. Ability to demonstrate respect	0	0	0	1	1	9	31	25	7.924*

B = Business Leaders   T = Business Teachers   *$p < .05$

For question number 12, the ability to create group synergy, $\chi^2(2, N = 67) = 9.623$, $p = .008$. The probability of a statistically significant difference between the subject groups was $p < .05$. This indicates a statistically significant difference in responses and thus perceptions between the subject groups with business leaders placing greater importance on the communication skill. This reflects the possibility that business leaders in this study value creating group synergy to a greater extent than does business education. Possibly, intense business competition has created a greater need to have work groups and teams work in close collaboration for producing more as a solidified unit than they would as independent members. The results may reflect that business seeks to align itself with the creation of synergistic teams to increase productivity and build cohesive organizational relationships. This study shows business education believes creating group synergy is important, but not to the extent that business does for obtaining and maintaining a synergistic team work environment that fulfills strategic goals and objectives.

For question number 23, the ability to demonstrate respect, $\chi^2(2, N = 67) = 7.924$, $p = .019$. The probability of a statistically significant difference between the subject groups was $p < .05$. This indicates a statistically significant difference in responses between the subject groups and provides very strong evidence of business leaders placing greater importance on the communication skill of showing respect than educators perceived. Possibly, intense global business competition has created a greater need to communicate more effectively so business seeks to align itself with the skill of communicating respect for all stakeholders to create and maintain a collaborative closeness based on mutual respect. Business leaders may see the need to show respect more often to various stakeholders, such as international customers and suppliers, because their cultures and societies place great importance on this interpersonal communication aspect and expect it to be a part of normal business communication. This study shows business education believes showing respect is important, but not to the extent that business does in believing this skill will help obtain and maintain customer and key stakeholder closeness.

Discussion of Results

Implications from the results of this study are made regarding only the population of business leaders and college business teachers found in Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota. The results from this study indicate that both subject groups generally rated the communication skills as important. For all communication skills, both subject groups rated the skills as either useful or essential in a vast majority of the responses, although the communication skill, teach skills, did receive relatively high elective ratings from 19% of the business leaders and 38% of the business teachers. This may mean that in most cases, both business leaders and business teachers perceive the communication skills to be useful or essential for business.

The skills of using information technology, writing business correspondence, creating group synergy, and demonstrating respect did reflect statistically significant differences in the perceptions between business leaders and business teachers with business leaders perceiving these skills to be of greater importance. Possibly, intense global competition has increased businesses' awareness of the need to use these skills to increase productivity, profitability, and organizational relationships than is sensed by business education. Findings such as this may assist business education for preparing courses and curriculum that could enhance the ability of students to learn and use these skills. Comparisons of the responses from the two subject groups reveal agreement on the importance of a vast majority of the communication skills. Finding no statistical difference in agreement on the importance of the surveyed communication skills is significant for indicating that the communication skills considered important in business are also those considered important in business education. Similarly, the results from this study indicate an overall consistency between business leaders and business teachers in their perceptions that none of the communication skills are trivial; no communication skills received ratings of trivial from either subject group. Results indicate that both business leaders and business teachers perceive the communication skills to possess some importance for business and to be possible core elements of a business communication skills course.

Despite substantial evidence that human resource managers and business instructors highly value communication abilities as discussed in broad terms, human resource managers value certain specific communication skills to a greater degree than do business professors. Of

the three primary constructs, leadership communication skills and interpersonal communication skills showed the greatest differences between managers and instructors. Human resource managers viewed these skills as more critical to employee performance. The two groups' perceptions converged regarding organizational communication skills, those that might be considered more public in nature (versus one-on-one). In contrast, the groups' perceptions diverged in the importance of leadership and interpersonal communication skills. The findings suggest that human resource managers perceived one-on-one leadership and interpersonal communication skills as more critical to personal and organizational success than did business instructors.

The agreement between the human resource managers and instructors suggests that there is much common ground on which to build strong communication skills in educational experiences. Human resource managers and instructors valued very highly all types of communication skills and abilities. The importance of communications skills to career achievement and organizational success is undisputed. It cannot be overstated that between business and academia, a bridge of understanding must be constructed for assessing and addressing the communication skills business employees need. Business must reach out to education and identify the specific communication skills they require. Conversely, education must constantly explore and analyze the specific communication skills businesses need. Thus, working together on improving performance through commitment to more effective communication skill teaching pedagogy should be feasible.

The review of literature suggests that through a communication audit, organizations must constantly assess their communication competence and examine how existing communication systems are either advantageous or detrimental to an organization's strategy and performance. Such an audit is the internal assessment of all communication systems, practices, and devices to realize effectiveness or understand possible voids, inefficiencies, and deficiencies in internal and external communications. In practical terms, audits will explain how communication systems support initiatives aimed at improving information flow or how they may create an overabundance of information that becomes confusing and harmfully complex (Hargie, 2002).

Communication is seen as an integral part of every organizational action and cannot be seen as an isolated function; most, if not all staff members, must have communication competence. An organization is reasonably clear about its audiences as they do not change a great deal over time. If an organization is purposeful in its communications practices, education efforts must be integrated as an important function throughout the organization. However, communication education rarely makes it into the budget as a separate line item, and when it does, it is one of the first areas to be cut when the budget needs to be reduced (Du-Babcock, 2006). Communications dollars tend to appear when surplus funds are left over and need to be spent down quickly. An organization must also develop a communications strategy for the overall organization rather than only for specific projects. In doing that, more attention will be paid to goals and outcome (Ober, 2001).

Further Study

This study found that business leaders and business teachers often agree on the importance of communication skills in business, suggesting the merit of further research in communication skills in business and business education. The following research should be considered for further study to advance knowledge in the field:

1. Survey business alumni to find their views of communication skill importance and their perceived levels of competence. Their insight might add a dimension that can be used to design communication skill educational programs and courses.

2. Research perceptions from business leaders and business teachers regarding how communication skills can be developed in undergraduate business curriculum and other required college course offerings, or outside of the college environment such as through continuing education, training consultants, or on-line educational methods. Educational design for communication skills may benefit from this knowledge.

3. Research business and business education to discover which communication skills are emerging as the most critical skills business organizations or specific organizational members must possess. Results may benefit adaptation to the changing communication skill needs of business and business education and the development of education that addresses the changing needs and priorities.

4. Research college business curriculum and course syllabuses for the types and degree of communication skill education incorporated into the various business courses and programs. Results may indicate the actual importance colleges and business instructors place on business communication skills in curriculum and course design and delivery.

5. Research the perceptions of business leaders and college business educators of communication skill competency possessed by college business graduates to determine weaknesses or strengths and the need for further education and development. Discovery of competency voids can be used to develop current and post-college communication skill education.

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APPENDIX

Comparison of Communication Skill Importance Between Subject Groups

Communication skills	Trivial		Elective		Useful		Essential		df	Power	χ^2
	B	T	B	T	B	T	B	T			
					$N = 67$						
Organizational communication skills											
1. Ability to initiate open discussion	0	0	1	1	14	13	17	21	2	.075	.324
2. Ability to resolve conflict	0	0	0	1	5	7	27	27	2	.150	1.201
3. Ability to create information networks	0	0	4	5	18	21	10	9	2	.070	.260
4. Ability to teach skills	0	0	6	13	16	15	10	7	2	.322	3.012
5. Ability to use information technology	0	0	1	3	8	21	23	11	2	.850	10.950*
6. Ability to give performance feedback	0	0	3	3	8	14	21	18	2	.200	1.736
7. Ability to negotiate	0	0	3	0	10	17	19	18	2	.479	4.716
8. Ability to write business correspondence	0	0	0	0	6	18	26	17	1	.795	7.764*
9. Ability to make convincing presentations	0	0	2	1	14	13	16	21	1	.125	.913
Leadership communication skills											
10. Ability to arouse enthusiasm	0	0	1	5	14	16	17	14	2	.317	2.916
11. Ability to build optimism	0	0	2	5	13	19	17	11	2	.375	3.569
12. Ability to create group synergy	0	0	1	4	12	23	19	8	2	.799	9.623*
13. Ability to build team bonds	0	0	1	4	13	20	18	11	2	.490	4.849
14. Ability to express encouragement	0	0	1	1	9	17	22	17	2	.319	2.974

	B	T	B	T	B	T	B	T	df		
15. Ability to provide motivation	0	0	1	2	6	12	25	21	2	.278	2.551
16. Ability to be persuasive	0	0	2	1	12	19	18	15	2	.230	2.056
17. Ability to be a change catalyst	0	0	3	4	14	19	15	12	2	.141	1.101

Interpersonal communication skills

	B	T	B	T	B	T	B	T	df		
18. Ability to listen actively	0	0	0	0	5	6	27	29	1	.053	.028
19. Ability to build rapport	0	0	0	1	10	17	22	17	2	.352	3.328
20. Ability to express emotional self-control	0	0	0	2	10	17	22	16	2	.472	4.637
21. Ability to build trust	0	0	0	0	5	7	27	28	1	.075	.217
22. Ability to relate to diverse people	0	0	0	1	7	14	25	20	2	.393	3.762
23. Ability to demonstrate respect	0	0	0	1	1	9	31	25	2	.713	7.924*
24. Ability to build relationships	0	0	0	3	5	11	27	21	2	.574	5.877

B = Business Leaders   T = Business Teachers   *$p < .05$