Association for Business Communication

Southwestern United States

2012 Refereed Proceedings
February 29 – March 2
New Orleans, Louisiana

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Lucia S. Sigmar, Vice President and Program Chair
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Editor's Note

Welcome to the 39th meeting of the Association for Business Communication-Southwestern United States. Many thanks are given to the planners, program chairs, reviewers, presenters, and other contributors responsible for making this a great conference. Special thanks go to Lucia Sigmar, Vice President and Program Chair of ABC-SWUS, who has assembled a great program that will appeal to business communicators.

The program this year includes 27 presentations by 45 authors from United States institutions in Alabama, Indiana, Kentucky, Louisiana, Minnesota, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, and Texas, as well as from Canada. Four papers are included in this proceeding.

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 **En Mao, Laura Lott Valenti,** and **Marilyn Macik-Frey** from Nicholls State University. They will present their paper on Thursday, March 1 at 8:30 a.m.

Congratulations are also in order for **Marcel M. Robles**, from Eastern Kentucky University who is being awarded the 2012 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.

You will find in this proceedings a call for papers for next year that includes the dates for both presentation proposals (September 15) and the proceedings (January 15) of the accepted presentations.

We hope this conference becomes a memory of professional enhancement and great times with colleagues as we share our collective knowledge and research.

Susan Evans Jennings
Editor

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CONGRATULATIONS AWARD RECIPIENTS!

2012 McGraw-Hill/Irwin Distinguished Paper Award
Status Update--We've Got a Problem: Leadership Communication in the Age of Social Media

En Mao, Nicholls State University
Marilyn Macik-Frey, Nicholls State University
Laura Lott Valenti, Nicholls State University

2012 Federation of Business Disciplines Outstanding Educator Award

Marcel M. Robles, Eastern Kentucky University

Future National and Regional Meetings
2012 – 2013

For more information visit:

http://businesscommunication.org/conventions/2012-conventions/

Association for Business Communication-Southeastern United States
March 8-10, 2012
St. Petersburg, FL

The 11th Asia-Pacific Conference of the Association for Business Communication
March 29-31, 2012
Seoul, South Korea

Association for Business Communication 11th European Conference
May 30 – June 2, 2012
Nijmegen, the Netherlands

4th Annual Tricontinental Conference
Global Advances in Business Communication (GABC)
June 6 – 9, 2012
Ypsilani, MI

Association for Business Communication 77rd Annual Convention
October 24 – 27, 2012
Honolulu, Hawaii

Association for Business Communication-Southwestern United States
March 13-16, 2013
Albuquerque, NM

ABC-SWUS Program Chairpersons 1973 - Present

2011-2012	Lucia Sigmar	1989-1990	Marlin C. Young
2010-2011	Margaret Kilcoyne	1988-1989	Sallye Benoit
		1987-1988	Tom Means
2009-2010	Faridah Awang	1986-1987	Lamar N. Reinsch, Jr.
2008-2009	Marcel Robles	1985-1986	Sara Hart
2007-2008	Ann Wilson		
2006-2007	Carolyn Ashe	1984-1985	Betty S. Johnson
2005-2006	Harold A. Hurry	1983-1984	Larry R. Smeltzer
		1982-1983	Daniel Cochran
2004-2005	Lana W. Carnes	1981-1982	Nancy Darsey
2003-2004	Marsha L. Bayless	1980-1981	John M. Penrose
2002-2003	Betty A. Kleen		
2001-2002	William Sharbrough	1979-1980	R. Lynn Johnson
2000-2001	Carol Lehman	1978-1979	Raymond V. Lesikar
		1977-1978	Jack D. Eure
1999-2000	William P. Galle, Jr.	1976-1977	Phil Lewis
1998-1999	Anita Bednar	1975-1976	Dale Level
1997-1998	Timothy W. Clipson		
1996-1997	Debbie D. Dufrene	1974-1975	Bette Anne Stead
1995-1996	William J. Wardrope	1973-1974	Sam J. Bruno
1994-1995	Roger N. Conaway		
1993-1994	Donna W. Luse		
1992-1993	F. Stanford Wayne		
1991-1992	Beverly H. Nelson		
1990-1991	Marian Crawford		

First Call for Papers

Association for Business Communication
Southwestern United States
Albuquerque, New Mexico
March 13-16, 2013

You are invited to submit a proposal or paper for presentation at the 2013 ABC-SWUS Conference in New Orleans. Research papers or position papers related to 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 2013 ABC-SWUS conference.

- If you are submitting a completed paper please submit your proposal online as indicated above. Then email the completed paper to Randy Waller - randy_waller@baylor.edu. 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.

- Submitted papers should not have been previously presented or published or be under consideration or accepted for presentation elsewhere.

- All authors and co-authors are expected to join ABC-SWUS and pre-register for the FBD meeting.

Deadline: **Papers and proposals must be received by September 15, 2012.**

The deadline for submitting accepted papers to the Proceedings will be January 15, 2013. Authors must submit to the proceedings editor a copy of the finished paper they wish to be considered for inclusion in the proceedings, this also applies to completed papers that were sent for original acceptance to the conference.

For more information, contact Program Chair Randy Waller
Email Address: randy_waller@baylor.edu

Prentice-Hall and Thomson Learning Outstanding Educator Awards

for

The Association for Business Communication
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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:

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
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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, or 2007. 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):

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

2010 Margaret 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

2003 Marcel Robles, Outstanding Teacher Award

2004 William Wardrope, Outstanding Researcher Award

2002 Lillian H. Chaney, Outstanding Researcher Award

2002 Jeré Littlejohn, Outstanding Teacher Award

1999 William Sharbrough, Outstanding Researcher Award

1998 Betty Kleen, Outstanding Researcher Award

1999 Robert Olney, Outstanding Teacher Award

1999 William Wardrope, 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

2012   En Mao, Laura Lott Valenti, and Marilyn Macik-Frey, Nicholls State University
Status Update – "We've Got a Problem" – Leadership Crisis Communication in the Age of Social Media

2011   Betty A. Kleen and Shari Lawrence, Nicholls State University
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

2004   Patricia Borstorff and Brandy Logan
Argumentativeness and Verbal Aggressivenes: 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

Status Update – "We've Got a Problem":
Leadership Crisis Communication in the Age of Social Media

En Mao
Laura Lott Valenti
Marilyn Macik-Frey
Nicholls State University

ABSTRACT

The new millennium can probably be characterized as the crisis century. We saw the rise in international terrorism with 9/11, the global economic meltdown with the United States housing and financial markets failing, and recently the political movements in the Middle East. The new century is also being shaped by aggressive developments in technology. Web 2.0 and social media have fundamentally altered the way many of us communicate. For example, acknowledging the role of social media in the toppling of the Egyptian leadership in February 2011 illustrates the emergence of these media as new tools for leadership (Iskander, 2011).

During crisis, leadership communication becomes a critical factor in the effectiveness of transmitting information, calming fears, and mobilizing followers to act. Research supports the role of clear, relevant, and high trust communication from leadership, but little has been studied regarding the use of new communication media to more quickly and efficiently distribute the information (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995). Exploring the effects of different communication media use and preferences during crisis situations provides important contributions to the communication, information systems, and leadership literature. To understand this growing phenomenon, our study examines the role of new media in a real organizational crisis situation. Our findings suggest that new communication media, although very likely to be employed as a tool, have limitations as with all mediums and are constrained in effectiveness by the leader's and follower's competence in and perception of its use.

The purpose of our study was to determine patterns and effectiveness of social media vs. traditional media use during an organizational crisis communication episode. We were interested in determining effects on leadership competence, message relevance, knowledge retention, and follower's willingness to act. We also looked at choice of communication medium by affected parties during the crisis.

INTRODUCTION

Our world is filled with news of crises, the economic turmoil throughout the world, political unrest in the Middle East, natural disasters such as the earthquake and tsunami in Japan, hurricanes, floods, and terrorism. As the effected populations attempt to recover from these events, leaders must communicate strategies and coordinate efforts to recover.

Leaders rely on strong communication to calm constituents, provide information, direct response, instill trust, and inspire action. Historically, the most effective medium for crisis communication is the richest source (Begley, 2004). The growth in technology has fundamentally changed the way people communicate. Individuals are increasingly turning to online sources for news during a crisis (Veil, Buehner, & Palenchar, 2011). Liu, Austin, and Jin (2010) proposed a Social-Mediated Crisis Communication Model, which suggests that people receive information from influential social media, interact with key people in their environment, and then access older online media such as blogs for information. Their study shows preliminary support for their model, but they encourage more research in this area because despite our knowledge of the use of new media during crisis, how to use this information as a leader in crisis management is not clear.

Using new social media by leaders is, in fact, still a controversial issue with some studies suggesting that allowing social media use within the organization will negatively impact productivity (Rai, 2010). However, as with many communication and technology tools, planning, skill, and strategy may be critical in moving toward more meaningful benefits. "Wise leaders are discovering this technology can be changed from a negative distraction into a powerful form of positive influence" (Grenny & Han, 2011).

In the United States, governments are struggling with budget deficits and are threatening cuts to higher education jeopardizing these institutions' futures. In our study, we selected a university in the southern United States. The president of the university,

in fighting against the budget cuts, has used a variety of communication methods including traditional channels and new media. The leader's communication goal was to mobilize constituents to become involved in the political process. We hypothesized message relevance and leadership competency would impact knowledge retained by the followers and their willingness to act. We also looked at choice of communication medium on these factors.

The use of new media in the leadership communication process during a crisis is supported by the growing use of this form of communication across populations, but especially in the college-age population of our study. Jones and Fox (2009) studied the new media use of various generations and found that a substantial majority (87%) of Gen Y or the Millennial Generation (defined in their study as those born between 1977 and 1990, ages 18 to 32 in 2009) were online. Their activity includes creating content and participating in social media at the highest rate of any other generational group with 67% having profiles on social networking sites. These participation rates would support the potential for the use of this form of new media as a potentially powerful source of crisis leadership communication. Our study provides a unique opportunity to test the supposition that new media is a growing avenue for communication exchange in crisis situations and to investigate the extent and types of usage as well as to gain some preliminary ideas as to what additional factors impact the effectiveness and use of this media over traditional sources. A better understanding of this new communication paradigm will assist leaders in the decision of if and when to use the new media and how best to maximize its utility.

THEORY AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

How leadership and communication media influence the followers during a crisis situation has been looked at most often through case studies in actual crisis situations. The patterns of behavior are then analyzed and propositions are made as to the generalizability of the findings to other crisis situations. The recent increase in the use of new media in such situations is a case in point. The general conclusion is that this is a growing means of disseminating information, gaining trust, and encouraging action above and beyond traditional means of communication during crisis. Our study looks at an economic crisis situation involving a university in the United States that impacts thousands of lives. Our purpose is to determine if the patterns of leadership behavior found in other crisis situations hold true for our population and then to extend the research question to determine what role social media and other communication media play in the process.

Leadership Competence and Communication Effectiveness during Crisis

During crisis situations, the role of leadership is to effectively communicate a high quality message that can be understood, accepted, and acted upon. "One of the most crucial leadership tasks during a crisis is to explain what is happening and what leaders are doing to manage the crisis. They must offer a convincing rationale, which generates public and political support for their crisis management efforts" (Boin, 2009, p. 373). Credibility in leaders is critical to getting the message out during crisis (Boin, 2009; Kouzes & Posner, 2003). Hackman and Johnson (2009) propose that leadership is in essence an influence process and credibility is

the foundation of influence. Credibility builds trust. Highly credible leaders are more likely to get their followers to believe their arguments (Hovland & Weiss, 1951). If the leader's critical task as stated above is to explain the crisis and crisis plan to followers, then the more competent and credible the leader is in this process, the more the followers will know about the crisis. Thus, in our study, we propose that the follower's perception of the competence of the leader in the crisis situation will affect the effectiveness of the message transmission, and we make the following hypothesis.

Hypothesis 1a: Perceived leadership competence will be positively related to the retained knowledge about the crisis by followers.

Further, perceived competence of leadership is expected to go beyond merely providing credible information; it is the means by which followers are influenced to act (Hackman & Johnson, 2009). We propose that those followers who perceive leadership to be competent, trustworthy, and credible will not only retain more of the critical information about the crisis, but will also be more likely to act on that information.

Hypothesis 1b: Perceived leadership competence will be positively related to the follower's willingness to take action.

The leadership research also suggests that followers will be more positive toward a leader and the leader's message if they perceive that they have "shared values." The leader must communicate the message in such a way that he or she shows an appreciation for the concerns, values, beliefs, and needs of the followers. The leader and follower must share a

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"common language" that allows the follower to find personal relevance in the common goals (Kouzes & Posner, 2003). In our study, we expect that the followers will be more likely to retain important information about the crisis if it is also personally relevant to them and if this connection has been made through the leadership communication process.

Hypothesis 2a: The relevance of the "crisis message" to the followers will be positively related to their retained knowledge about the crisis.

We further expect that a more important component of the follower's perception of personal relevance or "shared value" will be their willingness to personally contribute to meet the demands of the crisis. We suggest that motivating a follower to gain information is admittedly an easier task than persuading them to contribute personal resources of time, money, or social capital in the battle. The need for the crisis to have personal relevance to the individual and for that personal relevance to be successfully communicated is, therefore, critical to their willingness to take action.

Hypothesis 2b: The relevance of the "crisis message" to the followers will be positively related to their willingness to take action.

The purpose of the previous analysis and hypothesis testing is to better define the effects of leadership communication, message relevance, and followers' outcomes. However, the contribution we hope to make to the communication, information systems, and leadership arena is to take this analysis into the realm of communication media selection. Our study, therefore, also asked respondents to provide information not just on the leadership

communication effectiveness and its influence on their knowledge and willingness to act but also on the form in which the communication took place. We consider this component of our study to have the most potential to broaden our understanding of how the choices of communication media are being impacted by our rapidly expanding technology.

Communication Medium Choice during Crisis

Communication during a crisis situation is essential. Crisis management may perhaps be one of the most demanding tasks of leadership. "In the crucible of a crisis, the organization is threatened and comes under media and public scrutiny. Jobs and property are lost, and lives may be at stake. Events move at lightning speed, requiring quick decisions even though vital information may be missing" (Hackman & Johnson, 2009, p. 402). Hackman and Johnson (2009) also suggest that crisis increases the need to coordinate resources and groups of people as well as information and actions. Thus, the ability to communicate effectively will impact the long term outcome of crisis leadership. Traditionally, face-to-face communication has been the preferred means of communication during sensitive or difficult exchanges and during times of crisis. Liu, Austin, and Jin (2010) found that despite prevalent use of other communication media, crises were still predominantly communicated via face-to-face exchange and subject's preferred method of communication in crisis situations was face to face. Generally, research has yet to find that computer-mediated communication sources such as social media are able to replace face to face in terms of an ability to create intimacy and immediacy, to represent the same level of social presence, facilitate performance, or to

establish the trust necessary to inspire action (An & Frick, 2006; Begley, 2004; Barkhi, Jacob, & Pirkul, 1999). Based on the need for high richness of communication in crisis situations, we make the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3a: Face-to-face communication medium will be identified as the most preferred and the highest reported source of information during a crisis.

Daley (2010) argues that we are entering a time when social media is no longer an optional medium of communication for business, and those who ignore its presence or fail to incorporate it into their business and leadership repertoire do so at their own peril. Daley (2010) suggests that "social media is transforming every aspect of business" (p. 58). Although this dramatic change in communication is evolving so quickly that little empirical or theoretical work is available to support such claims, there is anecdotal evidence that social media is permeating many aspects of our business, political, as well as social lives. In particular, in the wake of the political movements in the Middle East, much has been reported about the role of social media in supporting, informing, and activating groups during the crisis.

In our study, the target audience is made up largely of members of a subgroup of individuals who are high users of social media. According to Jones and Fox (2009), 87% of individuals between 18 and 32 are online and 67% are active users of social networks. Therefore, we had a unique opportunity to collect empirical evidence to support the idea that social media use is a significant factor in the communication functions during a crisis. We suggest that our population being high users of social media would also be highly likely to adopt this media

during times of crisis. In fact, we suggest that their frequent reliance on this form of social exchange will likely result in increased use of social media during the crisis situation.

Hypothesis 3b: Social media use during the crisis will approximate or exceed the general use of social media by this group in non-crisis situations.

METHODOLOGY

Research Model

The research model for our study depicting the hypotheses discussed above is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Research Model
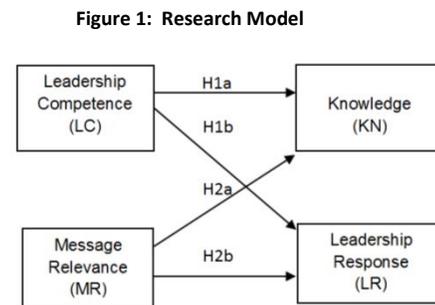
Data Collection

In the United States, governments are struggling with budget deficits which have led to cuts to higher education jeopardizing these institutions' futures. In our study, we selected a university in the southern United States. The president of the university, in fighting against the budget cut crisis, has used a variety of communication methods including traditional channels and new media. The leader's communication goal was to mobilize constituents to become involved in the political process.

An online survey instrument was used with a sample of undergraduate students from several sections of an introductory business class to

measure message relevance, leadership competence, knowledge retention, follower's willingness to act, and communication media use and effectiveness. Our instrument contains a combination of existing research scales and items developed specifically for our study. Leadership Competence was measured with eight items on a 7-point Likert scale. Message Relevance was measured using six items on a 7-point Likert scale. Knowledge of the participants was measured using a set of statements consisting of facts and fictitious information. The accuracy of response is used as a proxy of knowledge. Leadership Response was measured by a combination of a subjective Likert-scale item and a set of actions students took in response to the crisis communication. A total of 101 students participated in the survey. Gender was relatively evenly distributed with 42% male. The average age of the participants was 20.54 with the youngest being 18 and oldest being 54.

Analysis

We analyzed the research model using SmartPLS 2.0.M3 (Ringle, Wende, & Will, 2005), software using the Partial Least Square (PLS) analysis technique to assess construct reliability and validity of our scales and to test the research hypotheses. H1a, H1b, H2a, and H2b were assessed by examining the structural path significance using SmartPLS. H3 and H4 were descriptively assessed. The reliability of the multidimensional scales is adequate as presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Research Constructs Reliability

Construct	Abbreviation	Composite Reliability
Leadership Competence	LC	0.911
Message Relevance	MR	0.912
Leadership Response	LR	0.757

Results

As predicted, our results show a significant relationship between leadership competence and followers' willingness to act (H1b, β =0.75, $p < 0.001$). A weak relationship was found between message relevance and followers' willingness to act (H2b, β =0.11, $p < 0.10$). A positive but non-significant relationship was found between leadership competence and knowledge retention (H1a, β =0.16, $p > 0.10$). A non-significant relationship was found between message relevance and knowledge retention, which was counter to our expectation (H2a, β =0.02, $p > 0.10$). See model analysis results in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Research Model Results, *** P < 0.001; * p < 0.10
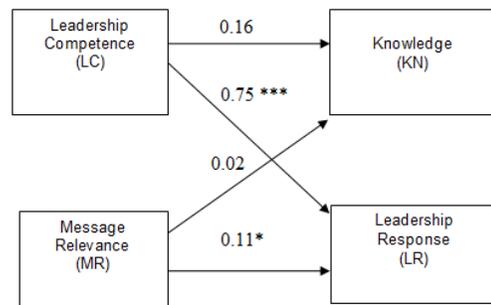
As hypothesized, face-to-face communication had the highest reported use for crisis communication found in our study, thus lending support to H3a. University employee in person (professor, administrator, staff, etc.) (46.6%) and friends in person (10%) together accounted for the largest source of crisis information. Other sources included newspaper 19.8%, website 6.9, TV programs 3%, and brochures 2%.

Although over 70% of the respondents reported accessing Facebook daily or very often, less than 3% identified Facebook as the best source of crisis information. More than 15% exchanged information about the crisis via Facebook after gaining it from another medium suggesting it was used as a medium for social exchange versus initial leadership communication. It was clearly demonstrated that the participants' Facebook usage in the crisis situation was vastly different from their regular daily Facebook behavior. Consequently, H3b was not supported.

SUMMARY AND FUTURE IMPLICATIONS

The world becomes smaller with both communication and technology. International business and globalization has never been more prevalent, and the integration of the Internet has become an important part of the unification process. With the constant progression of these macro-environmental factors that affect and influence society, the strategies in which we communicate and the effects they have, particularly as it relates to management during a crisis situation, is relative as we look to measure leadership effectiveness against communication paradigms. These perceived levels of effectiveness impact the way we manage and perform in the business world; it is important to understand these communication paradigms so that we can use technology to our advantage.

The relationship between leader competency and communication strategy was of particular interest in evaluating the first paradigm of communication effectiveness during a crisis. In our research, we were able to show that the perceived competence of a leader is a significant factor in his or her ability to communicate effectively to followers in a time of a budget crisis and to inspire the followers to take action. In our study, the more followers perceived university leadership as competent, trustworthy, and credible, the more likely they were to do something in the campaign to help reduce the negative impact of the budget cuts.

Our study suggests that perceived leadership competence is an important factor, but alternative explanations for our findings could involve the status of the leadership. University students are more likely to attend to and be influenced by high status university affiliated leaders than by others such as a regular university employee. The status of a person may have impacted students' decision to move to action over and beyond the perception of competence. How these and other factors impacted the outcomes are areas for future study. Understanding specific factors of leadership that contribute toward the influence event will add to our understanding of how leaders can best motivate large response networks during crisis.

The subjects used in our study were directly impacted by the budget crisis at hand. Localized and specific, these budget cuts threatened the existence of the education system in short term ways that directly impacted the student body

and educational programs. Therefore, we explored the relevance of the crisis message with respect to the extent to which they would take further action. We found that follower's actions are dependent on the message relevance. This means that the leaders must craft their messages in multiple ways to reach various types of followers, and the followers must develop a sense of common or shared values with the leader relevant to the issues.

Additionally, a leader who is perceived as competent is able to more effectively communicate the message, and followers are more likely to retain that knowledge. However, although the relationship was in the hypothesized direction, it was not statistically significant. We also did not find any impact of message relevance on knowledge retention. Since our research was conducted over three months following the budget crisis, the time gap may have negatively impacted recall by the followers. It may also be possible that the information that we determined to be critical to the budget crisis may not have been the same as that which the followers found most relevant to them. The factors that lead to their willingness to act could be more specific to their University situation and less directly related to key details of the budget issues.

One of the ways we communicate via technology is through social media. Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube have proven to be effective strategies in layering marketing messages for companies around the world. More companies are using these same platforms to layer their effectiveness in both brand awareness and communication, demonstrating that the personal and professional use of social media is easily entwined. We found that during crisis

management, followers preferred face-to-face communication when possible. This was reflected by huge audiences at on-campus information sessions. Also, followers were less likely to use social media more regularly than they normally do solely because of the crisis situation.

One explanation of the low use of social media in our study is that the university does not have a strong social media presence. Although the university does have a website, Facebook page, Twitter account, and YouTube links about various activities on campus, the use of these media sources are primarily to inform of campus activities, entertainment events, important semester dates, and sporting events. The norm of moving to these sources during crisis has not developed, which is consistent with Barry and Fulmer's (2004) discussion pertaining to why people adopt various types of communication media. They suggest that people will adopt communication media based on social norms and appropriateness as judged by the group. Since crisis communication falls outside of the typical usage patterns, students may have been less likely to turn to social media. This explanation is consistent with the findings of Liu, Austin, and Jin. (2010) that also found that social media was primarily accessed for entertainment or relationship maintenance, while other media were accessed for more important information such as that delivered in a crisis.

As we attempt to reframe our deliverance of crisis management strategies and acknowledge the presence and frequent use of social media, these paradigms require further exploration. For example, would another crisis situation affect followers in the same manner? And would the same crisis management, leadership,

and communication research findings be the same in a similar situation? Regardless, it is important to acknowledge that while our communication paradigms have changed, some things remain true to the study of leadership effectiveness: followers will take cues from a competent leader and take action, and although a message may be relevant to the same population, face-to-face communication is still preferred though social media is relevantly accessed. Ultimately the communication process clearly requires consistency between the social and technological aspects. Exploring this process will further the understanding of how messages are most effectively conveyed during crisis.

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Communication and Knowledge of Religious Accommodation Policies:

Does Company Size Matter?

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Abstract

The US is the most diverse society religiously in the world as more immigrants arrive with new religions. Religion plays an important role in the values that people hold. Companies develop and disseminate discrimination and harassment policies, assuming that they are protecting their employees' religious beliefs and the companies' welfare from employee litigation and complaints. A major finding of our study is that 75% of respondents either reported no policy or they were unaware of a religious accommodation policy, and 40% reported no policy or that they were not aware of a religious harassment policy. In analyzing the significance between size of company and religious issues, we found those employed by larger companies were more likely to be unsure as to whether or not their employer had religious policies.

INTRODUCTION

With over 1500 religions recognized in the US, the US is the most religiously diverse country in the world. As individuals continue to immigrate to the United States, they bring with them diverse religious faiths and beliefs (King, 2008). The freedom of religion enjoyed by the citizens of the US is limited by the negative impact those freedoms may have on the freedom of others.

The workplace has often been viewed as off-limits to any type of religious demonstration (Morgan, 2004); however, this narrow view is changing as a direct result of the unique combination of people who now make up the American workforce. There are approximately 311 million people (www.census.gov, March 2011); over 23 million firms (www.census.gov, 2008); and over 80 religious belief systems with over 60,000 members each in the United States (www.census.gov, December 2010).

Many companies are beginning to fully realize and understand the importance religion plays in the workplace. Religion is not merely the belief in some sort of theology or sacred text; rather it often helps shape and defines personal motivations and behavior in every facet of one's life including work life. This is obviously an important consideration in business, thus religion is a more than worthy area of special attention and accommodation within the

workplace. A better understanding of religion can only help to improve a company's overall performance in relationships with customers and employees (Kim, Fisher & McCalman, 2009; King, 2008).

According to a national Gallup Poll, 95 percent of the national population says they believe in God or a universal spirit, and 90 percent say religion is important (Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2008). Over the last twenty years, it has become common practice to express one's personal views about religious and spiritual topics and to seek religious accommodation in the workplace (Morgan, 2004). Laws governing religious diversity are unclear and corporate policies regarding religion are varied or absent.

Data compiled by the US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) indicates the religious discrimination claims against employers have increased from 1,939 in 2000 to 3,790 in 2010. Much like the number of cases, the monetary rewards over this 10-year period have almost doubled as well ($9 million awarded in 2010, not counting benefits obtained through litigation) (www.eeoc.gov/eeoc/statistics/enforcement/religion.cfm). "The latest data tell us that, as the first decade of the 21st century comes to a close, the Commission's work is far from finished," said EEOC Acting Chairman Stuart J. Ishimaru. "Equal employment opportunity remains elusive for far too many workers and the Commission will continue to fight for their rights. Employers must step up their efforts to foster discrimination-free and inclusive workplaces, or risk enforcement and litigation by the EEOC." (www.eeoc.gov) With the EEOC putting businesses on notice that discrimination will not be overlooked, it is important to

determine what policies exist and how they are communicated.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Religious Accommodation

According to King (2008), in a survey of the top 21 management journals, only four viable articles were found in a 10-year period on the subject of religion accommodation at work. Various authors (Hicks, 2002; Grafton, Knowles & Owen, 2004; Ashmos & Duchon, 2000) have conflicting results from their studies of religion in the workplace. There is new interest in religion at work; however, few have investigated the communication of religious accommodation policies or the attitudes and understanding of employees regarding these policies.

As interpreted by the EEOC, religious accommodation laws, "…require an employer to reasonably accommodate an employee's religious beliefs or practices, unless doing so would cause more than a minimal burden on the operations of the employer's business. This means an employer may be required to make reasonable adjustments to the work environment that will allow an employee to practice his or her religion. Examples of some common religious accommodations include flexible scheduling, voluntary shift substitutions or swaps, job reassignments, and modifications to workplace policies or practices." (www.eeoc.gov)

Recently there has been a trend in companies receiving increased requests from employees for various work-related religious accommodations such as religious holiday observances, prayer requests, and dress code exceptions for religious belief attire (King, 2008;

Von Bergen 2008). Legislation requires organizations and managers to recognize the importance of accommodating employees' diverse religious beliefs and practices and for hiring managers to be aware of discriminatory practices in regards to a candidate's religious affiliation when considering an applicant for an open position (Duffy, 2006; Ghumman & Jackson, 2008; Von Bergen, 2008)

Until recently, the pairing of research involving management-related disciplines and religion have been sparse for theoretical and empirical studies, and diversity research regarding religion is lacking (King, 2008). King (2008) posits many scholars avoid studies regarding religion and work because they do not wish to become involved in the socio-political aspects such as religious radicals or religion-affiliated political groups. The few management studies which have been conducted found a positive correlation between religion and employees' satisfaction, performance, and loyalty. They also found employees who are identified as religious are more open to new ideas and show greater confidence when they feel their organization is accepting of their religious expression (King, 2008). Duffy (2006) states that the majority of businesspeople claim their business decisions and career values are strongly influenced by their religious beliefs. This makes it important for organizations to understand the connection between the practice of religious accommodation and performance, cohesiveness, and effectiveness.

Employers can and do deny religious accommodation requests. However, these denials must be in accordance with the EEOC's standards and within the law as interpreted by the US Supreme Court. If an employer chooses to challenge an accommodation request, then

that employer should consider two main points of accommodation laws when justifying the decision. The first is "Sincere Religious Belief". One of the most obvious, yet hardest to prove considerations is if the employee holds a sincere religious belief (Von Bergen, 2008). As Von Bergen (2008) highlights in his research, the religious belief in question does not have to make sense to the employer, but the employee must hold a sincere belief in the religion or principle. Second is 'Undue Hardship on Employer'. An employer may claim an undue hardship as the basis for denying a request for a religious accommodation. Yet the courts typically find fault with employers who make little or no attempt to accommodate the religious beliefs of their employees or if the employer refuses discussion of religious beliefs in question.

Increase in Immigrants

In 1970, 4.5% of the population was foreign-born, and more than half of those (62%) were of European decent and were overwhelmingly Christian. By 2000, 12% were foreign born and only 16% of that population was of European decent. Many were from Africa or Asia and practiced religions vastly different from those in the US (Grossman, 2008).

The Center for Immigration Studies estimates that the number of immigrants from the Middle East has doubled eight times from 1970 to 2001 and is expected to double again before 2010. Almost 75% of these immigrants were of the Muslim faith. According to the 2005 edition of the World Christian Encyclopedia, there are 4.3 million Muslims living in the United States (www.adherents.com, 2005). Experts predict that Islam will surpass Judaism as the second most practiced religion in the United States

(Coplan, 2005). Because most companies structure their holidays around the Judeo-Christian observances, the shift to other religious characterizations has caused an increase in the amount of requests for time off to observe alternative religious holidays (Estreicher & Gray, 2006).

Increase In Religious Accommodation Claims

The increase in the number of religious discrimination claims filed with the EEOC (doubled in the last ten years) reinforces the fact employers are not reacting fast enough when it comes to accommodating religious needs of employees. Some trends in the workplace which seem to be responsible for the increase in the religious accommodation requests and religious discrimination claims included increased employee spirituality, immigrant influx, employees are more knowledgeable of workplace rights, and employee/employer ignorance.

Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Law applies to all companies with fifteen or more employees. Defending a suit can cost over $100,000 (not counting fines or awards) and take two to three years to settle. The courts have generally held that interpretations of the law should err on the side of upholding religious freedom and expression, which does not bode well for organizations when suits are filed by employees (Isgur, 2008).

Claims of discrimination under the law typically fall into one of two categories. The first concerns religious beliefs and practices that conflict with rules and conditions in the work place. Typically, these claims involve either work schedules that conflict with religious observances, or employee appearance policies that affect individual decisions in which religion has sway, such as hair length, clothing selection, food accommodations, and religious symbols worn by workers. This would also include requests for activities outside of work such as permission to be excused for religious observances. The second category of religious issues for which employees seek protection relates to harassment. These claims involve incidents where a worker is singled out for hostile treatment because of his or her religious beliefs or incidents where a worker is subject to behavior that is religious in nature, which the worker views as an unreasonable intrusion into his or her own right to practice or not practice religion (Pearce, Kuhn & DiLillo, 2005).

Job Satisfaction

Correlation analysis has shown a strong positive relationship between sales professionals' spirituality at work and job satisfaction. The sales professionals who align their self-concept to their spiritual identity (inner life) express their spiritual identity by meaningful work and by belongingness to the community. Thus, there is an alignment between who one is and what one does, resulting in satisfaction. The same reason holds true for the positive relationship between sales professionals' spirituality at work and commitment to the job. There is a strong negative relationship between sales professionals' spirituality at work and intentions to leave. When there is belongingness, i.e., the feelings of existing together in the community and when one is happy with the work, then one may not intend to leave the job and the organization (Chawla & Guda, 2010).

Kolodinsky, Giacalone, and Jurkiewicz (2008) posited the theory of spillover applying to satisfaction. Spillover, when used in this

context, is when a person is satisfied with one part or aspect of his or her life, that satisfaction spills over to another part of his or her life. This is typically applied to quality of life studies. They found workers who bring strong spiritual values to work will have positively related experiences in work related matters.

In sum, people want their own religion, their particularity, and personal respect. This is a more complicated matter than at first it may appear. It is essential to understand the importance and complexity of a person's religion in terms of her or his identity (Sorrentino, 2010).

Communication

Internal communication plays a key role in organizations. Effective communication contributes to improved teamwork, safety, innovation, and quality of decision-making in organizations. Firms that communicate well are 4.5 times more likely to report high levels of employee engagement and 20% more likely to report lower turnover rates than their peers (Wyatt, 2006). Communication between employees and senior management ranks among the top five "very important" aspects of job satisfaction, as reported by both employees and HR professionals in the SHRM Survey in 2008

Research suggests that effective communication is a leading indicator of financial performance; shareholder returns of companies with effective communication strategies have been found to be more than 57% higher than returns of less effective communicators (Wyatt, 2006). However, trying to pinpoint the benefits of specific communication programs can be a difficult task.

Effective communication can have a profound impact on minimizing expenses incurred by employee turnover, customer turnover, decreased product quality, sexual harassment, and workplace discrimination, among others. If an effective communication program saves the company even 1% to 5% of these costs, it will justify the time and resources required (Sprague & Del Brocco, 2002).

In an age of increased competition for talent, communication has become a strategic tool for increasing employee engagement, satisfaction, and retention. Through effective communication programs, HR professionals can significantly contribute to the success of their organization (Graebner, Lockwood & Williams, 2007). Research has shown that satisfaction with communication is imperative to job performance and satisfaction as well as overall organizational effectiveness (Garcia-Zamor, 2003; Ettorre, 1996).

An employer's failure to keep up with religious accommodation requests over time can cause a chain reaction of employee dissatisfaction, discrimination claims, and negative publicity. Experts say the monitoring of such requests should be built into continuing employer-supervisor communications (Fyock, 2010).

METHODOLOGY

Our research was focused on understanding the current state of the practice and communication of religious accommodations in the workplace. In particular, we were interested in the relationship of size of company and job satisfaction as they relate to presence of policies, and communication and knowledge of such policies. What is happening in the workplace as far as what employers are willing

to accommodate, what employees are requesting, and the communication of policies guided our research.

The participants were alumni from a regional university located in the southeastern US. The survey was electronically submitted to all alumni of the 1975 through 2008 time period for whom email addresses were available, resulting in a total of 7664 individuals. Of the 1169 alumni who opened the survey, 1041 responded to the initial question: "Does your company have an official written policy regarding religious accommodation?"

Respondent Profile

Slightly fewer than 55% of the respondents are male. The median age range is between 41 and 50 years. The year of graduation from the institution ranges from 1975 to 2008, with a slightly heavier concentration over the past 10 years from 1998 to 2008. More than 60 percent of the respondents earned a bachelor's degree, while 38.6 percent earned a master's degree from the institution. Majors include the following fields: accounting, economics, finance, management, marketing, technology, manufacturing systems technology, electronics technology, occupational safety, emergency management, criminal justice, social work, psychology, nursing, communications, mathematics, computer science, computer information systems, political science, geography, and chemistry.

The vast majority of respondents (86.2%) are employed full-time, with 7.1 percent indicating that they are self-employed. Whereas 31 states are identified as employment locations of these graduates, most are employed in Alabama, followed by a distant second in Georgia.

Tennessee, Florida, Texas, and Virginia are also indicated with some degree of frequency as employment locations. Over half the respondents indicated that they are employed in a professional occupation, with the next highest response coming from those classified as managers. The largest percentage of respondents (20.8%) is employed in governmental organizations, followed by educational institutions (17.7%), and service organizations (12.8%). The largest group (21.2%) is employed in organizations with more than 5000 employees. The remaining groups were 1-15 employees (15.8%), 16-99 (16.3%), 100-499 (17.9%), 500-999 (11.6%), and 1000-2499 (10.7%). Eighty-seven percent of respondents are Caucasian-American, while only 7.6 percent are African-American. Eighty-nine percent describe their religious affiliation as Christian.

Existence/Communication of Religious Accommodation Policies

Of the 1,041 alumni who responded to the initial survey question, "Does your company have an official written policy regarding religious accommodation?", 26 percent indicated their company does have such a policy; 34.6 percent said their company does not have such a policy, and the remaining 39.4 percent indicated they were not sure about such a policy. Of those whose company does have a religious accommodation policy, 218 or 83.9 percent indicated that the policy is included in the company's overall diversity policy. Sixteen percent indicated their religious accommodation policy is a separate policy. The majority (71.3%) indicated the policy is enforced, while almost a quarter of the respondents indicated they didn't know whether or not the policy was enforced. Sixty-

five percent believe their company's policy does work as intended.

Of the 1,022 respondents to the question: "Does your company have a written policy regarding religious discrimination/harassment?" 607 or 59.4 percent indicated that their company does have such a policy. The remaining responses were divided evenly between those who indicated that there was no such policy and those who were not sure whether or not their company had such a policy. However, 75% either reported no religious accommodation policy or they were unaware of it. The religious discrimination/harassment policy is, for the most part, included in the overall harassment policy, with 94.7 percent making this indication. Only 5.3 percent indicated that their company has a separate policy for religious discrimination and harassment. Almost two-thirds of those indicating a policy exists believe it to be enforced by company officials. The remaining one-third is not sure, while only 12 individuals or 2 percent indicated the policy was not properly enforced. Over half (51.8%) believe that the policy does work as intended.

Size of Company

Survey responses were analyzed based on number of employees. The categories were: companies with less than 100 employees (small), those with 100 to 500 (medium), and those with 500 or more employees (large), resulting in totals of 268, 150, and 418 respectively. Key survey questions were then analyzed looking at the relationships between these groups. The chi-square test of independence was utilized for the data analysis, and a .05 level of significance was determined

to be an appropriate parameter for the data analysis.

When asked if their company had an official written policy regarding religious accommodation, we found a significant relationship between number of employees and knowledge of religious policy. In companies with 99 or fewer employees, 18.7% reported a policy, in companies of 100-499, 26% reported a policy, and in companies of 500 or greater, 35.5% reported a policy (X^2=120.5, df =4, p-value=.000). The remainder of the respondents indicated no policy or that they did not know whether or not there was a company policy. When asked if the policy worked as intended, even though statistical significance was not found, the data indicated that 78% of employees from small companies felt that the policy worked, 65% from medium companies, and 62% of the large companies agreed.

Religious Accommodation and Number of Employees

Regarding religious accommodations provided by the employer, significant relationships were seen regarding most accommodations. Generally speaking, those employing fewer workers were more likely to provide a particular accommodation than their larger counterparts. Also, it appears that it is more likely that respondents from larger organizations are many times less likely to know whether or not such accommodations are allowed.

The following accommodations were statistically significant as related to company size: 85% of employees in a small company agreed with "My company allows special decoration of office space for holidays"; 75% of both medium and large companies agreed with

the statement (X^2=11.145, df=4, p-value=.025). "My company offers flexible work schedules in order to provide time off for religious observances" revealed 68% of employees from companies below 100 agreeing, 50% of employees from 100-500 agreeing, and 55% agreeing of those from companies above 500 employees (X^2=20.786, df=4, p-value=.000).

"My company accommodates various religious preferences when planning meetings, workshops, etc." had 34% of those from small companies, 28% from medium companies, and 28% from large companies agreeing (X^2=14,741, df=4, p-value=.005). Forty-eight percent from small companies, 41% from medium, and 37% from large companies agreed that their companies accommodate religious practices in the workplace such as prayer, meditation, etc. (X^2=24.164, df=4, p-value=.000). Forty-nine percent from small companies, 49% from medium, and 54% from large companies agreed with "My company accommodates religious practices regarding dress/personal appearance code such as facial hair, head coverings, etc. (X^2=24.586, df=4, p-value=.000). And on the borderline of significance (X^2=9.437, df=4, p-value=.051), 70% from small companies, 66% from medium, and 59% from large companies agreed that "My company allows employees to wear religious messages on clothing such as a Star of David pin, crucifix necklace, ProLife button, etc.

Work and Personal Views

Pertaining to questions concerning respondents' religious practices and beliefs and the role they see these playing relative to their employment, only a few practices/beliefs showed a significant relationship when looking at their responses relating to number of

employees in the organization. Those employed in larger organizations were more likely to agree that religion had a positive impact on their work (X^2=20.061, df=8, p-value=.010) and more likely to agree that they would seek legal remedies if they experienced religious discrimination/harassment at work (X^2=20.954, df=8, p-value=.007).

Those in medium-sized companies were more likely to consider new employment if they had problems with their religion at work, with 64% of respondents agreeing with this statement (X^2=31.903, df=8, p-value=000).

Even though a statistically significance was not found, the data indicated that on the whole, employees across the spectrum of company size believe themselves to be religious, attend religious services often, believe in a higher power, pray to a higher power, and have had experience with religions other than their own.

Survey responses pertaining to work and personal beliefs were also analyzed based on job satisfaction. Respondents were classified, based on their self-reported responses, as either Not Satisfied or Satisfied, resulting in totals of 302 and 538 respectively. When looking at questions concerning respondents' religious practices and beliefs and how they relate to job satisfaction, most showed a significant relationship between their religious beliefs and degree of job satisfaction. As is indicated in Table 1 below, these results show that those respondents indicating greater job satisfaction were more likely to agree with the following: religion has a positive impact on work, would seek legal remedies if experienced religious discrimination/harassment at work, would consider new employment if had problems with my religion at work, consider

themselves to be religious, attend religious services frequently, indicate that religion is very important to them, believe in a higher power, speak or pray to a higher power, and live life according to spiritual beliefs. Also, those indicating greater job satisfaction were more likely to indicate that a person's religion affects the way they work with that individual.

Job Satisfaction and Knowledge of Religious Accommodations Policies

Regarding whether or not a company has official written policies to do with religious accommodation/discrimination, there were no significant relationships observed between those who indicated satisfaction with their job and those that are not as satisfied. However, those who are satisfied with their jobs are more likely to indicate that policies work than those who are less satisfied with their jobs (45% of non-satisfied felt the policies worked whereas 61% of satisfied felt they worked (X^2 =12.596, df=2, p-value=.002).

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DISCUSSION

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People tend to bring their religious beliefs to work with the assumption everyone else has pretty similar belief systems, but that's just not always the case. This is a country of multiple beliefs and multiple religions, and not all of them agree with each other.

We investigated the relationship of communication and knowledge of religious accommodation policies and the size of companies. A major finding of our study is that 75% of respondents either reported no policy or not knowing if their company had a religious accommodation policy and 40% reported no policy or that they were not aware of a religious harassment policy. Thirty-two percent did not

know if the accommodation policy worked while 44% did not know if the religious harassment policy worked.

When looking at communication and knowledge of religious accommodation and discrimination policies as related to size of company, we found employees from smaller companies reporting fewer policies. This was not surprising because employees in small companies often know one another and accommodation is practiced in a more informal manner. However, employees in larger companies were unaware of the existence of such policies. This is a very troubling finding. Large companies have sophisticated human resource departments, multiple policies, and training programs. There is a gap between what the HR department is disseminating and what the employees are hearing. When that is combined with unsatisfied employees reporting fewer policies, the ground work is laid for multiple problems and possible litigation.

Training in religious diversity could remedy the lack of knowledge of both religious diversity and religious policies. Education can be the key to the accommodation of religious rights of members of minority religions, which in turn protects the principle of religious rights for all. This type of education can help employees to be more open-minded and understanding about the views of others as well as have a better understanding of views held by those working around them. Diversity boards comprised of several religions could assist people in discovering that religions share many values.

In addition, needed training should focus on helping managers fully understand the company's religious discrimination and harassment policies which create a supportive

work environment. The understanding of these policies will help managers to react to religious accommodation requests correctly as well as to communicate the policy clearly. Managers need to be sensitive to each request regardless of how foreign it may seem. Not all requests must be met, but the employer is obligated to accommodate any request that will not produce undue hardship.

Effective communication is an integral issue in effective management. In order to be successful, organizations should have comprehensive policies and strategies for communicating with its constituencies: employees, stakeholders, and the community at large.

Intuitively, human resource professionals would vote a resounding affirmation that companies have religious accommodation policies, and we would agree with that. However, from this research, it appeared that employees were not knowledgeable of such policies. The more dissatisfied employees were, the more they reported the absence of policies or that the policies did not work. This is dangerous for the company and could subsequently result in more religious litigation. And, finally, companies are in jeopardy of increased employee problems when communication is unclear or non-existent concerning policies. In our sample, those in large companies stated that they would seek legal remedies if they experienced religious discrimination/harassment at work.

LIMITATIONS

Exploration of the effects of religion in the workplace will continue to expand as religious diversity increases and becomes more apparent in organizations. As with any study, some minor

weaknesses were evident. This research was geographically restricted to participants primarily located in what is known as the "Bible belt" (southeast US). The data collected were self-reported. Caution must be advised as the results are confined to college graduates. Finally, the concepts of religious accommodation examined and the findings of the study do, in essence, replicate some common understandings in the literature.

FUTURE RESEARCH

Despite its limitations, the study results suggest several areas of interest for future research. First, due to the scope of the study, several of the concepts that were not included may provide additional insights. Second, in order to further the understanding of the boundaries and generalizability of this study's findings, new studies should attempt to focus more on human resource managers and their understanding of religious accommodation policies and/or expand the sample to include other regions of the US. Finally, consideration must be given to creating a longitudinal study, replicating this study with the same sampling frame in order to follow the impact of immigration, education/training of employees, and dissemination of information concerning religious accommodation. Our investigation of the communication of religious accommodations is a new area that needs additional investigation.

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Written and Oral Communication Skills: Accounting Employers' Perceptions of Skills Needed by Accounting Graduates

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Abstract

To be successful in my career field, what skills do I need? To be successful in the workforce, what skills do my students need? Are you preparing your students to meet the needs and demands of the workforce? We try to answer these questions almost daily. Our job is to determine the needs of business and industry and make appropriate curricular changes to be reflective of the work environment. One method used to determine what skills are needed by students for a career field is surveying employers in that field. Educators are faced with limitations such as degree program offering constraints and time; therefore, we must determine which skills are the most important skills needed by our degree program graduates.

We sought to determine the importance of skills needed by college graduates and to determine employers' degree of satisfaction with their existing employees' skills, those hired within the last five years, specifically for accounting graduates. For this paper, we focused on four areas: (1) the importance of written communication skills and oral communication skills needed by newly hired accountants; (2) accounting employers' degree of satisfaction with their accountants' skills (hired within the last five years) in the area of written communication skills and oral communication skills; (3) the type of software used and the frequency of use by accountants; and (4) demographic data.

For this **pilot study**, we used members of the Louisiana Society of Certified Public Accountants (n = 64) who had email addresses. An email message describing the project with link to the survey posted on Survey Monkey was sent.

INTRODUCTION

How does one determine which skills are needed to be successful in his or her chosen job field? College graduates are searching for jobs, but what skills do they need?

Several articles have been written about the skills set needed by college graduates. According to the study "Are they really ready to work?" conducted by The Conference Board, Corporate Voices for Working Families, the Partnership for 21st Century Skills, and the Society for Human Resource Management during April and May 2006, the most important skills needed to be successful in the workplace as an entry level worker cited by employers were: Professionalism/Work Ethic, Oral and Written Communication, Teamwork/Collaboration, and Critical Thinking/Problem solving. The study found that new workforce entrants with a four-year degree deficient in basic skills such as writing in English, written communication, and leadership. (The Conference Board, Inc., 2006)

Rimer (2011) reported that college graduates (*n* = 2,322) were leaving college lacking in the following areas: critical thinking skills; written communication skills; and reasoning skills. After two years of college, almost half (45%) the students had made no significant improvement in critical thinking skills or written communication skills, and after four years of college, over one-third (36%) of the students' thinking skills showed no significant improvement. They spent over half their time socializing or participating in extracurricular events and less than one-fifth their time was spent on academic-related activities i.e. studying. This is the first time that a cohort of undergraduate students has been followed over

a four-year period to determine if skills have been learned.

Henricks (2007) reported that one employer stated that job applicants from many elite colleges lacked the required writing skills scores needed for his job positions. His findings are supported by many other employers who are disappointed with the lack of oral and written communications skills of job applicants. Written communication skills are ranked at the top of required skills needed by job applicants. Both high school and college graduates fell short in the areas of writing skills and basic grammar skills. Employers believed that education is responsible for correcting this problem. Many employers stated that they do not have the time to teach basic English or writing skills on the job. Ways to correct the problem were offered such as encouraging employees to take college-level writing courses.

Several articles have been written about the skills set needed by accounting graduates. U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2009) reported that accountants must have at least a four-year degree either in accounting or a similar field of study. For those graduates who earn professional-related certificates, more jobs will be available. Employed accounting graduates could have several job titles: accountants, auditors, public accountants, forensic accountants, management accountants, government accountants, and internal auditors.

Since accountants must be able to communicate with their peers, supervisors, and clients, accounting graduates should possess these skills. They must be able to analyze data and make a recommendation or decision. Depending upon the job, some accounting graduates must be knowledgeable about laws and regulations as

well as possess computer-related skills. Accountants use special software packages to summarize and organize data. They use databases and the Internet to collect information. Sometimes accountants are required to provide technical assistance and maintain computer networks. (U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2009)

The article, "Managers Struggling to Find General Accounting Staff" (2007) reported that it was difficult to find accountants with general accounting skills. Other skills needed included communication skills, information technology (IT) skills, and leadership skills. Richardson (2009) reported that accountants need the following skills: analytical; must be detail oriented; computer skills; math skills; and communication skills. DiGabriele (2008) identified nine specific skills needed for forensic accountants based on previous literature: deductive analysis, critical thinking, unstructured problem solving, investigative flexibility, analytical proficiency, oral communication, written communication, specific legal knowledge, and composure. These nine skills were ranked by 252 individuals who were forensic accountants, accounting academics, or users of forensic accounting services. Academics and practitioners agreed that deductive analysis skills and critical thinking skills were the two skills needed for a forensic accountant. Users ranked oral communication skills and written communication skills as their top two skills. Moreover, "almost 55% of all respondents strongly agreed that oral communication is an important skill for forensic accountants" (p. 337).

Lai and Nurul Hidayah (2010) focused their 2010 study on what information communication technologies are needed by an accounting graduate when joining a tax firm. In their survey,

they listed eight major computing and ICT skills: spreadsheet software, word-processing software, presentation software, accounting information systems, commercial tax software, file and directory management, Internet skills, and email. Their study found that familiarity with spreadsheet software, word processing software, and email were the most important three skills for fresh graduates. Senior partners in the tax firms surveyed also stated that these skills along with tax preparation software skills should be included in tax courses provided at higher education institutions. The same study also stated that a substantial majority of the junior tax practitioners had used some type of e-filing for the client's tax return, but this item was not included in the aforementioned skills set.

London (2011) reported critical thinking, problem-solving (as the number one skill), ethical behavior, accounting technical knowledge, technology knowledge (which includes the use of advanced Excel, QuickBooks, and MYOB AccountEdge); and attention to detail as being essential assets for accountants.

Desirable knowledge and skills needed by college graduates will vary by stakeholders. These stakeholders include employers, graduates, faculty, university, departments, and current students.

Employers. Hanneman and Gardner (2010) reported that employers perceive that a college graduate's ability to analyze, evaluate, and interpret data; ability to communicate orally; and his or her ability to understand global issues as important to highly important to the job position. They made a comparison based on organizational size and industry sector. According to the article, "Robert Half: New Accountants Need Top Communication Skills"

(2007), it was reported by managers that accounting graduates needed communication skills in order to be promoted within the company. Also, it was reported that employers reported that beginning accounting graduate lacked the attention to detail that is so important in the area. New accountants must be able to incorporate leadership and managerial skills along with accounting acknowledge into their jobs. Employers recommended that education and training be tailored to the modern business.

Faculty. Accounting educators, Burke, Katz, Handy, and Polimeni (2008), reported that accountants need to be able to conduct research. In the performance of their jobs, they need to be able to locate, obtain, and organize information. Accountants must be able to use not only application software packages like Word and Excel, but to also use electronic databases such as ABI Inform and Business Source Premier. Recommendations included incorporating research skills into existing accounting courses by requiring accounting students to conduct Internet searches and use the electronic research databases. Accounting students should be required to locate relevant sources, evaluate the data, and draw conclusions and report findings. To meet AACSBI accreditation standards for assurance of learning (AoL), Gardiner, Corbitt, and Adams (2010) used an assessment model for measuring student learning outcomes (AoL); specifically, oral and written communication. This particular school found its accounting students to be weaker in written skills; therefore, the accounting faculty decided to implement changes in their major courses to include extra writing assignments. Ury (2009) stated that to be an accountant one must possess both natural skills and acquired skills. To be an accountant one must possess a passion for details and knowledge. Not only must an

accountant have strong mathematical abilities, he or she must be able to communicate numerical data and its meaning to clients, peers, and supervisors either in oral or written forms. Accountants must be able to use technology to perform their work. They must be able to read, interpret, and adhere to federal and state regulations as well as maintain currency in the area.

Graduates. Ahadiat (n.d.) asked accounting graduates which skills were important. They rated accounting technical skills, analytical skills, critical thinking, and team orientation as being most important. Graduates rated critical thinking skills as being most important for public accountants followed by analytical skills, ethical behavior, team orientation, and verbal communication.

PURPOSE

Our job, as educators, is to prepare graduates to enter the world of business. Educators must determine the needs of business and industry and make appropriate curricular changes to be reflective of the work environment. Due to constraints of degree program offerings and time, we sought to determine which skills are the most important skills for accounting graduates (Northwestern State University of Louisiana General Catalog, 2011-12). Curricular planners can use the information gathered as a guide and framework to assist educators with validating, updating, changing, expanding, or revising the courses in the accounting degree program. To obtain and maintain accreditation, a degree program must base its curriculum on employment trends and workplace skills (AACSBI, 2011).

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to determine the importance of skills needed by college graduates and to determine employers' degree of satisfaction with their existing employees' skills, those hired within the last five years, specifically for accounting graduates. The objectives for the study were (1) to determine the importance of written communication skills, oral communication skills, and general skills needed by newly hired accountants; (2) to determine the employers' degree of satisfaction with their accountants' skills, those hired within the last five years, in the area of written communication skills, oral communication skills, and general skills; (3) to determine the type of software used and the frequency of use by accountants; (4) to determine the existing liability coverage; and (5) to determine if differences existed among accounting employers based on certain demographic information.

For this paper, the researchers focused on four areas: (1) the importance of written communication skills and oral communication skills needed by newly hired accountants; (2) accounting employers' degree of satisfaction with their accountants' skills (hired within the last five years) in the area of written communication skills and oral communication skills; (3) the type of software used and the frequency of use by accountants; and (4) demographic data.

POPULATION

The population will comprise certified public accountants in Louisiana, Texas, Arkansas, and Mississippi. For this **pilot study**, the accessible population was members of the Louisiana Society of Certified Public Accountants. Sixty-four certified public accountants had email addresses and were listed as members of the Louisiana Society of Certified Public Accountants. Three of the 64 CPAs opted-out of the survey. One email bounced backed.

METHODOLOGY

The data was collected using Survey Monkey, an Internet-based service. Each participant received an email message describing the project and the link to the Internet-based survey. After six days, a follow-up email message describing the project and the link to the Internet-based survey was sent. Twelve participants completed the survey.

SURVEY

The survey was a modification of the one used by Bunn, Barfitt, and Cooper (2005). It was divided into five major areas—(1) the importance of written communication skills, oral communication skills, and general skills needed by newly hired accountants; (2) accounting employers' degree of satisfaction with their accountants' skills (hired within the last five years) in the area of written communication skills, oral communication skills, and general skills; (3) the type of software used and the frequency of use by accountants; (4) existing liability coverage; and (5) demographic data.

Specifically for this paper, the researchers focused on three communication-related areas plus components of the demographic section of the survey: (1) the importance of written communication skills and oral communication skills needed by newly hired accountants; (2) accounting employers' degree of satisfaction with their accountants' skills (hired within the last five years) in the area of written communication skills and oral communication skills; (3) the type of software used and the frequency of use by accountants; and (4) demographic data.

Importance of Written Communication Skills and Oral Communication Skills Needed by Newly Hired Accountants

The participants used a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*Extremely Important*) to 5 (*Unimportant*) to rate the importance of specific written communication skills and oral communication skills. The written communication skills included business letters, internal memorandums, emails, reports (less than five pages), reports (five pages or more), audit reports, proposals, articles for publications, and other. The oral communication skills included interpersonal/inner office, meeting/conference, multi-media presentations e.g. MS PowerPoint, client interviews, speeches (less than ten people), speeches (ten or more people), and other.

Accounting Employers' Degree of Satisfaction with Accountants' (hired within the last five years) Skills in the Area of Written Communication Skills and Oral Communication Skills

The participants used a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*very satisfied*) to 5 (*very dissatisfied*) to rate their degree of satisfaction with accountants' (hired within the last five years) skills in the area of written communication skills and oral communication skills. The written communication skills included business letters, internal memorandums, emails, reports (less than five pages), reports (five pages or more), audit reports, proposals, articles for publications, and other. The oral communication skills included interpersonal/inner office, meeting/conference, multi-media presentations e.g. MS PowerPoint, client interviews, speeches (less than 10 people), speeches (10 or more people), and other.

Type of Software Used and the Frequency of Use by Accountants

The participants identified the type of software used by accountants in their firm by entering the name of the software in the box. Using a Likert scale ranging from 1 (*Use It Daily*) to 5 (*Never Use It*), the participants indicated how frequently accountants in their firm used the software to perform their jobs.

Demographic Information

Participants identified the type of accounting firm, the firm/company scope, the office location where they worked by city population, the office size where they worked, number of years of work experience in the field of accountancy, gender, and current job title.

Data was analyzed using SPSS for frequency analysis and statistical testing where appropriate.

Limitations

The survey was only sent electronically to CPAs in the state of Louisiana. Only those Louisiana CPAs who are members of the Louisiana Society of CPAs (LSCPA) with email addresses were sent the survey. Louisiana CPAs who are not members of the LSCPA were not surveyed.

Results

Forty-five percent of the respondents were part of a Partnership Accounting firm; 45% were Sole Proprietorships, and 10% were part of an LLC. All the respondents had worked in the accounting field for more than 20 years and were the owners, managing partners, directors, or presidents of the accounting firm.

In terms of the importance of written communication skills needed for newly hired accountants, our respondents rated being able to compose business letters, memorandums and emails as "very important". Reports and audits were rated as "important"; proposals and articles for publication were rated as "somewhat important" or "unimportant". See table 1 for results.

Table 1: Importance of <u>Written Communication Skills</u> for Newly Hired Accountants

Business Letters	2 (Very Important)
Internal Memorandums	2 (Very Important)
Emails	2 (Very Important)
Reports	3 (Important)
Audit reports	3 (Important)
Proposals	4 (Somewhat Important)
Articles	5 (Unimportant)

When asked about oral communication skills needed by newly hired accountants, the results of our survey showed a higher level of importance for oral skills needed in a conference/meeting situation, and interpersonal communication. Client interviews were also rated "important"; but presentations and speeches were rated the lowest ("somewhat important"). See table 2 for results:

Table 2: Importance of <u>Oral Communication Skills</u> for Newly Hired Accountants

Interpersonal/interoffice	2 (Very Important)
Meetings/Conferences	2 (Very Important)
Client interviews	3 (Important)
Multimedia presentations	4 (Somewhat Important)
Speeches	4 (Somewhat Important)

When asked about the degree of satisfaction with the skills of their newly hired accountants in the areas of <u>written communication</u> and <u>oral communication</u>, our respondents rated the preparation in reports and emails as "somewhat satisfied." All the other areas in written communication were rated as "neither satisfied nor dissatisfied." In the <u>oral communication</u> areas, the respondents' level of satisfaction with the skills presented by their newly hired accountants was "neither satisfied nor dissatisfied." See table 3 for results.

Table 3: Satisfaction on <u>Written/Oral Communication Skills</u> for Newly Hired Accountants

Written Communication Skills	
Emails	2 (Somewhat Satisfied)
Reports	2 (Somewhat Satisfied)
Business Letters	3 (Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied)
Internal Memorandums	3 (Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied)
Audit reports	3 (Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied)

Proposals	3 (Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied)
Articles	3 (Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied)

Oral Communication Skills	
Interpersonal/ Interoffice	3 (Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied)
Meetings/ Conferences	3 (Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied)
Multimedia presentations	3 (Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied)
Client interviews	3 (Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied)
Speeches	3 (Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied)

The respondents were also asked about the type of software used by accountants in their firm to perform daily activities such as word processing, spreadsheet management, presentations, email, Internet browsing, income tax, bookkeeping, and database, and how often these software packages were used. All respondents unanimously stated that Microsoft Word (2003, 2007 or 2010) and Microsoft Excel were used in their offices for word processing and spreadsheet management on a daily basis. Only 25% of the respondents stated that their firms used any type of database management software; the majority of those used Microsoft Access, and it was only used once a month. In terms of presentation software, only 41% of the respondents surveyed used it in their activities and only once a month; of those, the majority used Microsoft Power Point. Out of the 12 respondents surveyed, 11 answered that they used Internet browsers in their daily activities, the majority using Internet Explorer. The findings were the same in the email category, 11 out of 12 firms reported using email in their daily

activities. The most used software was Microsoft Outlook (with 10 out of 11 respondents). In terms of income tax software, 11 out of the 12 respondents stated that they use it in their daily activities, and there was no consensus on the specific tax software used. The respondents reported using the following packages: Intuit ProSeries, Ultra Tax 2010, Lacerte, ProSystem, and Tax Works. Lacerte and Prosystem were used the most with 3 out of 12 firms each. Finally, for bookkeeping software, 11 out of 12 respondents reported using it in their daily activities. The specific software packages mentioned were Quickbooks (with 7 out of 11 firms using it), CSA, and Prosystem. See table 4 for results.

Table 4: Type of Software Package Used & Frequency of Use by Accountants

Activity	Software Package Used	Frequency
Word Processing	Microsoft Word	Daily
Spreadsheet	Microsoft Excel	Daily
Email	Microsoft Outlook (10) Yahoo (1)	Daily
Internet Browser	Microsoft Internet Explorer (8), Chrome (1), Mozilla (2)	Daily
Income Tax	Lacerte (3), Prosystem (3), UltraTax (3), Intuit (1), TaxWorks (1)	Daily
Bookkeeping	Quickbooks (7), CSA (3), Prosystem (1)	Daily
Database	Microsoft Access (2) Plenary Systems (1)	Once a month
Presentation	Microsoft Power Point (4) Imagine (1)	Once a month

To examine if there were any differences between respondents' perceptions of the importance of the skills of the newly hired employees and their satisfaction with those skills, paired t-tests were conducted where matched data was available (those observations who had items missing were dropped from the test). In all the skills analyzed, except Oral Communication Skills: Speeches, the p-value was higher than the selected alpha of .05. These results suggest that there is no difference between the means of the reported importance of the skills and the satisfaction with those skills. In the case of Oral Communication Skills: Speeches, the p-value was lower than our alpha of .05, which supports a difference between the mean of the reported importance of the skill and the respondent's satisfaction with the newly hired employee on that specific skill. See results on table 5.

Table 5: Reported Importance and Perceived Satisfaction of the Oral and Written Skills (T-test and P-value)

Written Communication Skills	T-statistic	P-value
Business Letters	1.812461	0.271134
Internal Memorandums	1.812461	0.276369
Emails	1.812461	0.269306
Reports	1.101632	0.148215
Audit Reports	0.713831	0.245828

Alpha = .05

Oral Communication Skills	T-statistic	P-value
Interpersonal /inner office	-1.61955	0.068199
Meeting/conference	-0.67082	0.258764
Multi-Media Presentations	1.150447	0.138364
Client interviews	1.859548	0.173297
Speeches	3.592106	0.003531

Alpha = .05

Discussion and Further Research

Results seem to indicate that accounting firms do expect more from their newly hired employees. The respondents rate almost all the written and oral communication skills examined in the very important/important levels. These findings appear to be consistent with Moncada, Nelson, and Smith (n.d.) as well as with Bunn, Barfitt, and Cooper (2005). The respondents' satisfaction with the skills of the newly hired employees seems to be in the neutral zone (not satisfied or dissatisfied). Further research should examine how the accounting firms close the gap and become satisfied with the newly hired employees. Moreover, further studies should also examine what we can do, as higher education institutions in producing the accounting graduates, to close the gap and make sure those newly hired employees' skills are perceived as completely satisfactory by the managers and/or partners in the accounting firms.

Results on the usage and frequency of software packages were extremely interesting. It is obvious by the results of the study that accounting graduates should be able to use the Microsoft Office package to perform various tasks such as composing letters and

memorandums, using spreadsheets to calculate physical data, using emails for communication, and using web browsers for research by the time they graduate, specifically, Word, Excel, Outlook, and Internet Explorer. These results are consistent with the findings of others (Moncada, Nelson, & Smith, n.d.; Bunn, Barfitt, & Cooper, 2005; Jones, 2011). These results are very helpful and positive in terms of providing support for what we are currently teaching our accounting graduates. Furthermore, it seems that accounting graduates would benefit tremendously if courses in bookkeeping using QuickBooks were also provided. Again, this result helps support the inclusion of software packages in the higher education accounting curriculum since all the software packages mentioned above were used on a daily basis at the accounting firms surveyed.

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Note: The following proceedings article was inadvertently omitted from the 2011 Association for Business Communication Southwest United States Proceedings. The editor includes it here with her apologies to the authors.

An Analysis of Communication and Technology Skills in the Office of Today

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Abstract

As graduates enter the workplace, are they equipped with the job skills and knowledge required by employers, specifically, communication and technology-related job skills and knowledge? This exploratory pilot study sought to determine what communication skills are currently being used on the job, how much time during the day these skills are used, what kind of written communication documents are being created and how often, and what type of technology is being used in these local offices. Factors of age, educational level, gender, company size, and career field were reported. Educators should use this information as a basis for determining if business communication courses in the curriculum address the communication skills currently being used in the workplace.

INTRODUCTION

What kind of communication skills are being used in the offices of today? We are living in what some may call the "digital world". So, has the office of 2010 kept up or are the employees still communicating the same way they did ten, twenty, or even thirty years ago? Are our business communications courses and curriculum preparing our graduates with the required and/or future skills needed for the workplace?

Communication skills or competencies are an integral part of most business-related employment opportunities in today's workplace. Employers expect employees to have oral and written communication skills and to be able to use current technology.

The work environment and the way employees perform their jobs have changed dramatically over the last decade. According to Kilcoyne (2003), some of the traditional employment skills needed by yesterday's employees are inadequate in today's work environment. Basso and Hines (2008) reported that not only do employers want institutions of higher education to prepare people for jobs, but to prepare people who can enhance the workplace. Therefore, educators must identify the job skills needed by employees and then provide opportunities that incorporate these skills and knowledge into the curricula (Gardner, 2008; Gardner, 2009; Hanneman, & Gardner, 2010; Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills [SCANS], 1992).

Universities and colleges must provide documentation that their curricular degree programs are reflective of the needs of the workforce. Educators can use several different sources such as advisory boards, alumni, employers, and professional organizations to determine the skill requirements of the workplace. (The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business [AACSBI], 2010; Kilcoyne, 2003)

Recent alumni are an excellent resource, since they are working in office-related positions. Therefore, they should be consulted about required skills and knowledge needed for employment. Educators can collect skill requirement needs and degree program satisfaction information from these graduates and their employers. (The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business [AACSBI], 2010)

PROBLEM STATEMENT

The purpose of this study was to determine which communication skills and technologies are currently being used in the local area offices surrounding a small regional public four-year university in Louisiana.

STUDY DESIGN

This was an exploratory pilot student-led study that described the results of student-led surveys. Based on a perusal of current post-secondary Business Communication literature and the Kellerman (D. Kellerman, personal communication, March 20, 2010) survey, information about the following communication areas were gathered and reported from respondents: Listening; Speaking; Writing; Reading; Audience; and Technology.

METHODOLOGY

As part of a classroom assignment, enrolled business communication students were given the survey. Each student was to select a business professional in his or her career field and have him or her complete the survey.

Instrument

The original instrument developed by Kellerman was modified. The revised instrument was divided into several sections. The first survey section asked the participants to indicate in a typical eight-hour day how many total hours are spent doing the following activities: (a) listening; (b) speaking; (c) writing; and (d) reading.

Using a scale ranging from 1 (*Everyday*) to 7 (*Not applicable*), the second survey section asked the participants to indicate the performance frequency of specific communication skills on the job. This section was broken down into four categories—listening, speaking, writing, and reading—with activities listed in each category. Under the Listening category there were nine items—one-on-one; face-to-face meetings; telephone; cell phone; small group meetings (less than or equal to 10); large group meetings (greater than 10); audio/video conferencing; booths/tradeshows; and other, please indicate. Under the Reading category there were 14 items—e-mail; paper documents (letters, memos); trade journals/documents; research data; faxes; daily, weekly newspapers; monthly magazines; professional books; websites; blogs; Facebook; LinkedIn; Twitter; and other, please indicate. Under the Speaking category there were 9 items—telephone (landlines); cell phone; small meetings (internal); small meetings (external);

large group presentations; face-to-face, one-on-one; audio/video conferencing; booth/tradeshows; and other, please indicate. Under the Writing category there were 19 items—letters (short--one page) externally sent; letters (long--two or more pages) externally sent; reports (short--less than or equal to five pages) externally sent; reports (long--more than six pages) externally sent; memos (short--one page) internally sent; memos (long--two or more pages) internally sent; e-mails; text message/instant message; faxes; technical manuals/documents; PR materials (press releases, ad copy, items to promote the company's products/services and image; newsletters, text messages; blogs, websites; Facebook; LinkedIn; Twitter; and other, please indicate.

The third survey section asked participants to indicate the percentage of time they spent each work day—reading, writing, speaking, and listening. The next question asked the participants to indicate how many e-mail messages they receive daily. The fourth survey section requested information about audience: (1) the destination of their business communication—primarily internal or external or a mix and (2) their international audience—increased, decreased, or remained the same.

The fifth survey section requested information about technology. Participants were asked to select all technological devices they used during a typical day to communicate with others—e-mail; fax; copy machine; voice mail; pagers/beepers; cell phone; PDAs; and other, please specify. From the devices listed above, they were asked to list the three most often used technological devices and to list the one they would be lost without—one that they could not go without over a 24-hour period. The

sixth survey section asked the participants to select their preferred method of communication for use internally with colleagues and employees.

The seventh survey section asked the participants to select all the strategies they had used to become a more successful communicator in their position. The eighth survey section asked participants to list the top three to five skills needed by new employees today and to list the top three to five skills lacking by current graduates. The final survey section requested demographic information about the participant—gender; age; company size; participant's educational level; participant's position/title; and participant's career field.

RESULTS OF THE SURVEY

Since the survey were administered in two different semesters and it was changed after its administration in the summer, only the summer findings are reported for this paper.

Summer findings. Data were analyzed using SPSS for frequency analysis and statistical testing where appropriate. Fifteen students received surveys. Thirteen surveys were returned, and the results were calculated.

The first survey section. Of the thirteen participants, two indicated that in a typical eight-hour day they spent 8 hours listening; two spent 8 hours speaking; two spent 8 hours writing; and one spent 8 hours reading. The average amount of time spent listening was 4.2 hours; speaking was 3.5 hours; writing was 2.7 hours; and reading was 3.2 hours.

The second survey section. Using a scale ranging from 1 (*Everyday*) to 7 (*Not applicable*),

the second survey section asked the participants to indicate the performance frequency of specific communication skills on the job. Each item is classified according to the following interpretative scale: everyday, < 1.5; 3-4 times a week, 1.6 – 2.5; 1-2 times a week, 2.6 – 3.5; several times a month, 3.6 – 4.5; and > 4.6 less than once a month.

This section was broken down into four categories—listening, speaking, writing, and reading—with activities listed in each category. Under the Listening category there were nine items—one-on-one (m = 1.2); face-to-face meetings (m = 2.0); telephone (m = 1.1); cell phone (m = 2.5); small group meetings--less than or equal to 10 (m = 3.5); large group meetings--greater than 10 (m = 5.0); audio/video conferencing (m = 5.8); booths/tradeshows (m = 6.7); and other, please indicate (m = 0).

Under the Reading category there were 14 items—e-mail (m = 1.0); paper documents-letters, memos (m = 1.4); trade journals/documents (m = 3.8); research data (m = 3.2); faxes (m = 2.2); daily, weekly newspapers (m = 3.1); monthly magazines (m = 5.5); professional books (m = 5.4); websites (m = 2.4); blogs (m = 6.1); Facebook (m = 4.9); LinkedIn (m = 6.0); Twitter (m = 6.6) ; and other, please indicate (m = 0).

Under the Speaking category there were 9 items—telephone-landlines (m = 1.0); cell phone (m = 2.3); small meetings–internal (m= 3.2); small meetings--external (m = 5.2); large group presentations (m = 5.9); face-to-face, one-on-one (m =1.8); audio/video conferencing (m = 6.1); booth/tradeshows (m = 6.7); and other, please indicate (m = 0).

Under the Writing category there were 19 items—letters short--one page externally sent (m = 3.1); letters long--two or more pages externally sent (m = 5.4); reports short--less than or equal to five pages externally sent (m = 4.2); reports long--more than six pages externally sent (m = 4.6); memos short--one page internally sent (m = 2.8); memos long--two or more pages internally sent (m = 5.0); e-mails (m = 1.2); text message/instant message (m = 3.5); faxes (m = 2.2); technical manuals/documents (m = 5.3); PR materials—press releases, ad copy, items to promote the company's products/services and image (m = 5.7); newsletters (m = 5.5); text messages (m = 4.2); blogs (m = 6.5), websites (m = 3.2); Facebook (m = 5.4); LinkedIn (m = 6.1); Twitter (m = 6.6); and other, please indicate (m = 4.0-Testimony).

The third survey section asked participants to indicate the percentage of time they spent each work day doing the following tasks—reading (m = 27.50), writing (m = 16.67), speaking (m = 23.75), and listening (m = 32.08). The next question asked the participants to indicate how many e-mail messages they receive daily. The participants' responses vary –70 e-mails per day to 5 monthly. One participant indicated receiving 70 e-mails per day; two receiving 50 e-mails per day; and two receiving 20 e-mails per day.

The fourth survey section requested information about their audience: (1) the destination of their business communication—primarily internal or external or a mix and (2) their international audience—increased, decreased, or remained the same. Almost 50% (n= 6) of the participants indicated that the destination of their business communication was primarily a mix of both internal and external destinations; 31% (n = 4) indicated primarily internal directed toward employees, subordinates, superiors, and

advisory boards; and 23% (n = 3) indicated primarily external directed towards clients, and customers outside the firm. Participants were asked if their communication contacts to an international audience had increased, decreased, or remained the same in the last five years. Thirty-eight percent (n = 5) of the participants indicated that their international audience contacts had remained the same, and 38% (n=5) indicated they had not used international communication. Twenty-three percent (n = 3) indicated their international communication had increased.

The fifth survey section requested information about technology use by participants. Participants were asked to select all technological devices they used during a typical day to communicate with others. These devices included e-mail; fax; copy machine; voice mail; pagers/beepers; cell phone; PDAs; and other, please specify. All participants (n = 13) used e-mail; then fax (n = 10); next copy machine and voice mail (n = 9). Only one person indicated using a pager/beeper. From the devices listed above, they were asked to list the three most often used devices and to list the one they would be lost without—one that they could not go without over a 24-hour period. The top three devices were e-mail, fax, and cell phone. The device that they could not go without over a 24-hour period of time was cell phone (n = 5); then e-mail and computer (n = 2) respectively.

The sixth survey section asked the participants to select their preferred method of communication for use internally with colleagues and employees. Eleven participants selected face-to-face, one on one. One participant selected e-mail, and one selected instant messaging.

The seventh survey section asked the participants to select all the strategies they had used to become a more successful communicator in their position. Forty-six percent (n = 6) selected seminars/workshops off site; 30% (n = 4) selected return to traditional classroom for instruction; and 23% selected online seminar/training.

The eighth survey section asked participants to list the top thee to five skills needed by new employees today and to list the top three to five skills lacking by current graduates. The participants' responses varied from communication skills (verbal and written); computer skills; people skills; decision making skills, business etiquette; willingness to work; loyalty and work ethics; leadership; professionalism; and telephone skills. The skills lacking by graduates included communication skills (verbal and written); computer skills; business etiquette; time management; phone etiquette; leadership; people skills; listening skills; and professionalism.

The final survey section requested demographic information about the participant—gender; age; company size; participant's educational level; participant's position/title; and participant's career field. Fifty-four percent (n = 7) of the participants were women, and 46% were men (n = 6). The average age of the participants was 41 years, and ages ranged from 23 to 60. Over half of the participants (n = 7) worked for companies with less than or equal to 20 employees. Fifty-four percent (n = 7) indicated their educational level as some college or post-secondary training; 23% (n = 3) indicated having a MBA/Master's degree; and 15% (n = 2) indicated having a college degree (four-year) graduate. The participants included various positions/titles: manager, office

manager (n = 2), deputy assessor, CRS, technology security manager, store manager, director resource planning, administrative assistant, director of operations, director of sales, and local/veterans employment representative/supervisor. Thirty percent (n = 4) of the participants listed their career field as management, and 15% (n = 2) listed accounting.

CONCLUSIONS

The results of the surveys were compiled to determine what communication skills are currently being used on the job, how much time during the day these skills are used, what kind of written communication documents are being created and how often, and what type of technology is being used in these local offices. Factors of age, educational level, gender, company size, and career field were reported.

Findings indicated that the majority of the participants reported their time was spent equally divided among reading, listening, writing, and speaking. Under Listening, participants reported using their listening skills everyday one-on-one conversations, face-to-face meetings, and telephone (landlines) conversations. Under Reading, participants reported using reading skills every day to read e-mails and paper documents such as letters and memos. Under Speaking, participants reported using their speaking skills every day for telephone (landlines) conversations and face-to-face, one-on-one conversations. Under Writing, participants reported using their writing skills every day to write e-mails and prepare faxes.

More than half of the participants indicated that their business communication documents were primarily for a mix of both internal and external audiences. About one fourth of the participants indicated their international communication had increased. All participants indicated using e-mail, and a large majority used fax machines, copy machines, and voice mail each day. Their preferred method of communication internally is face-to-face. Seminars and workshops offsite were the preferred method for participants to improve their communication skills. Communication skills both verbal and written were listed as one of the top five skills needed. Conversely, communication skills both verbal and written were listed among the top five skills that current graduates lacked.

Almost one third of the participants listed management as their career field, and over one half were women. The average age of the participants was 41, and they listed a variety of educational backgrounds.

Using the findings of this study, it appears that our current business communication course is incorporating the required communication and technology-related job skills. Emphasis is placed during the semester on e-mail messages, written letters and memorandums, and at least two speaking activities. International communication is incorporated throughout the course, and it culminates with a final written and oral team-based communication project.

Since this was an exploratory pilot student-led study, it is recommended that the instrument be reviewed and revised before it is used again. Some of the items need to be eliminated and some need to be clarified. Another recommendation is that if the data is to be collected by students, the student should be required to find a business person in his or her career area interest. The students should have

the participants attach a business card and/or contact information to the data collection instrument. Also, after completion of the survey, the student would write a one-page letter describing the results and the interview. Future research should include a larger sample size.

As a side note, the researchers had hoped that this activity would increase the students' awareness of the importance of communication and technology-related skills to their careers. By having the students select a business professional in their field and actually collecting the data from this person, we hoped to reinforce the importance of the assignments and activities required in the business communication course.

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The Following Pages Contain the

Program for the
Association for Business Communication
Southwestern United States Program
Federation of Business Disciplines
2012

**March 1, 2012
(Thursday)**

8:00 a.m. – 8:30 a.m.   Oak Alley

ABC-SWUS Breakfast

**All ABC-SWUS presenters and members are invited to enjoy
a complimentary continental breakfast.**

8:30 a.m. – 10:00 a.m.   Salon 817

SESSION A   **Welcome by ABC-SWUS President Margaret Kilcoyne**

Crisis Communication & Cultural Issues

Session Chair: **Lucia S. Sigmar**, Sam Houston State University

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Winner of the 2012 McGraw-Hill/Irwin Distinguished Paper Award

Status Update--We've Got a Problem: Leadership Communication in the Age of Social Media
En Mao, Nicholls State University
Marilyn Macik-Frey, Nicholls State University
Laura Lott Valenti, Nicholls State University

Crisis Communication in the MBA Classroom: A Step-by-Step Approach
Teresa T. Sekine, Purdue University
Diana M. Brown, Purdue University

Coming and Going in Turn, and Don't Stretch Out Your Head to Watch Please: The Dilemma of Literally Translating Signs into a Foreign Language
Marcel M. Robles, Eastern Kentucky University

Using the Hermann Brain Dominance Model to Determine Communication Styles
Kathryn O'Neill, Sam Houston State University

10:00 a.m. – 10:30 a.m.   Napoleon Exposition Hall

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.*

**March 1, 2012
(Thursday)**

10:30 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.   Salon 817

SESSION A   **Workplace Issues in Business Communication**

Session Chair: **Randall Waller**, Baylor University

Any Such Thing as Confidentiality in the Workplace?
Carolyn Ashe, University of Houston-Downtown
Deloris M. Wanguri, University of Houston-Downtown

The Velvet Jungle: A Facet of the Velvet Ghetto
Bobbie G. Schnepf, Southeastern Louisiana University
Julie J. Nunenmacher, Southeastern Louisiana University

Communication and Knowledge of Religious Accommodation Policies
Patricia C. Borstorff Jacksonville State University
Louise J. Clark, Jacksonville State University
Kimber L. Arlington, Jacksonville State University

Communication Technologies: What is Really Being Used by Business Managers?
Susan E. Jennings, Stephen F. Austin State University

1:30 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.   Salon 817

SESSION A   **Presentation Design and Discussion**

Session Chair: **Traci Austin**, Stephen F. Austin State University

Presentations in Online Business Communication Courses: Faculty and Student Perceptions
Marsha Bayless, Stephen F. Austin State University
Betty S. Johnson, Stephen F. Austin State University
Judith Biss, Stephen F. Austin State University

Sharpening Students' Presentation Skills through Experiential Learning: Junior Achievement Day at Benjamin Franklin Charter School, New Orleans, Louisiana
Kelly A. Grant, Tulane University
Ashley K. Nelson, Tulane University

Archangels of Private Equity: Exploring the Role of "Gift Exchange" Rituals in Investor Presentations
Michael C. Porter, University of St. Thomas

Beyond Beauty: On "Designing" for Business Presentation Success
Monica Santaella, Texas A & M University-Kingsville
Agustina A. Cavazos-Garza, Texas A & M University-Kingsville
Barbara R. Oates, Texas A & M University-Kingsville

**March 1, 2012
(Thursday)**

3:00 p.m. – 3:30 p.m.	Napoleon Exposition Hall

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.	Salon 817

SESSION A   **ABC-SWUS Business Meeting**

Presiding: **Margaret Kilcoyne**, ABC-SWUS President
                    Northwestern State University

All ABC-SWUS presenters and members are invited to attend the meeting

5:30 p.m. – 7:00 p.m.	Napoleon Exposition Hall

FBD Meet and Greet Social

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, dinner, or the historic French Quarter.

**March 2, 2012
(Friday)**

7:30 a.m. – 8:30 a.m.   Oak Alley

ABC-SWUS and ABIS Joint Breakfast

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

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8:30 a.m. – 10:00 a.m.   Salon 817

SESSION A   **Social and Electronic Media**

Session Chair: **Teresa T. Sekine**, Purdue University

Online, Face-to-Face, or Hybrid? Thoughts on Electronic Course Delivery
Paul Sawyer, Southeastern Louisiana University

Technology and the Millennial Learner: Implications for Instruction
Lisa Gueldenzoph Snyder, North Carolina A & T State University

What's New in E-Textbooks?
Carol Lehman, Mississippi State University
Debbie D. DuFrene, Stephen F. Austin State University

Social Media: Should Business Schools Engage or Not Engage?
Ashley K. Nelson, Tulane University

10:00 a.m. – 10:30 a.m.   Napoleon Exposition Hall

FBD Coffee Break

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March 2, 2012
(Friday)

10:30 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.   Salon 817

SESSION A   **General Issues in Communication**

Session Chair: **Kathryn O'Neill**, Sam Houston State University

Innovative Tools for Engaging Students in the Global Classroom
Joselina Cheng, University of Central Oklahoma

*Business Communication in Context: Exploring Ways to Deepen Student Connections Between
Classroom Concepts and the Real World*
Amanda Helm, Xavier University of Louisiana
Beverly Andry, Xavier University of Louisiana

ACEing B-Comm: A Pilot Course in Service Learning
Lucia S. Sigmar, Sam Houston State University
Sanjay S. Mehta, Sam Houston State University

Designing and Teaching a Graduate Course in Fundraising Communication
Carolyn Meyer, Ryerson University

1:30 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.   Salon 817

SESSION A   **Business Communication Curricula**

Session Chair: **Faridah Awang**, Eastern Kentucky University

*Written and Oral Communication Skills: Accounting Employers' Perception of Skills Needed by
Accounting Graduates*
Margaret Kilcoyne, Northwestern State University
Brenda Hanson, Northwestern State University
Thomas Hanson, Northwestern State University
Begona Perez-Mira, Northwestern State University
Nat Briscoe, Northwestern State University
Sue Champion, Northwestern State University

*Comparative Results of Two Studies: Communication Skills, Software, Needed by College of Business
Majors and Courses Taught to Prepare Students for these Skills*
Phyllis C. Bunn, Delta State University
Rebecca Hochradel, Delta State University

Measuring Attitudes Toward Writing Among Undergraduate Business Students
Traci Austin, Stephen F. Austin State University
Judi Biss, Stephen F. Austin State University
Carol Wright, Stephen F. Austin State University

*Challenges in the Business Communication Classroom: Identifying Antecedents in the Relationship
Between Reading and Writing*
Ashley J. Bennington, Texas A & M University-Kingsville
Barbara R. Oates, Texas A & M University-Kingsville

**March 2, 2012
(Friday)**

3:00 p.m. – 3:30 p.m.   Napoleon Exposition Hall

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3:30 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.   Salon 817

SESSION A   **Lagniappe**

Session Chair: **Margaret Kilcoyne**, Northwestern State University

Handwriting: What Place Does it Hold in a Technological Age?
Harold A. Hurry, Sam Houston State University

Valued Business Intelligence: A Case for Examining Senior Management Perceptions of Media vs. Interpersonal Information Sources
Michael Porter, University of St. Thomas

Corporate Consulting for Fun and Profit (Panel Discussion)
Geraldine E. Hynes, Sam Houston State University
Kathryn O'Neill, Sam Houston State University