ABSTRACT
                A study examined the relationship between perceived
communication competence and its importance in business organizations
and the need for additional training of college business students in
communication competencies. A survey was sent to all individuals who
had indicated to a university center for management education and
services an active interest in business or organizational training
procedures or programs over the previous 5 years. One hundred
eighty-five responses were received. Respondents were asked to
indicate on a four-point scale the extent of competence of supervisor
or management personnel in specific communication skills with
subordinates, supervisors, and peers; the importance of those skills
to supervisors or middle management personnel; and in which of the
communication skills categories additional training was needed. The
categories used were formal presentation, group problem solving,
conference leadership, giving directions, handling grievances,
private conferences, delegating authority, motivating people, and
listening. The results indicated that listening, motivating people,
and handling grievances were ranked as the top three areas in which
additional training was needed. In general, supervisors or middle
management personnel saw these three areas as being the most
important to them regardless of with whom they are communicating.
Listening and motivating people were the areas where on-the-job
training should be concentrated, and where students should place the
most emphasis before entering the business job market. (HTH)

Communication Training Needs in Organizations:

A Competency/Proficiency Based Study

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Almost any attempt to analyze organizations, offices or personnel includes an investigation of the communication techniques that the potential employee will be needing and utilizing upon entering the work-place. Whether it be through job descriptions or actual on-the-job experience, persons within the organizations are actively aware of the importance of communication. The various practices that the individual will be asked to perform--from being effective during the initial inter-view to successfully supervising and managing others--all point to communication as being important. The fact that it may seem almost self-evident to indicate that communication is critical to an organization's and an individual's effectiveness only serves to emphasize the importance of actually discovering the areas of need for the person entering the job market, persons wishing to advance within the various organizations, and individuals who teach these two groups.

So pervasive is this intrisic awareness, in fact, that persons planning to enter into almost any occupation are well advised to assess their own communication abilities if they plan on being successful in the field they choose. As the economy progresses through the remainder of the 1980's, more and more of the positions available will be based on a service dominated economy with upwards of seventy percent of all jobs being centered on people dealing with people.[1] The way that employees deal with those individuals receiving these services, which is clearly a communication issue, becomes paramount to succeeding in whatever position an individual chooses.

The amount of time that employees presently spend in communication activities underscores the point. As early as 1964, a survey of industrial personnel indicated that first level supervisors spent seventy one percent of their time communicating with other individuals, second level managers spent eighty one percent of their time in the same activity, and third level managers eighty percent.[2]

Numerous other studies have reached similiar conclusions since 1964 regarding the importance of communication in the workplace. Klemmer and Snyder combined direct observation and questionnares for their 1972 study of the communication activities of over 2,600 persons in a research and development laboratory.[3] This combined technique, which was designed to check the estimates individuals might make of their own time spent communicating, revealed that the average individual spent from fifty to eighty percent of a typical workday communicating and that two-thirds of this communicating was talking and listening. Klemmer and Snyder's survey is important for it revealed that people tend to underestimate the amount of time they spend in oral communication in favor of writing and reading when asked to guage their own communication activities. The direct observation technique indicated that people actually engaged in a great deal more face-to-face communication than they realized. In another survey, over eighty percent of the managers identified communication as a major source of difficulty in their jobs.[4] In fact, "experts in management theory and human relations have been preaching the need for improved communication for nearly four decades."[5]

Given the awareness of a need for better communication skills, and the almost unlimited sub-topics that could be included in that need, several surveys have been conducted of persons actively working asking

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them to identify what specific communication skills would be most useful

to the college graduate entering the workplace. Three recent surveys are

especially useful for ascertaining the communication needs of the college

graduate. DiSalvo, Larsen and Seiler surveyed randomly selected graduates

(1963-73) from the College of Business Adminstration at the University

of Nebraska.[6] The survey revealed which speech communication areas that

the University had traditionally taught had turned out to be most useful

to these graduates. However, this survey did not ask the respondents

to relate these skills to specific on-the-job needs. Instead, their

study concentrated only on perceived importance of selected communication

skills. No effort was made to examine the level of competence. Thus,

it is impossible to determine from this study which communication skills

are adequate and which need improvement. This information is obviously

vital for designing training and development programs and curricula

responsive to these needs.

Two years later, Hanna used similiar categories in a pilot study

and determined that they were not sufficiently business based to be

fully applicable to the realities of the organizational setting.[7] As

a result of the pilot study, he revised the categories and surveyed

the "Chief Executive Officer" of fifty-five companies in an effort to

discover the "most troublesome" communication situations for managers,

supervisors, and the labor force. He assumed from the results that the

areas which were most troublesome should also be the areas where the

training for college students should be emphasized. An equally plausible

explanation, of course, would be that the areas that are most troublesome

are also the ones where the skills are already used effectively. There

is no reason to believe that the executives feel any need for additional

training simply because they see certain areas as creating difficulties.

This potential gap between the needs of employers and the training
and background of college graduates was also addressed by Glassman and
Farley who asked 223 businesspersons to identify areas in need of emphasis
in business courses. Speaking and listening ranked quite high and the
authors concluded: "Business wants students who know how to persuade,
resolve conflict, be understood--in other words , deal with daily mana-
gerial problems."[8]

Competency/Proficiency Analysis

The importance of communication in organizations and businesses is
substantiated from both the surveys of time spent by individuals in the
process of communicating and studies of the perceived needs for the abilities
encompassed in those communication skills. However, the areas unanswered
by these studies include the relationship between the communication skills
seen as important and those in need of further training.

As the review has indicated, prior studies have assumed that
"importance" or "most troublesome" are synonymous with communication
deficiencies. This study is designed to guage the correlation between
competence and importance and the relation this correlation has to the
actual need for further training. As indicated earlier, simply seeing
a communication skill as important does not indicate that the individuals
need any further training. If decisions are to be made regarding additional
training in universities and on-the-job, the issue that must be answered is
which skills are presently not well enough developed.

Two studies were conducted in order to answer the question of the
relationship between perceived competence and importance and the need for
additional training. The initial study, which functioned as a pilot for
the one reported in detail in this paper, used the origional format

(ie. titles/labels/categories of communication skills) reported in the

DeSalvo study to see if the assumptions made by the Hanna study were

substantially correct. The assumption being that the traditional labels

of speech communication are not easily translated into the needs of

businesspersons. Based on the returns of thirty-seven questionaires

from members of the Evansville Personnel Association, Thomlison[9] found

that certain skills, such as listening, were easily identified as being

in need of improvement, but that Hanna's conclusion concerning the problem

with the transferability of labels was justified. This was revealed by

both tabulated information and answers from open-ended questions.

Based on the pilot study, the present survey was devised that incor-

porated the results from the Thomlison survey and the two previous studies

by DiSalvo and Hanna. The new survey was sent to all individuals who

had indicated to the University of Evansville's Center for Management

Education and Services an active interest in business or organizational

training procedures or programs over the last five years (1976-1981). A

total of 185 responses were received.

The questionarre requested respondents to judge the extent of competence

of supervisors and/or middle management personnel in specific communi-

cation skills with subordinates, supervisors, and peers; the extent of

importance of specific communication skills for supervisors and/or

middle management personnel with subordinates, supervisors, and peers;

and to check which of the communication skills categories needed additional

training. In all three cases, respondents were asked to answer in relation

to their own organization. The categories used, based on revisions from

the pilot study, were: formal presentation, group problem solving,

conference leadership, giving directions, handling grievances, private

(1-to-1) conferences, delegating authority, motivating people, and listening.

In all three areas, the choice of other was also available. For the

competence and importance questions, a zero to four scale was used to

rate the extent of competence and importance of each category with each

"target group" (ie. subordinates, superiors, and peers). The categories

on the scale were labeled as follows: 0=Not at all; 1=To some extent;

2=To a moderate extent; 3=To a considerable extent; and 4=To a great extent.

For the question regarding additional training, respondents were asked to

check from the list "those areas which you feel need additional training

in your organization." The category of other included an opportunity to

explain that choice.

A computer assisted analysis was conducted on the returned question-

nairer using the SSPS program.[10] Frequency tabulations, cross-tabulations,

and weighted frequency tabulations were computed. The Wilcoxon Signed-

Rank Test for a Paired Experiment was used for the 27 separate possibilities

regarding the competence and importance rankings.[11] The model used to analyze

which communication skills need improvement was as follows: Mean Rating

for Importance minus Mean Rating for Competence equals Level of Training

Need. The higher the differential, the greater the need for skill improve-

ment and the more advisable communication training becomes.

Results

As Tables I, II and III indicate, listening, motivating people, and

handling grievances were ranked as the top three areas where additional

training appears to be needed. In general, supervisors and/or middle manage-

ment personnel see these three areas as being the most important to them

regardless of whether the communication is with subordinates, superiors, or peers.

INSERT TABLES I, II, & III

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Table IV indicates the responses of the 185 individuals to the

"areas which you feel need additional training in your organization."

Interestingly, motivating people and listening rank substantially higher

than any of the other categories. This result is especially important for

the categories in the questionnaire were presented in the order of formal

presentation, group problem solving, conference leadership, giving directions,

handling grievances, private (1-to-1) conferences, delegating authority,

motivating people, and listening. The over-whelming emphasis given to

the categories of listening and motivating people would seem to be the

two areas with the greatest need for additional training.

INSERT TABLE IV

Supervisor/Subordinates

Table I indicates the competence/importance differential for supervisor and/

or middle management personnel with subordinates. Motivating people

(1.639) and listening (1.607) are clearly ahead of the next three categories.

Handling grievances (1.323) stands out as an area that was not indicated

as one greatly in need in response to the general question (Table IV), but

that is apparently a need that arises based on its importance to the role

of supervisor and/or middle manager in relationship to subordinates. The

closeness in ranking between delegating authority (1.181) and giving

directions (.988) indicates that the combined activity that most supervisors

engage in with subordinates is of substantial importance. Significantly,

conference leadership (.495) and formal presentation (.110) receive little

signifigance and Table IV substantiates that conclusion.

Supervisor/Superiors

Table II indicates the competence/importance differential for

supervisors and/or middle management personnel with superiors. Listening

(1.187) and motivating people (1.179) receive approximately the same

differential ranking and would both seem to be in need of additional

training. Once again, Table IV substantiates these results. Handling

grievances (.919) and private 1-to-1 conferences (.885) would indicate

a possible correlation between these activities and certaintly indicates

the method for training for this type of activity. Since the question

was directed at communication with superiors, giving directions (.546),

delegating authority (.501), and conference leadership (.456) naturally

fall at the end of perceived need.

Supervisor/Peer

Table III indicates the competence/importance differential for

supervisors and/or middle management personnel with peers. For this

particular category, listening (1.264) and motivating people (1.148)

are clearly the two areas most in need of additional training. Formal

presentation (.104) falls well below all other categories which is

probably a correct reflection for this grouping. Conference leadership

(.397) is also very low and this can be seen as a logical reflection

on the question.

Implications

From any one of the four perspectives that were addressed in the

survey, listening and motivating people are clearly the areas where training

on-the-job should be concentrated and where individuals planning on entering

the job market should place the greatest emphasis when acquiring communi-

cation skills. These results are significant for the other choices do

vary from supervisor to subordinate, supervisor to superior, or supervisor

to peer and these variations are easily understood by the type of inter-

action that would normally take place between these groups. However, in

all the categories of interaction, listening and motivating people was

chosen. Clearly then, training for individuals already actively working

should begin with these two crucial areas.

The results also indicate which areas do not justify extensive training.

Conference leadership ranked next to last or last in all four Tables. In

all situations this particular skill either is already one that is known,

or there simply is no great need for it. Formal presentation ranked last

on two of the tables (supervisor/peer and supervisor/subordinate) and

ranked sixth for supervisors/superiors. On table IV it fell cleanly

into the lowest three areas in need of further training.

For the individual preparing for a career in business, these results

indicate that the present skill level that they will attain in formal

presentation and conference leadership is sufficient for the present needs.

For those individuals designing curriculum for the pre-business and pro-

fessional student, the implications are much greater. Numerous universities

and colleges provide courses titled "Business and Professional Speaking."

If the results of this survey are correct, this particular course might not

be meeting the needs of the student. Curriculum planners should carefully

examine the results indicated on the tables before deciding which courses

should be offered to these students. The process of motivating people,

for example, needs to be incorporated directly into the classwork of these

students. Listening should be a primary course goal and perhaps a separate

course. Finally, because of the variation between tables I, II, and III,

after the first two categories are determined, courses should also be

designed which address each of these categories and their particular needs.

This final implication for curriculum planners also applies to training

and development personnel. Training, based on these results, must be

tailored to the needs of each category.

Conclusion

This survey was an attempt to replicate and update past efforts
to determine the areas most in need of communication training in businesses
and organizations. The results indicate that listening and motivating
people are the areas of over-riding need for additional training. Major
questions regarding the present curriculum for college and university
students should be raised as a result of this information. For the programs
that presently exist within the various businesses and organizations,
this survey should either affirm the present direction or provide additional
insights into the training needs.

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TABLE I

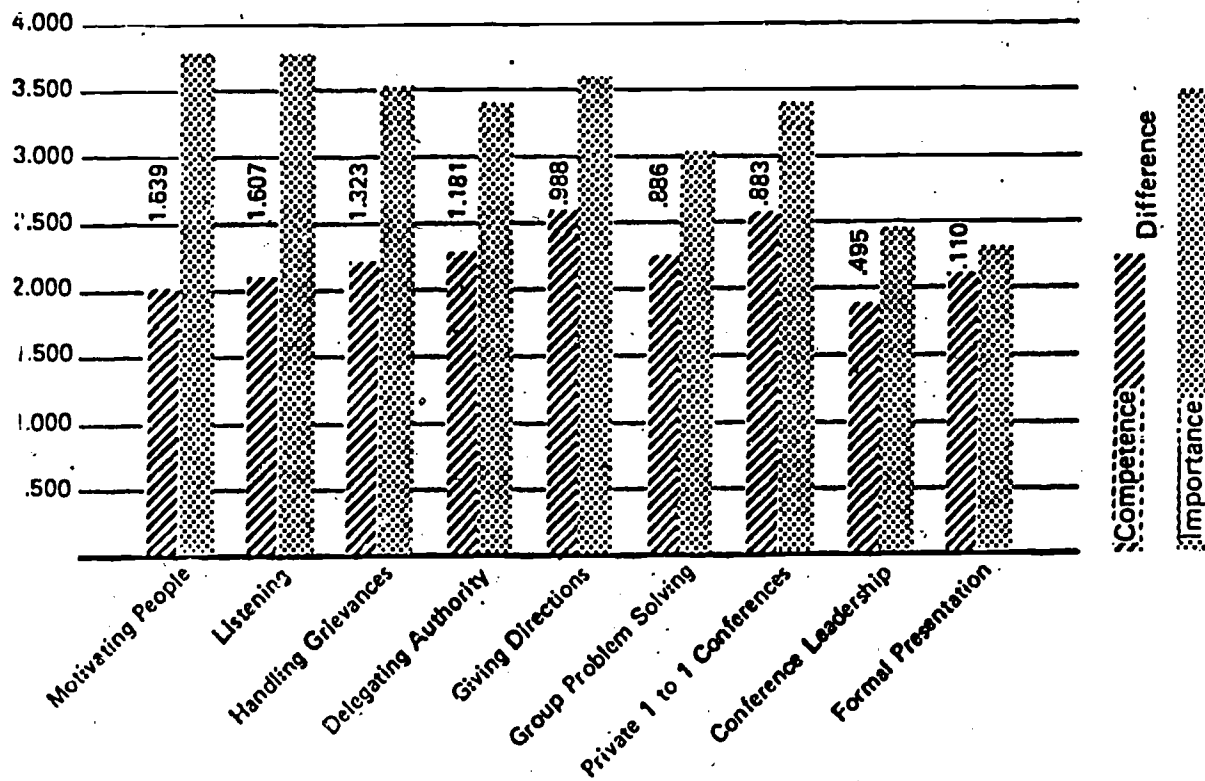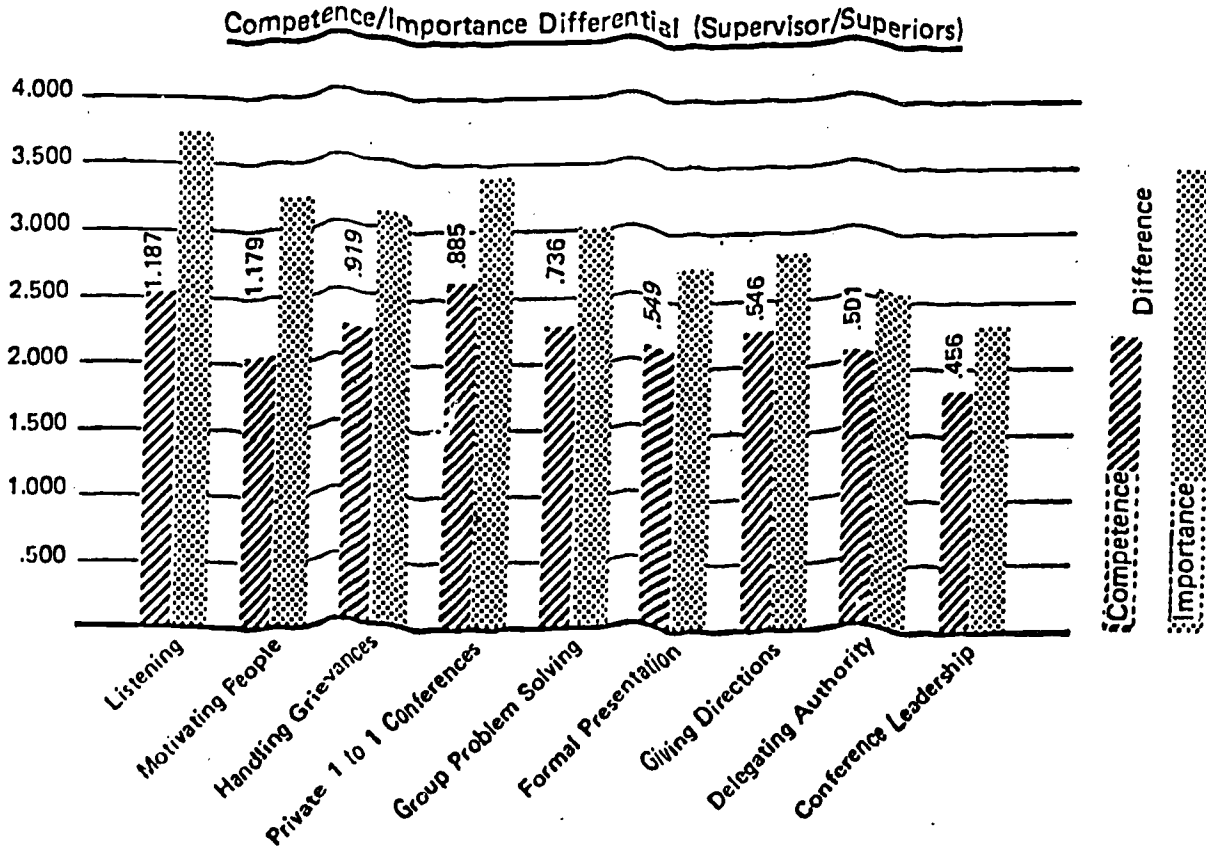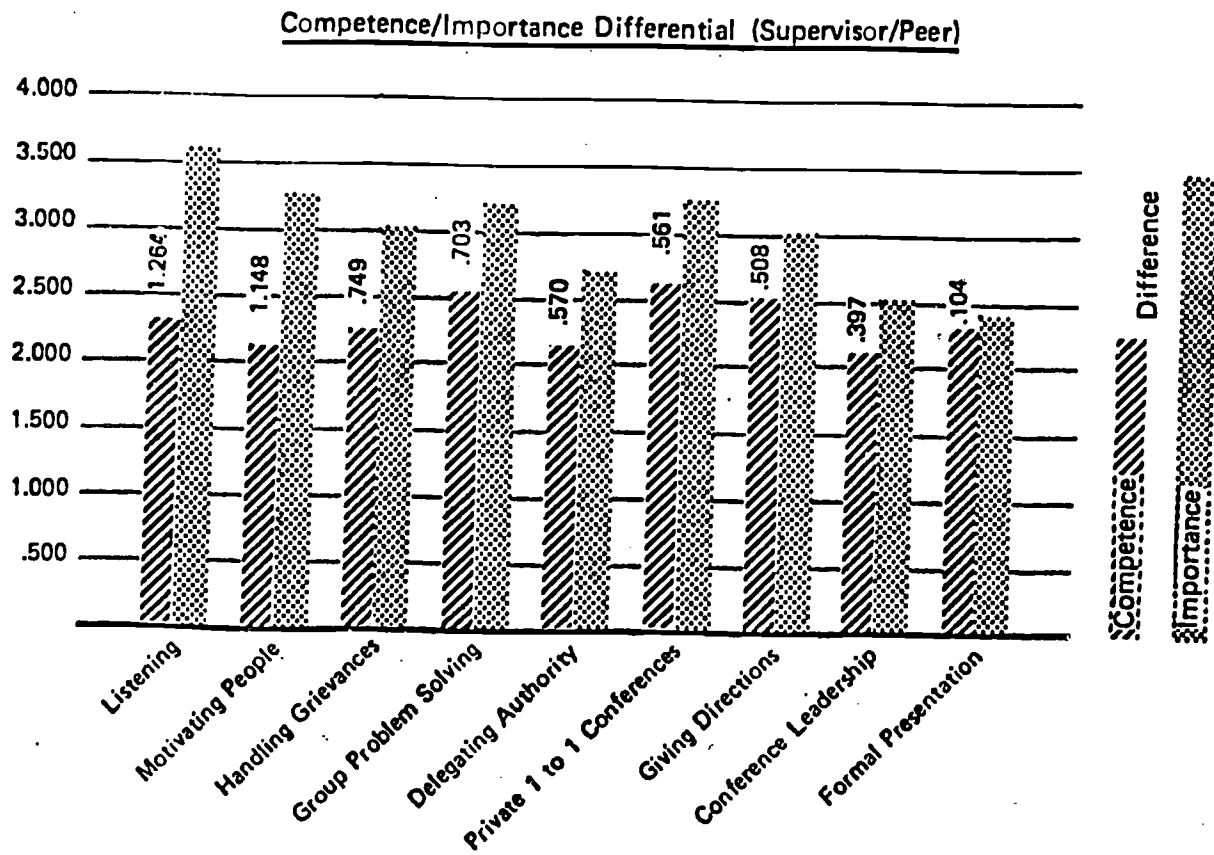## Competence/Importance Differential (Supervisor/Subordinates)

TABLE II

Competence/Importance Differential (Supervisor/Superiors)

TABLE III

Competence/Importance Differential (Supervisor/Peer)

TABLE IV

Additional Training Needed For Supervisors
(Percent of Respondents Indicating Training Need)