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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to review and organize existing literature on the evaluation of communication skills training programs. When setting training objectives, four levels of evaluation should be considered: (1) reaction (how did participants feel about the training?); (2) learning (what did the participants learn from the training?); (3) behavior (how has the learning been applied at work?); and (4) results (how has the training affected the organization?). The paper provides an overview of 19 published evaluations (discussed in alphabetical order by name of author) which were studied in hopes of encouraging and directing future evaluation efforts. Results of the study provided a basis for several recommendations to guide future evaluation efforts. First, evaluations should be multi-level. Second, trainers and researchers should continue using a variety of evaluation methods to strengthen research findings. Third, techniques for accurately measuring behavior changes need to be developed. Fourth, more studies to determine the training's ultimate impact on the organization ought to be developed. Fifth, the long-term effects of training must be examined. Finally, evaluations should be published and serve as models for future efforts. (One table is included, and 39 references are attached.) (MG)

EVALUATING COMMUNICATION SKILLS TRAINING IN ORGANIZATIONS

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INTRODUCTION

Amidst the transformation into a high-tech, service-oriented society, businesses are coming to new realizations. No longer can a company expect to beat the competition without state-of-the-art technology. And now, no longer can a company expect to beat the competition without state-of-the-art people. As businesses increasingly recognize the need for competent employees to provide the quality of service society demands, the response to this need seems to be ever more frequently "human resource training."

Human resource training is seen as a viable way of improving organizational effectiveness by improving the ability of individual employees to perform their jobs. In recognition of the benefits of human resource training, organizations are spending increasing amounts of money on it. In 1985 the United States corporations and governments spent an estimated $215 billion to train employees. This is nearly as much as the total amount spent on primary, secondary, and higher education for the same time period (Carnevale, 1986).

Importance of Communication Training

Among the most prevalent content areas for human resource training is communication (Johnson, 1986). In 1986, an estimated 66.2% of organizations with 50 or more employees provided some form of communication skills training (Norback, 1987). The

importance of communication in business and industrial settings has long been recognized, so it should not be surprising that organizations are willing to invest in communication skills training. Simply put, organizations believe that by training individuals to communicate better, they are improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the entire organization.

An investment in a training program may be viewed as an investment in a set of procedures designed to bring about a relatively permanent change in a person's behavior as a result of practice (Wexley & Latham, 1981). Communication skills training is often aimed at improving interpersonal skills, group interactions, supervisory communication, listening skills, and other behaviors. "[Communication training] should not aim to make the participants <u>aware</u>, or <u>sensitive</u>, or even <u>knowledgeable</u>, rather it should leave them with the ability to communicate better" (Anastasi, 1987, p. 741). When organizations invest in communication skills training, they expect results. They expect positive, visible changes in behavior and they ultimately expect an impact on organizational effectiveness.

Need for Training Evaluations

With the growing emphasis--and dollars--placed on training in organizations, it would seem logical, if not imperative, that training professionals conduct formal training evaluations to ensure that expectations are being met. However, relatively few

evaluations are actually conducted (Bunker & Cohen, 1978; Smeltzer, 1979). One survey of trainers indicated training evaluation is considered to be the most critical issue in their field, yet 90% of the respondents had no definite method for evaluating training (Olivas & Inman, 1983). This is an unfortunate fact because when money gets tight, programs which cannot be accounted for will invariably be cut, and training departments which do not substantiate their contribution to their companies are usually among the first to experience cutbacks (Zenger & Hargis, 1982).

If training professionals recognize the importance of evaluation, why are evaluations so rare? One of the main reasons why evaluations are not conducted is because they are not required by management. Some trainers have reported that their managers actually discourage evaluation with, "We wouldn't have hired you if we didn't think you were effective." Several studies have indicated trainers' reluctance to "waste time" testing something managers have convinced themselves is good (Carlisle, 1984). However, in lean economic times, these same training programs may be viewed as superfluous (Bell & Kerr, 1987). As long as the task of evaluating the cost-effectiveness of training is neglected, training may not be seen as a budget priority.

Fears Surrounding Training Evaluations

There are several fears which may surround communication training evaluation. One fear is that communication training results may be too difficult to measure. A training professional may wonder, "What if I could see the effects of my program, but my efforts to measure those effects failed? How am I supposed to prove the program really was worthwhile?" This trainer probably does not know that different evaluation techniques have been developed to detect effects at a variety of levels.

Another fear may evolve around limited resources. A trainer who has read about evaluations which involved simulating realistic settings to test learning (e.g., Bennett, 1981; Bowers, Gilchrist, & Browning, 1980; Clark, et al., 1985; Moses & Ritchie, 1976), or evaluations which entailed conducting series of follow-up interviews (e.g., Byham, et al., 1976; Hand & Slocum, 1970) may be fearful that the requirements in time, energy and money are too steep. This trainer would need to be exposed to the various alternative evaluation approaches which are less expensive and less time-consuming.

Finally, people may fear that they are incapable of conducting the evaluations, especially if they have limited research backgrounds. Rather than avoiding evaluation altogether, these people should seek advice from consultants in organizational communication or industrial/organizational psychology to handle the most complicated procedures. Plus, there are some simple

evaluation methods which they could learn on their own.

Most trainers recognize the importance of training evaluations, but some possess very real fears about measurement methods. It is time to put those fears aside. As long as communication training programs are not evaluated, there is no way of knowing whether they are meeting the organizations' needs and, ultimately, whether they are worth investing in.

Purpose of this Study

The purpose of this study is to review and organize existing literature on the evaluation of communication skills training programs. This study will examine a sample of previous efforts in hopes of encouraging and directing future evaluation efforts.

The remainder of this report will be organized as follows: First, the four levels of evaluation will be discussed as they pertain to communication skills training. Next, previous evaluations of communication training programs will be reviewed. Finally, implications of this study for future research in human resource development will be considered.

LEVELS OF EVALUATION

Evaluations are conducted for one obvious reason: to determine the effectiveness of training programs. What constitutes "effectiveness" in communication training, however, is not so obvious. Usually in organizations a project is considered effective if it results in sufficient monetary gains. Unfortunately, it is not always easy to assign a dollar value to training results, especially for some of the intangible benefits of communication training. The preferred criteria for measurement of communication training effectiveness should be specific training objectives. However, most training programs are not evaluated on whether training objectives are achieved. As a result, organizations do not know whether they should continue, modify, or abandon training efforts (Latham, 1982).

There are four levels of evaluation to consider when setting training objectives. Each of these levels can be defined as follows:

1) Reaction How did participants feel about the training?

2) Learning What did participants learn from the training?

3) Behavior How has the learning been applied at work?

4) Results How has the training affected the organization?

In this paper, the pertinent issues surrounding communication training evaluation at all of these levels will be explored. Each level will be briefly described, then variables, methods and

special considerations will be discussed.

Reaction

In most organizations training programs are only evaluated at the reaction level. The usual measurement tool is an end-of-course questionnaire or "happiness index" designed to find out how much participants liked the workshop (Del Gaizo, 1984). The questionnaire is sometimes jokingly referred to as the "smile sheet" under the notion that scores are related to how often the instructor smiles (Fitz-enz, 1984). In a way, this evaluation can be looked at as a "customer satisfaction" measure (Kirkpatrick, 1987). The goal should be to find out whether or not participants were satisfied with the program.

Some people dismiss evaluations on this level as meaningless since there is no assurance that learning has taken place or that behaviors will change. However, participants' reactions should be taken seriously because they can provide useful information for improving the training experience. In addition, it is not uncommon for management to make decisions about a training program's future based on the comments of one or two participants.

Variables. Some variables which are frequently considered in reaction evaluations are course content, instructional approach, instructor skills, training climate, and overall impressions. Under course content, we could examine feelings about the course objectives, materials, and information covered. The instructional

approach (i.e., behavioral modeling, lecture, discussion) could be evaluated in terms of perceived effectiveness for delivering the course material. A few of the instructor skills which can be included in the evaluation are presentation, clarity, and responsiveness to participants. One other very important, yet often neglected, instructor consideration is how well the instructor serves as a model of the communication skills being taught. As training consultant Arty Trost has remarked, "It's amazing how often communication trainers don't practice good communication skills" (1985).

The training climate can be evaluated in terms of the following necessary conditions: a climate of mutual respect, a climate of collaborativeness rather than competitiveness, a climate of supportiveness rather than judgmentalness, a climate of mutual trust, a climate of fun, and a human climate. These conditions are recognized by adult education expert Malcolm Knowles as most conducive to learning (1987).

Finally, the overall impressions of the course should be considered. Some relevant topics include the perceived value or importance of the course and whether a participant feels the learning can be applied in the workplace.

Methods. The most popular method for measuring reaction is the end-of-course questionnaire. It is generally favored because it is short and simple and the results can be easily quantified for statistical analyses. Examples of published communication

training studies which employed this method are Bell & Kerr (1987), Emener & Rye (1975), and McNamara and associates (1982).

There are alternative, qualitative methods for measuring reactions. Elliott (1978) used a subjective, written reaction. Hand & Slocum (1970) obtained reactions through exit interviews conducted with participants after the training. Finally, Coffman (1979) conducted meetings with "key clients," those people responsible for trainee productivity on the job, to obtain delayed reactions from observers.

Special Considerations. There are several considerations to make when developing reaction evaluation instruments. One is the honesty of participants. If participants are allowed to remain anonymous, they are more likely to respond candidly.

Another consideration is the use of a standard or nonstandard instrument. A standardized instrument would have the advantages of demonstrated reliability and validity and would allow for comparisons between different training groups, while a nonstandard format would provide more flexibility to measure course effectiveness in its own unique context.

Finally, the timing of the evaluation should be considered. Formative evaluations are used during training programs (i.e., after each module) to provide ongoing feedback to the instructor. Summative evaluations are usually conducted immediately after the course has concluded, but at this time participants may be at an unusual high and therefore unable to objectively critique the

training. A "delayed reaction" could be obtained a few weeks after the training, once the initial excitement has died down.

Learning

The learning evaluation is conducted to determine whether or not the training program has been successful in developing knowledge or behaviors. Every program should have some learning objectives which could be evaluated. Typically in communication courses, these objectives are specific communication skills.

The internal validity of training is based on the learning evaluation. If the participants cannot demonstrate that they have learned the skills or information taught in the program, then the program is considered invalid. In addition, we must remember that if no learning has taken place, there can be no resulting behavioral changes on the job.

Variables. There are two basic variables which can be measured through a learning evaluation. The first is knowledge. In a communication skills training program, a researcher might wish to determine whether participants understand some basic communication concepts. For example, in a study by Hand and Slocum (1970), participants were tested on their knowledge of human relations. A researcher might also look for a participant's ability to discriminate between different communication behaviors in a given context (e.g., Elliott, 1978; Ehmener & Rye, 1975; McNamara, et al., 1982).

The second variable of learning is behaviors. Because communication skills training is generally oriented toward changing behaviors, participants are frequently asked to demonstrate or role-play what they have learned. The focus of these evaluations should be on the participant's ability to demonstrate learning of active listening, public speaking, or whatever other skills the course focuses on.

Methods. A variety of methods can be used to measure learning. These methods should be chosen according to the objectives of the course. To measure knowledge gain, some communication training studies have used standard tests (e.g., Hand & Slocum, 1970; McNamara, et al., 1982). Other times, participants have been asked to discrimate between effective and ineffective communication in given situations (e.g., Elliott, 1978; Emener & Rye, 1975).

To measure behavioral learning, a series of exercises may be used to determine whether participants can demonstrate each of the skills taught. The Bell and Kerr study (1987), for example, tested each participant's writing, presentation, and dictation skills through exercises. Other studies may involve role-play tests designed to measure the ability to apply skills in simulated settings (e.g., Bennett, 1981; Bowers, Gilchrist, and Browning, 1980; Burnaska, 1976; Clark, et al., 1985; Moses & Ritchie, 1976). Finally, behavioral learning may be measured through written tests with questions asking participants to respond as they would in

real-life situations (e.g., Elliott, 1978; Emener & Rye, 1975; Smith [study B], 1976). One limitation of written behavior tests is that they discount the need for physically demonstrating skills, including nonverbal communication skills.

Special Considerations. Most published communication training evaluation efforts have emphasized evaluation at the learning level, but this level is not as important in communication skills training as the behavior level or the results level. Some communication training studies demonstrate that learning gain does not necessarily correspond with behavior changes at work (e.g., Burnaska, 1976; Emener & Rye, 1975). So, while much focus is applied to determining whether participants understand communication or understand communication skills, perhaps more attention should be given to ensuring that participants are able to apply communication skills at work. It is arguable that simply viewing participants in classroom performances is all the evaluation that is needed at the learning level because it is enough to ensure that learning is taking place.

Another consideration for evaluating at the learning level is resources. Many learning studies demand liberal investments in time and money. For example, simulating realistic environments, acting out role-plays, and coding each individual's behavioral responses can be very costly. If resources are limited, other methods may be considered more feasible.

One more consideration is whether learning evaluation results can be attributed to the training. If learning is measured only after training, there is no way to tell whether participants might have had the knowledge prior to training. Also, if no control group is used, a researcher cannot be assured that the participants did not gain the knowledge elsewhere. Finally, it is important to consider whether testing which occurs before the training could have influenced the results of a test after the training, as McNamara and associates have (1982).

Behavior

Evaluation at the behavior level would measure the application of training to the workplace. People are often unable to transfer the skills they have learned in training sessions onto the job. This problem, which is particularly relevant with communication and other people-oriented skills training, should be addressed in training evaluations (Trost, 1985). When training is ineffective in producing the behavioral results intended, the result may be costly in terms of lost productivity and lost confidence in the training function (Kelley, Orgel, & Baer, 1984).

Variables. Evaluation on the behavior level must correspond directly with the training objectives. Some variables which can be evaluated include speaking, writing, listening, group communication, interviewing, interdepartmental communication, nonverbal communication, dictating, meeting facilitation, sales

presentations, supervisory communication, assertive communication, and many others, depending on the nature and objectives of the training.

Methods. Behavior changes are most commonly measured via questionnaires. Some communication skills training studies have asked trainees to rate their own behaviors through questionnaires (e.g., Bell & Kerr, 1987; Blakeslee, 1982; Emener & Rye, 1975; Golembiewski & Munzenrider, 1973). Other studies have obtained the perceptions of subordinates of the trainees (e.g., Burnaska, 1976; Hand & Slocum, 1970; Smith [study A], 1976). Peers and supervisors could also be called upon to rate the trainees.

One frequently used (but infrequently published) method of evaluating behaviors is the collection of anecdotes, or stories about how the training has been applied. This method has been discouraged because of overwhelming biases, but it can be used to supplement quantitative methods (e.g., Blakeslee, 1982). Individual or group interviews can also be used to gather qualitative data, or they can be structured and coded for use as quantitative data, as in a study by Byham and associates (1976).

Special Considerations. One major consideration is the distinction between actual work behaviors and simulated work behaviors. If subjects are evaluated based on their performance in contexts which are irregular or with people with whom the subject would not normally communicate, the evaluation should be regarded as an evaluation of learning, not as an evaluation of

behavior on the job. If actual work behaviors cannot be directly observed by the researcher, other methods can be used to determine whether work behaviors have been affected by the training.

Another consideration is the difficulty in measuring behavior. Some training professionals lack the background, skill, or time necessary for careful and accurate evaluations on this level. An outside consultant may need to be hired for help or guidance.

A third consideration is whether participants are helped to transfer their newly learned skills to the workplace. No matter how actively trainees participate in the training program and how eager they are to try out the new skills, many trainees find it difficult to transfer these skills to their jobs (Trost, 1985). A perfectly good training program will have a limited impact on behaviors unless participants are helped in applying what they have learned.

There are many techniques which could prove useful for increasing the transfer of training. In the communication training program studied by McNamara and associates (1982), trainers used a review and application log which fostered group discussion about organizational applications of what they were learning. Another method is to have trainees write down and verbally "publish" their goals at the end of the training session. Verbally "publishing" a goal is a powerful tool for maintaining commitment to the goal (Cialdini, 1984). Trainers could also

encourage participants to keep journals of their efforts to use communication skills at work. In addition, managers and peers can be coached in providing positive feedback to trainees. Also, follow-up training sessions are popular; some people consider them to be an essential element of a training program design (Trost, 1985).

Another consideration is whether behavior evaluation results can be attributed to the training. Before and after measures would be needed to distinguish behavior changes made as a result of training. A control group would help in determining whether these changes might have occurred despite the training.

Next, we must consider the requirements for change. In order for behavioral changes to take place, five requirements must be met. They are as follows: 1) desire to change, 2) know-how of what to do and how to do it, 3) the right job climate (particularly as created by the trainee's manager), 4) help in applying the classroom learning, and 5) rewards for changing behavior (Kirkpatrick, 1987).

Finally, it is important to consider the value of "statistically significant" behavioral changes. Training programs often result in significant behavior changes, but organizational behavior management theorists recognize that "sometimes a statistically significant change in behavior may be of little or no practical significance to the organization" (Frederiksen, 1982, p. 6). If there is no evidence to suggest that trainees'

behavioral changes have had a measurable impact on organizational effectiveness, the results have no practical value to the organization.

Results

When evaluating at the results level, training professionals are looking at the impact of training on organizational effectiveness, the "practical significance" of training to an organization. Often times, the decision of whether to maintain training programs depends on their measurable impact on the economic bottom line, and necessarily so (Kelley, Orgel, & Baer, 1984). With the emphasis organizations place on the bottom line, it seems sensible to conduct training evaluations at the results level, but this is seldom done.

Variables. A number of variables can be included in an evaluation of organizational results. Researchers could watch for trends in turnover, absences, sales, customer satisfaction, quantity or quality of performance, morale, cost reductions, grievance reductions, reductions in scrap or errors, accident rates, amount of suggestions, new products or new customers. Other variables could be easily measured, including employee satisfaction, working relationships, efficiency in use of time or money, or amount of supervision required to perform tasks. The list is endless.

Methods. The simplest way to measure results is to monitor

them with methods regularly used by the organization. Some communication skills training evaluations have looked at such indices as sales quotas, performance appraisal ratings, turnover, tardiness, and formal grievances (e.g., Ivancevich & McMahon, 1976; Rosentretter, 1979; Smith [study B], 1976). Other studies have used questionnaires to measure the improved efficiency of time use as a result of improved communication (Bell & Kerr, 1987) or any effects on employee morale (Emener & Rye, 1975; Smith [study A], 1976), on supervisor-employee relationships (Bell & Kerr, 1987), on customer satisfaction (Smith [study B], 1976), and on job satisfaction (Ivancevich & McMahon, 1976).

Special Considerations. One major limitation of measurement at this level is the difficulty of separating variables. Many factors can affect the results of an evaluation, including inflation, timing, location, season, and management cooperativeness. If control groups are used and results seem to be consistent over time, however, the evaluations become more reliable.

Another consideration is whether the results to be measured are valued by top management. If management is not concerned with customer satisfaction, for example, an evaluation of this variable would be meaningless to them, despite the results. Generally, the results which are more highly valued are those which are related to dollars.

Call for Action

Communication skills training programs can and have been evaluated to determine their effectiveness. It is important to measure the impact of each program at various levels. We must know how participants feel about the training, what they learned from it, how the learning is applied on the job, and how the training contributes to overall organizational effectiveness. In communication skills training, it is especially critical to focus on behavior changes and organizational results.

While billions of dollars are being invested in human resource training, it is surprising that training programs are rarely evaluated. The lack of training evaluations is a major problem, posing a threat to the economic stability of organizations and their training departments, and limiting the effectiveness of training efforts. To demonstrate accountability, a fundamental component of any training program should be an objective assessment of training effects (Burkhart, Hehles & Stumphauzer, 1976).

REVIEW OF STUDIES

In this section, a sample of the published communication skills training evaluations will be reviewed. An overview of the levels of evaluation used for each study is presented in Table A.

Bell & Kerr (1987) measured the effectiveness of a business communication skills training program periodically offered to the support and secretarial staff at The University of Texas at Austin. The course focused on improving formal communication skills (writing, speaking, dictating) and supervisory skills. The 96 participants in this study met two hours per day, three days a week for five weeks, a total of 30 hours. Evaluations occurred at all four levels. The participants' reaction to the course was evaluated in the typical manner with an end-of-course questionnaire, and findings indicated that the participants liked the teaching methods, believed the course overall was effective, and felt the course was important in performing their jobs. At the learning level, before-and-after skills tests indicated that participants' writing and presentation skills had improved significantly, and a dictation exercise showed that participants demonstrated performance comparable to college senior performance in a managerial communication course. Behaviors on the job were evaluated 3 to 23 months later with a survey questionnaire sent to participants and to a matched, randomly selected control group.

Table A: Levels of Evaluation

	REACTION	LEARNING	BEHAVIOR	RESULTS
Bell & Kerr, 1987	questionnaire	tests	questionnaire	questionnaire
Bennett, 1981	X	simulations & observations	X	X
Blakeslee, 1982	X	X	questionnaire & anecdotes	X
Bowers, et al., 1980	X	simulations	X	X
Burnaska, 1976	X	simulations	questionnaire	X
Byham, et al., 1976	X	X	interviews	X
Clark, et al., 1985	X	simulations	X	X
Coffman, 1979	meetings	?	?	?
Elliott, 1978	written	tests	X	X
Emener & Rye, 1975	questionnaire	tests	questionnaire	questionnaire
Golembiewski & Munzenrider, 1973	X	X	questionnaire	X
Hand & Slocum, 1970	interviews	questionnaire	questionnaire	X
Ivancevich & McMahon, 1976	X	X	X	questionnaire & monitoring
McNamara, et al., 1982	questionnaire	tests	(not reported)	X
Moses & Ritchie, 1976	X	simulations	X	X
Rosentretter, 1979	X	X	X	monitoring
Smith, 1976 (A)	X	X	questionnaire	questionnaire
Smith, 1976 (B)	X	tests	X	questionnaire & monitoring
Webb & Howay, 1987	questionnaire	questionnaire & tests	X	X

Reaction How did participants feel about the training?
Learning What did participants learn from the training?
Behavior How has the learning been applied at work?
Results How has the training affected the organization?

Participants reportedly used the skills learned after they returned to their jobs. In addition, responses indicated that the training group members performed more tasks, performed a wider variety of tasks, and had more job responsibilities than members of the control group. Finally, the evaluation of results, based on the survey questionnaire, indicated that participants performed more duties in fewer personnel hours and required less of their supervisors' time in routine written communication tasks than control group members, and their relationships with their supervisors often improved.

Bennett (1981) studied the impact of human development training on 19 criminal justice personnel (graduate students). The course provided training in microcounseling, clarification of values, self-knowledge, and assertiveness, with an emphasis on experiential learning. The impact of the course was measured at the learning level. A before-and-after microcounseling role-play test indicated that participants had significantly improved their ability to give microcounseling responses and performed better than a comparison class. Significant improvements in microcounseling interview skills were also found in before-and-after interviews made with people outside the classroom. The evaluations of other aspects of the course are not relevant to this study.

Blakeslee (1982) examined the effects of communication skills training for 164 high-talent professionals in a Fortune 500 manufacturing company. The workshop provided training in one-to-one, small group, and group-to-group communication over 3 & 1/2 days. Evaluation was conducted on the behavior level. In a post hoc survey questionnaire distributed six months

after completion of the workshop, participants reported statistically significant improvement in the quality and quantity of communications. Anecdotes were also collected to gather information about people's feelings of "why" the workshop improved communication.

Bowers, Gilchrist, and Browning (1980) measured the effectiveness of a two-day course in improving the communication performance of 70 tax enforcement officers. Evaluation was performed at the learning level. Trainees were asked to participate in simulations before, after, and again 4-6 weeks after the course. Results indicated significant and sustained improvement in communication performance.

Burnaska (1976) evaluated an interpersonal skills modeling program on 62 middle-level managers at General Electric. Evaluations were performed at both the learning level and the behavior level. To determine whether learning had occurred and could be sustained, the participants and a randomly selected control group were observed in simulated role-plays within one month after training and again four to five months later. Trainees performed better than the control group at both time intervals. To determine effects on the behavior level, employees of the managers completed questionnaires one week prior to training and again four months after the training. The employees perceived minimal, if any, changes in their managers' behaviors.

Byham and associates (1976) studied the influence of modeling training on supervisors' ability to handle interactions with their employees. Evaluation took place on the behavior level. To determine the effects of training, a random sample of trained supervisors' employees participated in

highly structured interviews before the training and seven months after the training. Subordinates in a roughly matched department were also interviewed. Responses were coded and positive differences in employees' perceptions of their supervisors after training were found in most categories, as well as positive differences in perceptions of trained over untrained supervisors.

Clark and associates (1985) evaluated the effectiveness of an interpersonal skills workshop for 27 supervisors in residential programs of a hospital for disabled clientele. The workshop was based on a study that identified supervisory behaviors which affect employee job satisfaction and performance. Evaluation was conducted at the learning level. Trained and untrained supervisors were rated on their performance in role-play situations before and after training. After training, trained supervisors performed significantly better than untrained supervisors and significantly better than they had before training. However, the magnitude of change from pre- to post-training, although statistically significant, was not great.

Coffman (1979) presents case studies of evaluations of interaction management modeling programs designed to increase the supervisor's skills in handling interactions with employees. The procedures for evaluation are not aimed at any one level and may or may not be relevant at all levels. "Key clients," those people responsible for trainee productivity on the job, are asked to gather data on the training impact, then to meet to discuss strengths and weaknesses of the training. The training programs in the case study were determined as strong in such areas as "improving

working relations and communications with supervisor and employee" and "consistence and uniformity" of training (p. 32). Weaknesses were found in such areas as "time in discussion (supervisor and employee)" and "too arbitrary--does not allow for the human variable."

Elliott (1978) measured the effects of t-group training on the communication and discrimination skills of 11 counselor trainees (graduate students). The 20-hour training program was evaluated on reaction and learning levels. At the reaction level, nine of the eleven participants indicated through a subjective, written evaluation that the experience had been worthwhile to their personal and professional growth. On the learning level, written tests before and after training indicated participants significantly improved their communication skills but not their discrimination skills. Members of a matched control group did not significantly improve their communication skills, but did significantly improve their discrimination skills (although not significantly more than the experimental group).

Emener & Rye (1975) investigated the outcome of communications awareness training on first-line industrial supervisors. The 40 participants met 3 hours per day, twice per week for five consecutive weeks, a total of 30 hours. Some research was conducted at all four levels of evaluation. The reactions to the course, measured by an opinion poll of 25 of the participants, were generally positive. Overall, participants felt the program strengthened their supervisory skills and that there was an advantage to having an outside instructor. Also, participants indicated they did not resent being asked to attend, a continuation of the course

would be helpful to all supervisors, and they would not resent being asked to attend an extension of the program. On the learning level, written tests before and after training indicated significant improvement in communication skills and discrimination skills. To measure behavioral changes, participants were surveyed before and after training. No significant changes were found in participants' perceptions of their communication styles or supervisory styles. This same survey also indicated, on the results level of evaluation, that there were no significant changes in level of morale related to their jobs.

Golembiewski & Munzenrider (1973) examined short-term and long-term effects of an organizational development program for division managers and regional managers of a sales organization. An evaluation was performed on the behavior level. Participants were asked to complete the Likert "Profile of Organizational Characteristics" six times during the 245 days of the active training program, and again approximately one year after termination of the intervention. Results indicated "favorable" lasting effects on regional managers in all categories of the Profile, but only minimal effects on division managers.

Hand & Slocum (1970) measured the results of a program attempting to improve human relations practices of managers in a specialty steel plant. The managers attended 1 & 1/2 hour training sessions once a week for 28 weeks. Evaluations were performed at reaction, learning, and behavior levels. Delayed reactions to the training were determined through exit interviews of participants which indicated that trainees perceived executive staff did not support the program. These perceptions conflicted

with perceptions of the executive staff measured by Likert's Profile of Organization Characteristics. On the learning level, questionnaires completed by the randomly selected training and control groups before, after, and again 90 days after training indicated the following: trainees significantly improved in their acceptance of themselves and others upon completion of the training, but the change was short-lived. No other significant results were found on the learning level. On the behavior level, subordinates of the groups completed the Leadership Behavior Description Questionnaire before training and again 32 weeks after training, indicating significant improvement in trainees' "initiating structure" component, but the program was not considered effective in improving trainee behavior overall.

Ivancevich & McMahon (1976) studied effects of a 5-day management and organizational behavior training program on 60 first-line supervisors, 46 sales managers, and 54 engineering supervisors from a large manufactoring company. Evaluation occurred on the results level. Before, after, and again one year after training, participants and a comparison group indicated their perceived levels of satisfaction on a questionnaire. Some positive differences were indicated in areas of social interaction satisfaction, job security and innovativeness satisfaction. Analysis of performance ratings suggest some effects on performance, but these effects must be accepted with caution.

McNamara and associates (1982) evaluated a communications training program for auditor/evaluator staff at the United States General Accounting Office. The four-day course was intended to improve interpersonal problem

solving and communication skills among participants. Evaluations at the reaction and learning levels are reported for the 2419 individuals who had attended the course so far. Reactions were obtained through questionnaires which indicated participants held significantly more positive attitudes toward the course content, the status of communication skills at GAO, and the status of personal communication skills than control group members. Also, in an end-of-course questionnaire, participants rated instructor competence and effort, course materials, and course benefits highly. Learning was assessed through a multiple choice achievement test and a not too reliable observation exercise, indicating statistically significant differences between groups, but these differences were not great. The transfer of training to the job was measured by self-report follow-up questionnaires and direct observations of communication in work groups, but the results were not discussed in this article.

Moses & Ritchie (1976) examined the impact of supervisory relationships training of 90 first-level supervisors in two telephone companies. The training followed a behavioral modeling approach and the effects were measured on the learning level. Two months after training, each trainee and each member of a matched, randomly assigned control group participated in simulated problem solving discussions. Performance ratings indicated the trained group's performance was consistently superior to the control group's in all three types of problem solving discussions.

Rosentretter (1979) examined an adult eduction program provided for 68 department managers of Maryland Cup Corporation. The 15-hour program was designed to increase managers' facilitative communication skills for goal

setting with subordinates. Evaluation was performed at the results level. Researchers monitored four economic indices (turnover, tardiness, performance appraisal ratings, and formal grievances) and found significant differences only in the turnover index, which was enough to demonstrate a total incremental cost savings for the company during the six-month period of over $2100.

Smith [study A] (1976) studied effects of training designed to improve the employee morale at IBM. A group of 18 managers received behavior modeling training in two sessions, focusing on "how to communicate effectively with individual employees and groups of employees, how to feed back opinion survey information, and how to prepare meaningful action plans to improve morale" (p. 351). Evaluations were conducted on both the behavior level and the results level. To measure effects on behaviors, researchers had subordinates of the trainees and of managers in a control group complete a meeting effectiveness questionnaire. The analysis indicated that trained managers ran significantly more effective meetings with more "open discussion of relevant issues" and "generating good ideas for problem solutions" (p. 353). On the results level, opinion surveys before and one year after training indicated significant improvements in the morale of employees of trained managers and no real change in employees of control group managers.

Smith [study B] (1976) studied the effectiveness of different types of training which focused on "ways of improving communication with customers, customer satisfaction, and sales to customers" (p. 351). Sixty second-level managers participated in this second training program, which was

developed as a result of the success of the first training program. Effectiveness was evaluated on the learning level and the results level. To measure learning, researchers compared managers' written responses to customer comments before and after training, finding significant improvements in participants of some training groups (depending on the type of training). On the results level, customer satisfaction was measured with questionnaires before, four months after, and ten months after training, showing a significant, positive relationship between communication skills of managers after training and later levels of customer satisfaction. Also, sales performance was monitored over one year and showed an improvement in one training group (modeling plus team-building).

Webb & Howay (1987) evaluated the effects of public speaking training offered to a small group of secretaries and engineers. The training was conducted over four weekly 3-hour sessions and was evaluated on the reaction and learning levels. Reactions, measured via end-of-course questionnaires, indicated a general positive appraisal of the training, particularly regarding the workshop organization and information presented. Pre- and post-tests were used to determine what learning had taken place, while a pre- and post-survey questionnaire was used to measure levels of communication apprehension. No significant differences in rhetorical sensitivity or knowledge gain were found, but communication apprehension sigificantly decreased.

Conclusions

Overall, very few evaluation studies of communication skills training have been published. The sample reviewed here indicates the following:

1) Positive effects of communication skills training have been found at all four levels of evaluation.

2) The most popular methods of evaluation have been questionnaires, tests, simulations, and monitoring of organizational impact.

3) Evaluation studies typically employ more than one method of evaluation, thereby strengthening the findings.

4) Much of the emphasis of evaluations has been on the learning level, which is arguably the least relevant or practical to an organization.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RESEARCH

The task of evaluating the effectiveness of communication skills training is critical for determining whether the organization's needs are being met. The primary intention of this study has been to encourage future evaluation efforts by demonstrating that evaluations can and have been successfully conducted. The results of this study provide a basis for several recommendations to guide future evaluation efforts.

First, multi-level evaluations are recommended. In order to obtain more thorough appraisals of the validity and effectiveness of training, evaluations should be conducted at all levels, when possible. Two studies which reported evaluations at all levels are the Bell & Kerr study (1987) and the Emener & Rye study (1975). These studies could be referred to for the guidance of future efforts.

Second, trainers and researchers should continue using a variety of methods of evaluation to strengthen the research findings. Particularly useful are combinations of quantitative and qualitative data collection (i.e., questionnaires and interviews), which result in specific, measurable responses, plus people's feelings about those responses.

Third, techniques for accurately measuring behavior changes need to be developed. Some researchers have simulated environments to determine whether behaviors have been learned, but

these methods do not demonstrate whether behaviors are applied outside the simulated environments. Practical methods for directly observing communication behaviors at work need to be developed.

Fourth, more studies to determine the training's ultimate impact on the organization ought to be developed. To support the assertion that improved communication can result in improved organizational efficiency and effectiveness, a variety of organizational factors should be carefully examined.

Fifth, the long-term effects of training must be examined. Some studies have found training effects to be short-lived (e.g., Hand & Slocum, 1970). As new techniques and follow-up programs are developed to prolong the effects of training, long-term evaluations can be simultaneously conducted.

Finally, evaluations should be published. Current evaluation efforts can serve as models for future efforts, but they need to be readily accessible to the public. In addition, as more communication training evaluation studies are published, the credibility of communication skills training in organizations will be enhanced.

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