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The purpose of this paper is to advocate and describe a comprehensive communication skills course for future executives. One question which may be asked is, who needs an executive communication course? Here are some quotations from a few individuals that will answer this question.

One person wrote, "...I know now--that the ability to communication is everything." That man is Lee Iacocca (1984, p. 18). Donald Seibert (1984, p. 182), CEO of J.C. Penney, stated, "Another key characteristic of the typical chief executive officers I know is that they communication well at every level in the company." (emphasis in original)

Don Keough, president of Coca-Cola, said that the ability to communicate has been important in the development of his career. He added:

I believe that for a top executive not to realize that he has an enormous obligation to try to communicate as effectively as possible is just not facing up to a major responsibility. It's almost a contradiction in terms to see someone in a senior executive position who isn't able to communicate well. (in Linver and Taylor 1983, pp. 242-243)

Iacocca (1984, p. 15) stated it succinctly: "The most important thing I learned in school was how to communicate." Iacocca said he felt that more and more college graduates could express themselves clearly, but he attended a Dale Carnegie public speaking course to sharpen his expressiveness skills. Another executive, Don Bader of Occidental Petroleum, asserted, "Communication is extremely important to any career, and yet we spend probably the least amount of time in college or school really developing effective communication." (in Linver and Taylor 1983, p. 284)

The consensus of executive opinion seems to be that effective communication skills are essential. Whether college graduates receive adequate training in communication skills is another matter. Don Bader thinks communication should be emphasized more. Iacocca mentions that many entry level executives can express themselves adequately in writing and basic speaking, but cannot listen. In other words, some communication needs are being met in college and some are not. Thus, companies are forced to send their executives to seminars and workshops at company expense to gain proficiency in various communication skills. This should be unnecessary. Universities could prepare managers in these requisite skills--and they do.

Twenty years ago, many business students were not required to take communication classes. Today, a business writing and speaking course is a core requirement in most business schools throughout the country. So, business writing and basic public speaking needs may be met, but persuasive speaking, sales presentations, public relations, motivation, interpersonal skills such as listening and provid-

ing feedback, group problem solving, negotiation and bargaining, and conflict management are not given enough emphasis. The management and organizational behavior literature compiled to date suggests that more emphasis in communication skills is necessary.

What the Managerial Theorists Say

Chester Barnard (1938, p. 82) wrote, in his benchmark work, The Functions of the Executive, "The first executive function is to develop and maintain a system of communication." Chris Argyris (1962) devoted an entire book to developing interpersonal communication competence in organizations. Likewise, William Haney's (1960) enduring work, Communication and Interpersonal Relations, discussed communication theories in organizational settings.

A perusal through classic discussions of management effectiveness (Drucker 1966, Etzioni 1964; Guest, Hersey & Blanchard 1977) and contemporary management and organizational behavior texts (Certo 1980; Mathis and Jackson 1976; Riggs, Bethel, Atwater, Smith & Stackman 1979; Smith, Carroll, Kefalas & Watson 1980; Tansik, Chase & Aquilano 1980) shows that communication skills are considered important for managers. Further, at least three recent texts, Organizational Management Through Communication (Allen 1977), Managerial Communication: A strategic Approach (Smeltzer & Waltman 1984), and Sussman and Krivonos' (1979) Communication for Supervisors and Managers, are centered around managerial communication skills.

Also, there are a number of trade books whose authors espouse the importance of effective executive communication skills (see Burkett 1983; D'Aprix 1977; Hart 1980; Levinson 1981; Rice 1965). A quotation from one trade book author represents this view. Duerr (1971, pp. ix-xiii), wrote:

Management is communication. The one single thing that each and every manager depends on, that sorts the successes from the failures, is the ability to communicate with other people and to organize their communications among themselves.

Many journals devote space to effective business communication articles (e.g., Administrative Management, Business Horizons, Journal of Business Communication, Journal of Business Education, Personnel Journal, Public Management, Public Relations Journal, Training and Development Journal). Likewise, popular magazines such as Forbes, Fortune, Inc., and Working Woman feature articles on executive communication.

In spite of the impressive amount of literature that focuses on communication skills for executives, universities do not require a course in executive communication. Most universities do not even offer an elective course in executive, managerial or leader communication. The next section describes common

university courses that cover communication contexts.

Communication Courses

A person might note that executive communication courses are not required because communication in all its contexts is adequately covered in a myriad of other classes. This is true. Let's examine some of these other classes.

Within the business school core lies the aforementioned "business communication" class that stresses business writing and public speaking. Most business schools require this course. The course is often offered by marketing or management departments. Or, if outside the business school, it is housed within the English or communication departments, depending upon whether the emphasis is on writing or speaking. This is a necessary course that focuses upon theory and application of theory. But, as mentioned before, it cannot adequately encompass writing, basic speaking and all the other types of communication that executives do.

Well, perhaps other business classes over communication. This is also true. Most management departments offer courses in organizational behavior, theories of management, leadership, and personnel development. These classes mention communication in passing--and some delve into communication theories in depth, but none offer practical experience and application of communication theories in organizational contexts.

Marketing departments emphasize communication in specific contexts. Examples of these include sales management, sales training and development, public relations, consumer behavior, and advertising classes. These classes are good but usually do not center on the executive's roles and behaviors in these communication contexts.

Communication departments offer a variety of classes that pertain to the executive: persuasion; forensics; interpersonal, organizational, group, public, mass, and nonverbal communication; communication and conflict; and negotiation and bargaining. Again, these offers are good. However, a business student would have to declare a double major or take a minor in communication to derive the maximum benefit from these ten courses. This may be a good idea. But, as in the case of the management courses, professors usually emphasize theory and not practice. Thus, students leave these classes full of ideas and devoid of skills. They can recite the qualities of a competent communicator, but they cannot demonstrate these behaviors. Later, corporations are forced to send these incompetent executive communicators to communication workshops offered by the Dale Carnegie Institute and other training establishments. Dale Carnegie gets paid to enhance executives' communication performance, not just increase their knowledge base. It would be nice if universities could offer an executive communication course that exposed students to relevant theories AND helped them develop their communication skills. At least one Western university does offer such a course.

The Executive Communication Course

At this university, the executive communication course is housed within the marketing department. There are several reasons for this. First, the executive is more than just a manager or supervisor. Yes, executives perform all management functions and attend to human resource decisions, but they also lead people. They are figureheads for the organization; they communicate the company's culture and philosophies. O'Toole (1984, p. 233) wrote, "Iacocca's biggest achievement may be that he convinced more people to follow him than any business leader has ever done before." A motivator is a marketer.

Additionally, executives, especially chief executives, give the organization's viewpoints and positions to the public, meet with important visitors, attend professional conferences, and serve as liaisons with other organizations and government agencies. As Lundborg (1981, p. 245) pointed out, "A CEO is called upon to do more things, be in more places, serve on more boards and committees, make more speeches than anyone could possibly do." It is this public communication commitment that justifies placing this course within the marketing department. Just as in advertising, the top executives are personally marketing the company to its many publics. It is just as Robert Cushman, CEO of Norton Industries, stated it:

...managers of big institutions...must spend more time trying to understand and influence external affairs than they spend on the more traditional job of internal management. (in Steiner 1983, p. 25)

Increasingly, according to Steiner (p. 57), top executives are discovering the necessity to communicate effectively with the media. Some CEO's are now featured in television advertisements for company products (e.g., Eastern Airlines' Frank Borman, Avis' David Mahoney, Remington Shaver's Victor Kiam, and of course Chrysler's Lee Iacocca). These campaigns are successful due to the CEO's ability to project credibility to the public. This credibility is based upon the competence and safeness that the CEO communicates (Martel 1984, pp. 150-151). This executive advertising lends itself to a class situated in a marketing department.

Course Format, Content, and Activities

The executive communication course at this university emphasizes knowledge and performance. Students learn theory through lecture; application through readings, films, and discussion; and behavioral skills through structured communication activities.

Students who perform well are invited to participate in a management conference where they compete in three executive communication skill categories. The California Management Conference is hosted each Spring by the University of California, Berkeley. It is open to all undergraduates at Western colleges and universities. The competition is judged by local business executives on the three aforementioned areas. The first area is group problem solving. Students are placed in small groups, given a local business context and a topical news issue, and asked to discuss it. They are judged on how well they

perform. The second area is negotiation and bargaining. Here students are judged by how well they can bargain in a business conflict of some sort. Impromptu public speaking is the third area. Students are handed a current news topic, given five minutes to prepare, and then deliver a five minute speech. Students then complete a portion of the GMAT and meet the sponsoring firms. Winners are announced that evening. The competition provides students with an opportunity to show off their executive skills to company recruiters. Thus, students have an incentive to perform well in the class.

The class meets once a week during a ten week quarter. At the first meeting, students introduce other students in one minute speeches. They are instructed to mention something memorable about the person they are introducing. Afterward, the professor discusses the importance of awareness, perception, and knowledge in successful executive performance. Students are assigned readings. To become aware and knowledgeable (and to be able to participate in group discussions), students are required to read the Wall Street Journal and a local newspaper on a daily basis. They are also responsible for the contents of Business Week and Newsweek. Every subsequent class begins with a thirty minute discussion on current events and how these relate to business. The first class ends with a lecture on empathy and listening.

For the second class period, students are required to read and discuss Iacocca. Discussion focuses on the communication contexts in the book that are similar to the competition areas mentioned above. This book is assigned because Iacocca is a well known executive that communicates often in public.

In the third meeting, students are introduced to leadership theories and read and discuss an article that features a photograph of Iacocca and President Reagan. The author delineates leadership and management differences (Gonzalez 1985). This article is succinct and points out that good executives must manage and lead simultaneously.

The study of leadership is continued in the fourth meeting. Here, students view a sixty minute videotape starring Captain Kirk of the television series Star Trek in a variety of executive communication situations. It is important for students to actually see a successful leader's communication style, even though Kirk is a fictitious character. On this day, students hand in a short report and deliver a two minute speech on a famous past or current leader and his or her communication style. Again, the point is to have students focus on leader communication style in various contexts.

At the start of the fifth day, students turn in a self profile which lists their strengths and weaknesses. Following Seibert (1984, pp. 24-29), lecture centers around building self confidence through self appraisal and iterative, hierarchical successes. For students to compete in a public arena, they must have realistic self confidence that is based upon their capabilities and limitations.

The first part of the sixth class revolves around

a lecture on corporate culture. Students view and discuss the In Search of Excellence documentary videotape. This is an important class because students get the opportunity to see successful companies run by outstanding executives who know how to relate with their internal and external publics. The second part of this class is devoted to lecture on small group communication theory. This lecture is necessary as it introduces students to interpersonal and group behavioral concepts that they will need to know before they can practice group interaction competencies in applied settings.

Group problem solving is the agenda item for the seventh session. Students are assigned to groups of seven and are subjected to conditions they will face in the competition at the conference. The entire class time is devoted to repeated practice and feedback from fellow group members and the professor.

In the eighth class meeting, the professor lectures on group conflict management and students continue group problem solving practice. In the final hour of the eighth meeting, the professor gives a lecture on theories of negotiation and bargaining.

Students are placed in bargaining situations similar to those they will be exposed to at the conference; this practice occurs during the first part of the ninth class meeting. During the second part of the class, the professor lectures on the nuts and bolts of public speaking.

In the first part of the final class meeting, students view a videotape on persuasive public speaking. Then they are given topics and speak on these in small groups. The instructor and classmates provide feedback to speakers. The entire class period is spent practicing impromptu speeches. For their final examination, students perform one last round of impromptu speeches. After that, students are prepared to compete in the management conference and in the real world.

Conclusions

To summarize, the aim was to advocate and explicate an executive communication course that would be taught in a marketing department. We quoted four executives who think that communication skills are essential. We showed that respected managerial theorists and current management and organizational behavior text writers recognize the material link between communication skills and success in management. We listed three current managerial communication books and noted that journals and the popular press devote space to executive communication. Further, we established that available communication courses do not adequately meet the theory/application/performance requirements of a quality executive communication class.

We explained that a marketing department was the appropriate place to locate this class because the course focuses on executives who interact with and influence the public. We described the course and demonstrated that it succeeds in interfacing theory with performance.

This executive communication course provides training for a management competition where students

manifest their skills in a public setting--and are rewarded for their performance. As their careers progress, they will be rewarded with more communication challenges. Here is a class that makes our students marketable. The question is, will you elect to offer this course?

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