Meeting the Distance Learner's Need for an Online Writing Center

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Abstract

This paper discusses the steps taken at a proprietary business school to establish an online writing center for its new online MBA program. The online writing center was beta tested in the spring and summer quarters of 2005. School employees enrolled in beta test sections of three courses and were asked to submit case studies and papers for review by online writing center staff. The employees were satisfied with the feedback they received from the online writing center staff. The first MBA students began fall quarter classes on October 3, 2005, so it is too soon to determine their perceptions of the center's efficacy.

Introduction

While today's undergraduate and graduate students may not be excellent writers or communicators, they are certainly computer savvy. They expect their professors and their schools to communicate with them via email, and they expect to be able to find information about courses and programs on the school's intranet or web site. These students are also more visually oriented than previous generations. These changes have significantly affected the way in which writing teachers and writing programs deliver course material. As Muriel Harris noted in 1995, "as the Internet grows and develops, on-line[sic] writing centers will take on new shapes and provide learning environments for writers in ways we cannot yet predict" (p. 4). Nine years later, in June 2004, the Conference on College Composition and Communication published its Position Statement on Teaching, Learning, and Assessing Writing in Digital Environments. In September 2005, a Google search using the term "online writing centers" produced 18,800,000 hits.

Background

MSB/GC is a proprietary college. It offers associate and bachelor degrees at seven residential campuses in Minnesota; its online offerings include an online bachelor's degree in business administration and an online Master of Business Administration. In January 2005, the school began to develop an online writing center for use with its then proposed online MBA program. Existing online writing centers, other university's MBA programs, and the demographics of MSB/GC students were researched to determine what the MBA student population would need in an online writing center.

The most recent enrollment data available was from fall of 2004. At that time, MSB/GC had 3,362 students enrolled. Of that total, 69% were females and 31% were males. A total of 507 students were enrolled in one of the school's two bachelor of science programs: 180 were enrolled in the bachelor of science in accounting program and 327 were enrolled in the bachelor of science in business administration program. (Olson, 2004.) Although the majority of the business program students took their coursework residentially, more than 50% of the courses were offered online. In

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fall 2004, over one-third of the business program students were enrolled in at least one online course. (Olson, 2004)

Since business instructors made up 24% of the instructors at MSB/GC in fall 2004, MSB/GC business instructors who taught online courses were contacted via email and asked about their students' writing abilities. Instructors were asked to list the types of errors (surface level errors as well as problems with content, organization, style, and documentation) that they encountered in their students' writing. Next, the competitors' web sites were reviewed for information regarding the types of writing assistance provided (if any) for their MBA students. This information was then used to compile a list of materials for incorporation into the new MSB/GC Online Writing Center.

The following presentation summarizes the findings, lists the recommendations made, details the way in which the MSB/GC Online Writing Center was built in the Blackboard Learning System™, and summarizes the results of the school's first beta test of the online writing center.

Laying the Groundwork for the Development of the MSB/GC Writing Center

Online writing centers do more than provide students with online writing instruction and tutoring. They also "bring visibility to the campus writing center and serve students who may have difficulty getting to the center for writing assistance. . ." (Anderson-Inman, 1997).

The online writing center developed at the Minnesota School of Business/Globe College was designed to provide the school's online MBA students with access to writing tutors and resources. Since the MSB/GC MBA program will be offered exclusively online, the administration assumed that most of the students would not be able to obtain writing help through one of the school's residential writing centers. It was also assumed that, since most MBA students were working professionals, MSB/GC MBA students would not be interested in or able to try to reach a writing tutor during traditional school hours. In fact, it was noted that most online students participate in their online classes late at night (usually after 10:00pm) and on weekends.

Anderson-Inman noted that the services [online writing centers provide] can be divided into three types: resource materials, online tutoring, and information gateways. She defined resource materials as "a selection of readings and reference materials designed to promote greater writing fluency and grammatical accuracy in student papers" (p. 786). This was the most challenging aspect of designing an online writing center solely for graduate student use as the Research and Development staff and the Director of the Online Writing Center were actually completing development of the remaining MBA courses after beta testing of the first two completed courses began in March.

To have at least some relevant materials available for the students enrolled in the first set of beta test courses, the school's online writing center library of resources initially contained handouts developed or used in previous undergraduate writing courses and in MBA communications courses taught previously by the online writing center's director. These included handouts on punctuation, style, document format, and resumes. Once the three MBA courses to be beta tested in the spring were completely developed, colleagues were asked to submit articles, handouts, and useful links to include in the resources link of the online writing center. This process will be continued as the full complement of MBA courses is taught.

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The third service, providing "information gateways," was the easiest element to establish. The MSB/GC Online Writing Center offers students a link to Purdue's Online Writing Lab, for example. Purdue has the most extensive and best-known Online Writing Lab, but links to OWLs at other large universities were also provided.

The director of the online writing center felt that the second service, online tutoring, would be the most important to MSB/GC's MBA students. After consulting the MSB/GC technical staff, it was determined that the most efficient way to provide this service was through the Blackboard™ link. Many schools allow students from outside the institution to submit questions and papers for feedback. As the school's resources are limited (it does not have a graduate student body from which to draw tutors or teaching assistants to staff its online writing center) and since the online tutoring services are provided at no additional costs to MSB/GC's MBA students, the decision was made to initially limit access to MBA students.

To limit access and to make accessing the online writing center easier for MBA students, it was decided that the MSB/GC Online Writing Center should be built using the Blackboard Learning System™, which is the Web-based software employed for all MSB/GC online undergraduate and graduate courses. The MSB/GC Online Writing Center was set up using the same "look and feel" (format and tools) as the school's online classes, creating a comfortable environment and providing familiar navigation for its users.

The school offered its first set of beta courses for interested and qualified employees in the 2005 spring quarter. MBA students in one of these courses, Information Technology Systems Management, were enrolled in the MSB/GC Online Writing Center. These students were asked to submit three papers to the Online Writing Center for feedback. Papers were reviewed and returned within 48 hours. The second set of beta courses were offered in the summer quarter of 2005, but only one new course was added and the same set of students was enrolled. This time, students were asked to submit one major paper to the online writing center.

The quality of the drafts turned in varied widely, but the drafts did reflect the same types of errors noted by online faculty in response to the email query sent in January 2005. The errors listed included:

- inability to write clearly and correctly
- inappropriately casual writing style
- few or no research skills
- lack of knowledge of APA Style and documentation

These findings were not surprising; these are the same types of errors the staff of the online writing center had observed while teaching adult learners at both the undergraduate and graduate level at other colleges. Some improvement was noted, however, between the papers submitted in the first and second round of beta testing.

Building an Online Writing Center in Blackboard™

Building the MSB/GC online writing center using the Blackboard was done for several reasons, not just to address the access and familiar environment issues noted earlier. It saved time, provided

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secure access, facilitated ready access to the school library, allowed group interaction, enabled real-time interaction with students, provided detailed user statistics, and limited access when needed.

Less Time

Since the existing Blackboard™ course template could be used to create the online writing center, the center could be created in time for the spring quarter's students to be enrolled.

Secure Access

The Blackboard™ system provided everyone (administration, faculty, and students) easy yet secure access to the Online Writing Center. Because the system is Web-based, any registered student who has a computer and Internet access can use the Online Writing Center from his or her home, office, or any other remote facility anywhere around the world.

Ready Access to the MSB/GC Library

The existing Blackboard™ template used for the MBA courses provides student users with a link to the MSB/GC library, so students working on papers with an online tutor have the added benefit of being able to access sources while discussing research and research papers.

Group Interaction

One important element of the school's MBA classes is peer review. Blackboard ™ allows faculty to place students in groups within a class for interaction, group discussion, and peer critiques of other students' work. It was important to have this option for faculty and students. Such a feature enables faculty and staff to provide an environment similar to the MOO (MUDs, Object Oriented) environments offered by other universities (Anderson-Inman, 1997). MBA faculty have the option of assigning groups in their own individual courses or assigning groups for peer review through the Online Writing Center.

Real Time Interaction with Students

Tutors who work in the MSB/GC Online Writing Center may hold virtual office hours using the chat room feature. During these posted hours, tutors can interact in real time with student users. Or, if a tutor is not available, a student can post a message in the chat room for the tutor he or she has been working with. This option was especially attractive because it allows the MSB/GC Online Writing Center staff to record and monitor student questions in an effort to improve the services offered.

Students often ask the same questions, or at least they have similar questions about research, punctuation, and documentation, so the chat log provides them with a question/answer library of sorts. Blackboard™ allows the system administrator to erase some or all of the content in the chat area. It also gives the administrator the option to separate the chat room into different sections—one per MBA course or course section, for example—and to set time/date restrictions. That is, if more than one section of MBA students had been enrolled in the spring, the administrator could have delineated the chat room into separate sections and ended the access by the final week of the quarter.

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Detailed User Statistics

Because Blackboard™ tracks student usage in a variety of ways, it allows the administration to compile data to determine how effectively the online writing center is serving students. It can track the number of minutes a student spends in each area of the course and the time of day the student logs into the course. It displays this information in a variety of formats. This ability to track student use on a daily, weekly, or monthly basis allows the administration the opportunity to change the hours tutors are available, to schedule additional tutors during peak times, and to be more cognizant of students' needs.

Limited Access to the Online Writing Center

Because MSB/GC is a small, proprietary institution with limited resources, limiting access to the online writing center was an important concern. Unlike Purdue, which has a renowned writing and rhetoric program, MSB/GC has no graduate students available to work as tutors in its online writing center. To serve its students, the school had to find a way to limit access. Using Blackboard™ and creating the online writing center within a course structure helped to establish those limits. It also allowed administrators to restrict access to the graduate student population for the short term.

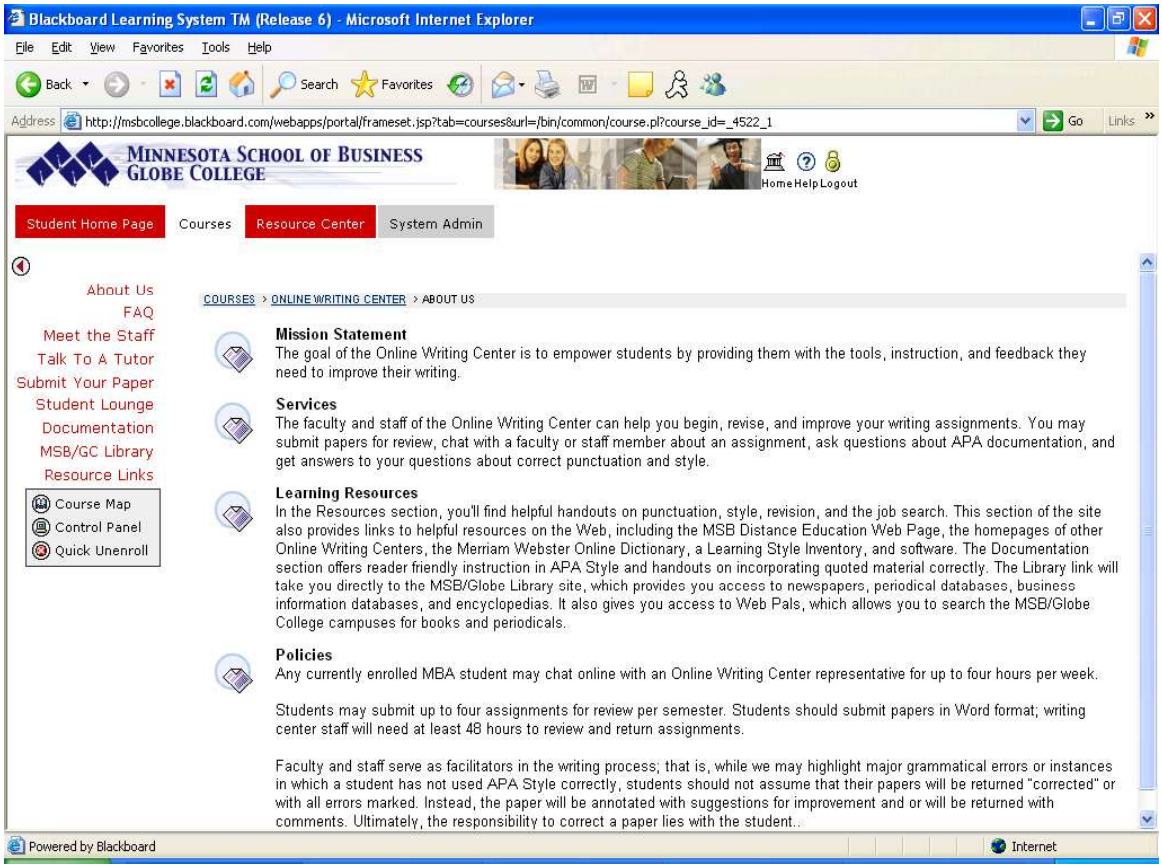
The Components of the MSB Online Writing Center

The MSB/GC Online Writing Center's main menu currently includes the following components:

- About Us
- FAQ
- Meet the Staff
- Talk to a Tutor
- Submit Your Paper
- Student Lounge
- Documentation
- MSB/GC Library
- Resource Links

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Figure 1. Screen shot of home page of the MSB/GC Online Writing Center.



About Us

Clicking on About Us allows the student to view descriptions of the following material:

- Mission Statement
- Services
- Learning Resources
- Policies and Procedures

Mission Statement:

The Mission Statement is based on the MBA Program Description and reads as follows: "The goal of the Online Writing Center is to empower students by providing them with the tools, instruction, and feedback they need to improve their writing."

Services:

The homepage includes both a statement of services as well as a section on policies and procedures.

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> The faculty and staff of the Online Writing Center can help you begin, revise, and improve your writing assignments. You may submit papers for review, chat with a faculty or staff member about an assignment, ask questions about APA documentation, and get answers to your questions about correct punctuation and style.

Learning Resources

Every course in Blackboard™ has a Learning Resources section and link. This is the description that appears on the MSB/GC Online Writing Center page:

> In the Resources section, you'll find helpful handouts on punctuation, style, revision, and the job search. This section of the site also provides links to helpful resources on the Web, including the MSB/GC Distance Education Web Page, the homepages of other Online Writing Centers, the Merriam Webster Online Dictionary, a Learning Style Inventory, and software. The Documentation section offers reader friendly instruction in APA Style and handouts on incorporating quoted material correctly. The Library link will take you directly to the MSB/GC Library site, which provides you access to newspapers, periodical databases, business information databases, and encyclopedias. It also gives you access to Web Pals, which allows you to search the MSB/GC campuses for books and periodicals.

Policies and Procedures:

Perhaps the biggest concern among writing center administrators and tutors is the student perception that online writing centers and their tutors exist to "fix" papers—instead of empowering students to become better writers. The policies and procedures section of the Online Writing Center clearly state the type of assistance students can expect to receive from the Online Writing Center faculty and staff as well as the amount of time students may expect to wait for feedback on their work.

Since MSB/GC's Online Writing Center does not yet serve undergraduate students and does not emphasize proofreading as part of the assessment process, it was decided that the faculty would provide limited editing services in an effort to help students recognize major errors in their papers. Many of the students in the spring 2005 beta courses had been out of school for some time and were unfamiliar with APA style, for example. Instead of using the Track Changes feature in Word®, the tutor highlighted major grammatical errors, awkward sentences, and documentation errors in different colors to show students the pattern of their errors. The tutor also carried on a dialogue with the student through annotations and end comments. Students were free at any point in the quarter to send an email with any questions to the tutor. (See Appendix A & B for student paper samples.) This initial experience with "live" papers led to a change in the policy statement to reflect the administration's willingness to assist students with editing issues.

This is the current policy statement students view when they open MSB/GC's Online Writing Center Policies and Procedures link:

> Any currently enrolled MBA student may chat online with an MSB/GC Online Writing Center representative for up to four hours per week.

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Students may submit up to four assignments for review per quarter. Students should submit papers in Word format; writing center staff will need at least 48 hours to review and return assignments.

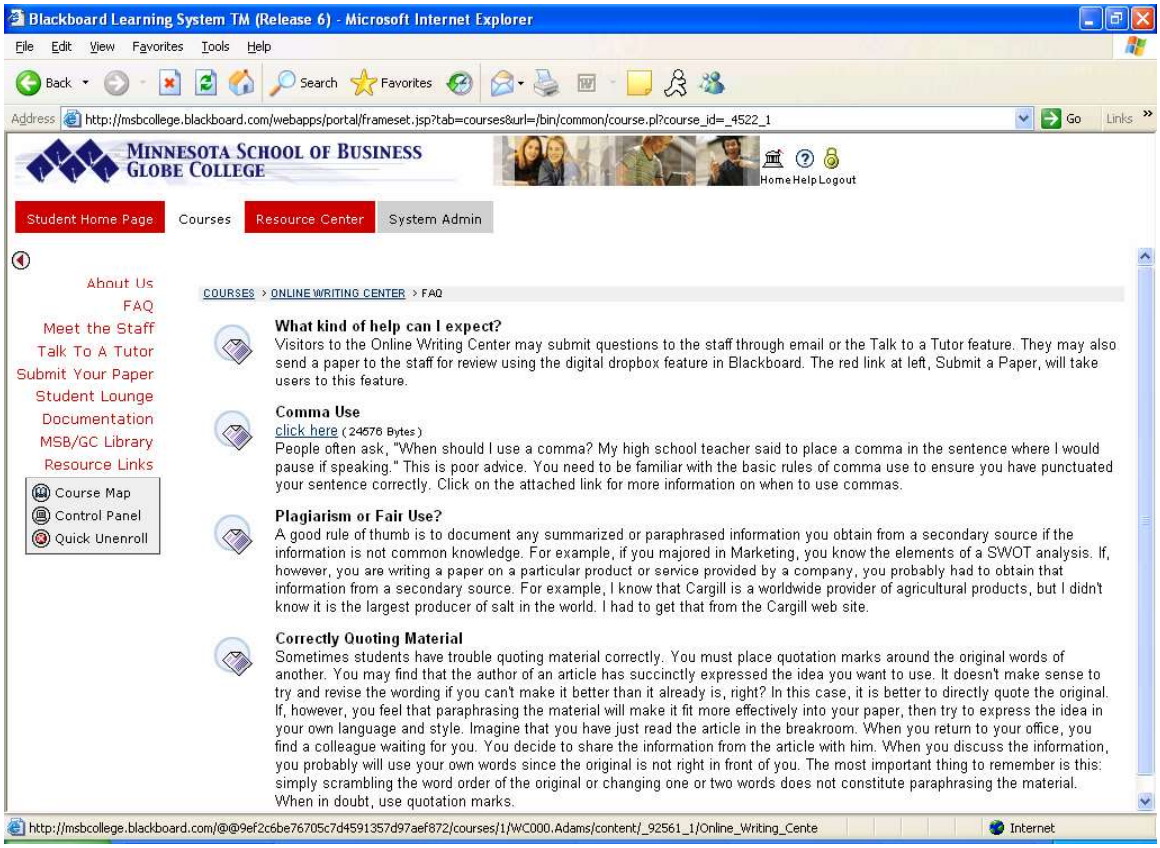
Faculty and staff serve as facilitators in the writing process; that is, while we may highlight major grammatical errors or instances in which a student has not used APA Style correctly, students should not assume that their papers will be returned "corrected" or with all errors marked. Instead, the paper will be annotated with suggestions for improvement and or will be returned with comments. Ultimately, the responsibility to correct a paper lies with the student.

FAQ

This link provides the students with answers to the questions the administration believed would be asked most often. The headings are as follows:

- What kind of help can I expect?
- Comma Use
- Plagiarism or Fair Use?
- Correctly Quoting Material

Figure 2: Screen shot of the FAQ page of the MSB/GC Online Writing Center.



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What kind of help can I expect?

This section explains the procedure for submitting a paper to a tutor:

> Visitors to the Online Writing Center may submit questions to the staff through email or the Talk to a Tutor feature. They may also send a paper to the staff for review using the Digital Dropbox feature in Blackboard™. The red link at left, Submit a Paper, will take users to this feature.

Comma Use:

This section provides a brief explanatory paragraph and a link to a comma handout created just for the center.

Plagiarism or Fair Use?

This provides a brief explanation of plagiarism for students:

Correctly Quoting Material:

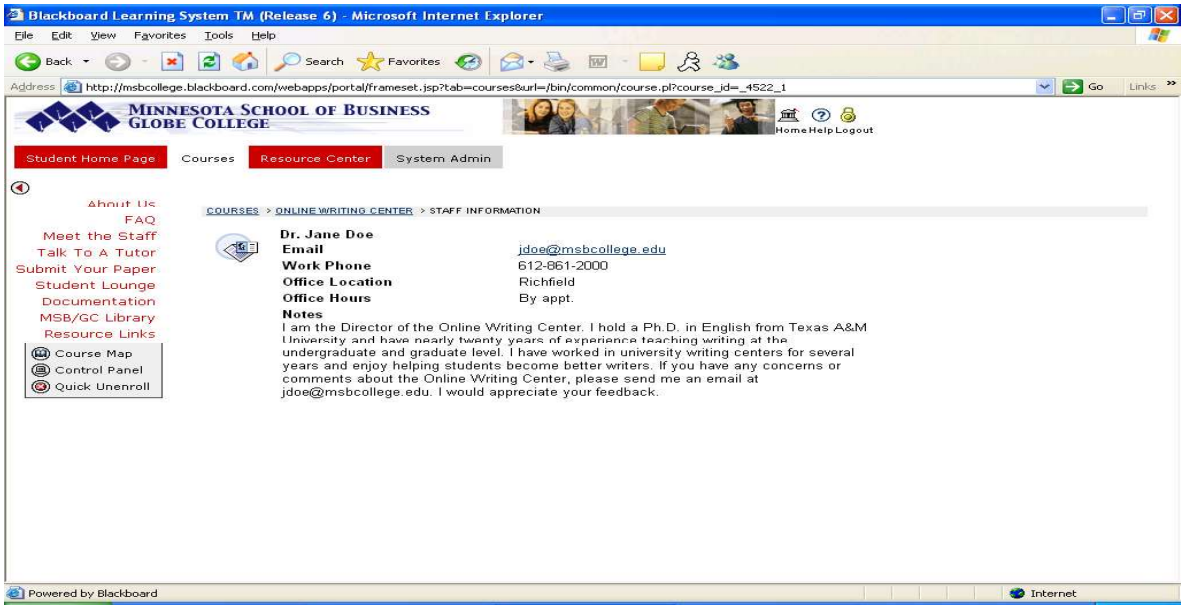
This provides a brief explanation or review on how to correctly quote material.

Meet the Staff

This menu item is another standard Blackboard™ feature. It includes photos of the staff, contact information, and a brief biographical sketch for each tutor. All online undergraduate and graduate instructors are required to post their name, email address, work phone, office location, and office hours. In the Notes section, instructors are encouraged to post a summary of their qualifications. Brevity and a professional tone are encouraged. Instructors are encouraged to post a photograph of themselves to make their students feel more comfortable, but the posting of a photograph is not required. The following screen shot was created using a fictitious name for the purpose of this manuscript.

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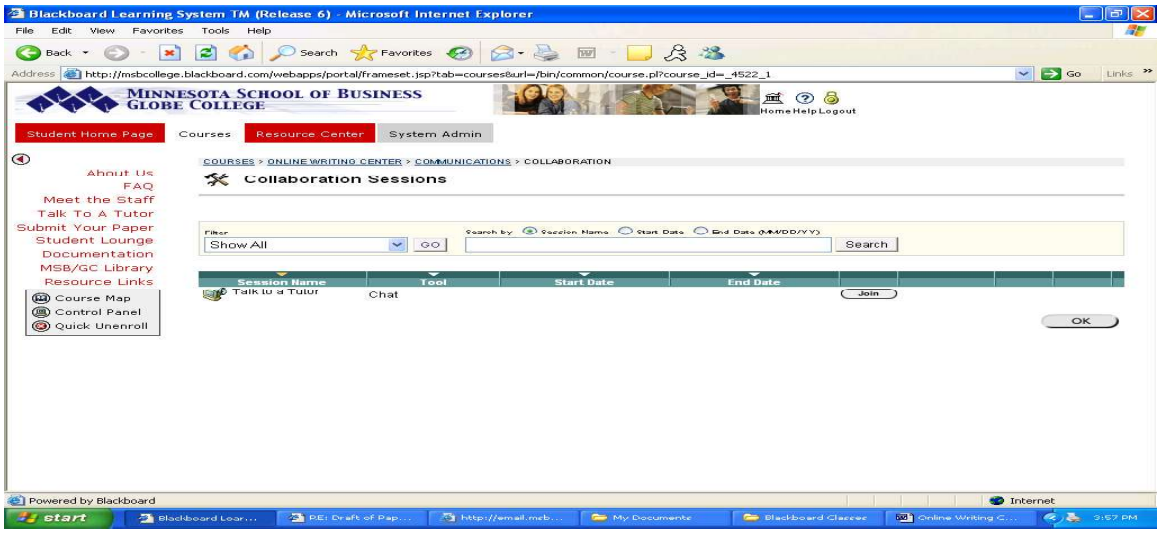
Figure 3. Screen shot of Meet the Staff page of the Online Writing Center.



Talk to a Tutor

When students click on this link, they see the Talk to a Tutor link. Students simply click on Join to begin.

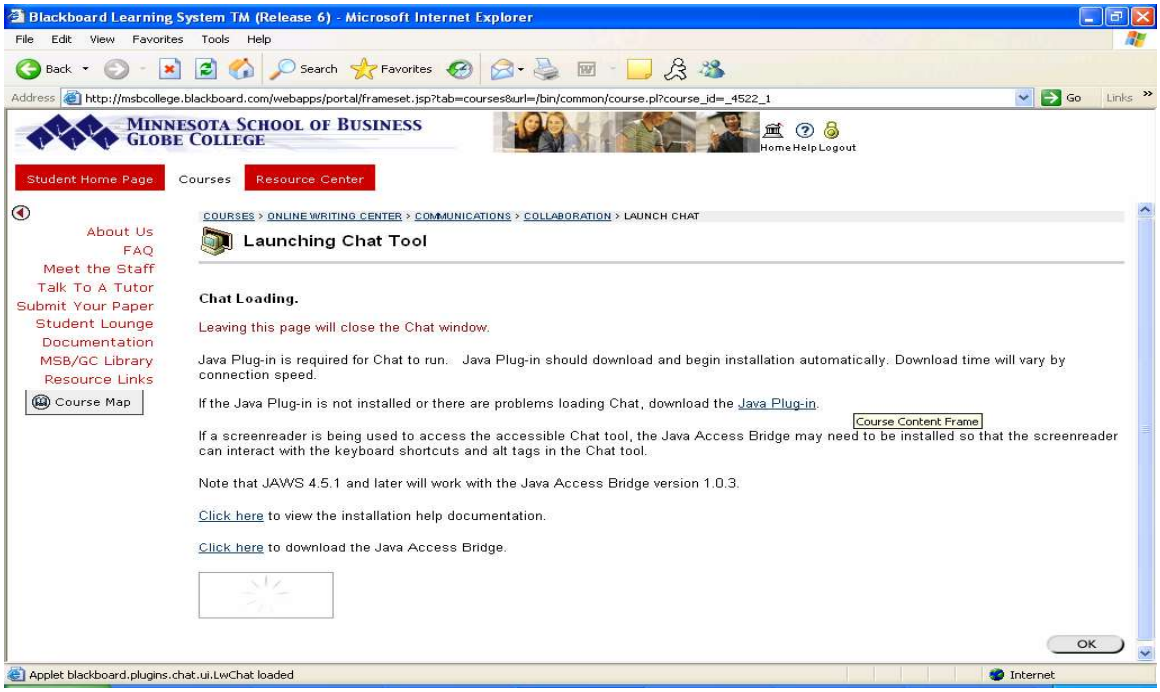
Figure 4. Screen shot of the Talk to a Tutor page of the MSB/GC Online Writing Center.



The student clicks on the Join button to enter the chat room. If the student does not have JAVA™ Plug-in loaded on his or her computer, the software will instruct the student to download the necessary software. The following screen appears:

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Figure 5. Screen shot of the Launching Chat Tool page



When the student has finished downloading the necessary Java™ Plug-in, he or she can enter the Talk to a Tutor link located on the page previously displayed.

As discussed previously, students who click on the Talk to a Tutor link can enter the chat area to talk live to a faculty or staff member during posted hours or to post a message to which a faculty or staff member can respond to within 48 hours.

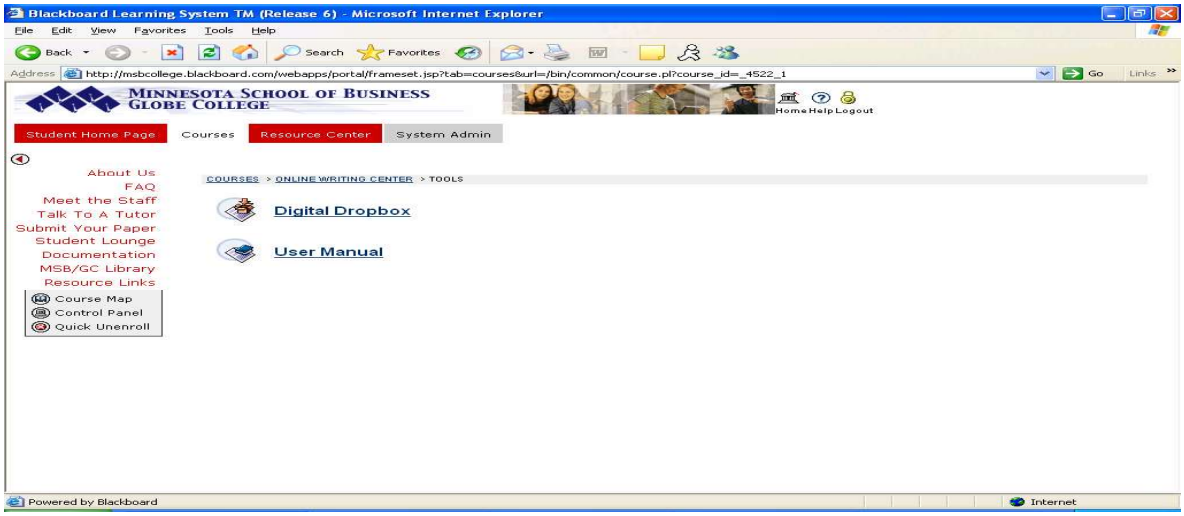
Blackboard™ Chat allows the administration to save all questions and dialogue between tutors and students for an entire quarter. Chat can be subdivided by course or allow all enrolled MBA students access to one chat room. The administration has not yet decided whether or not to leave the chat room open indefinitely or to archive chat rooms each quarter. Since Blackboard™ allows the administrator to erase dialogue in the chat room, the administration may decide to edit or prune the Chat and leave it open until the first MBA class graduates. These decisions will be made after the first "live" set of MBA students use the MSB/GC Online Writing Center.

Submit Your Paper

MBA students enrolled in the beta test are asked to submit their papers using the Digital Dropbox feature in Blackboard™. Students may submit papers in their Blackboard™ classes in one of two ways: assignment links or through the Digital Dropbox, so they are already familiar with the process.

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Figure 6. Screen shot of the Digital Dropbox page that appears when a student clicks on the Submit Your Paper link of the MSB/GC Online Writing Center.



To turn in a paper, the student first clicks on the Digital Dropbox link. Then the student will see the Add a Paper/Send a Paper screen displayed below. The student must type in the name of the assignment, browse through his or her files to locate the assignment, and then click on the Submit button. Now the file is ready to be sent to the tutor. The student clicks on the Send a Paper link, browses to locate the file from the list provided, and hits the Submit button. Now the file is waiting for a tutor to retrieve it and assess the paper it contains.

Once the tutor has evaluated the paper and provided feedback, he or she follows a similar procedure to send the student's paper back.

When the student has waited the requested amount of time (48 hours), all he or she has to do is click on Submit Your Paper, click on Digital Dropbox, and open the file that has been sent by the tutor.

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Figure 7. Screen shot of the Add File/Send File page showing the student's paper has been added and sent to a tutor in the MSB/GC Online Writing Center.

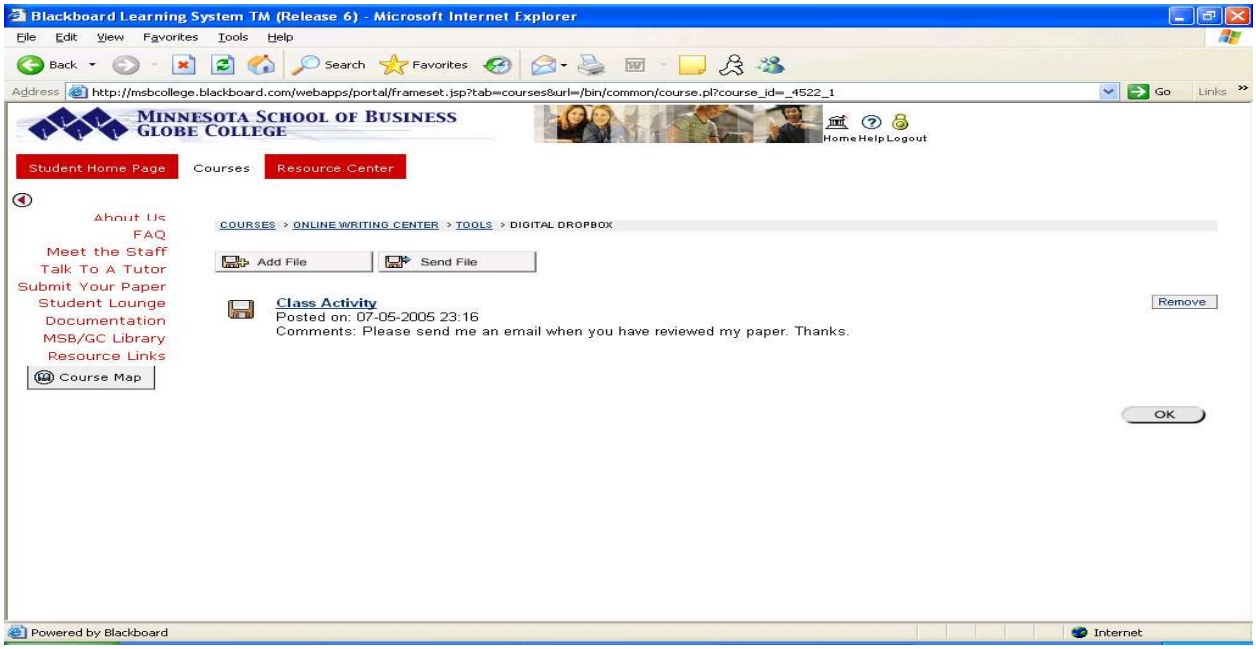
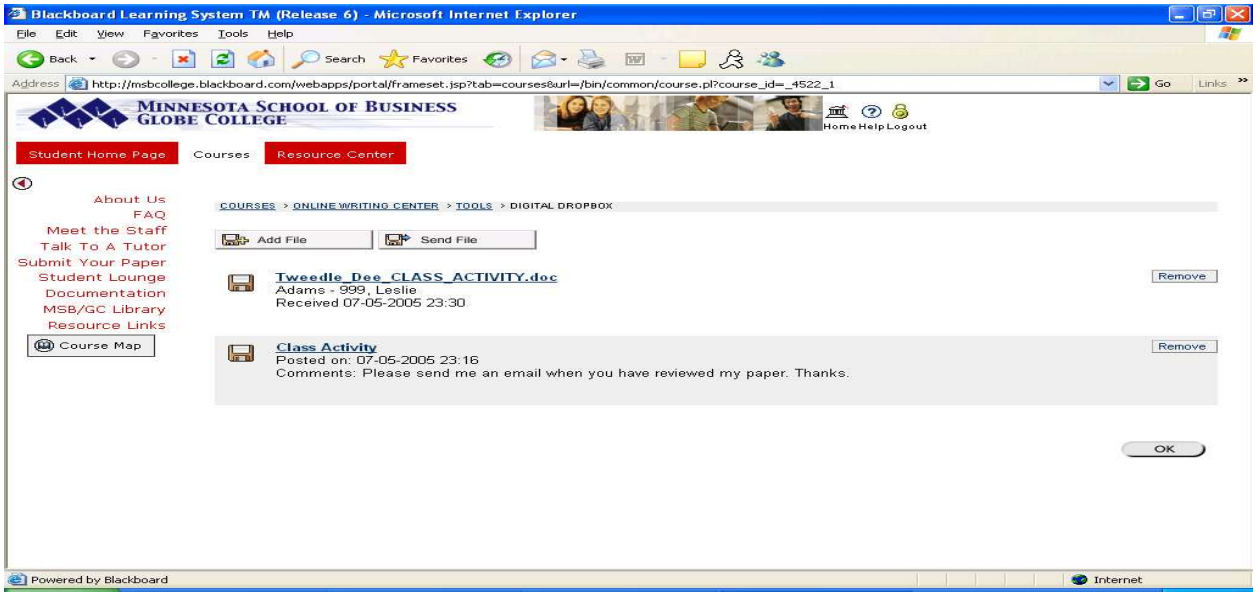


Figure 8. Screen shot showing the student's screen after the tutor has returned his paper.



The Digital Dropbox method assures that the student's transaction is confidential. The only disadvantage is that it can be time consuming for the tutor to locate on his or screen which papers are new and which have already been read and posted as responses.

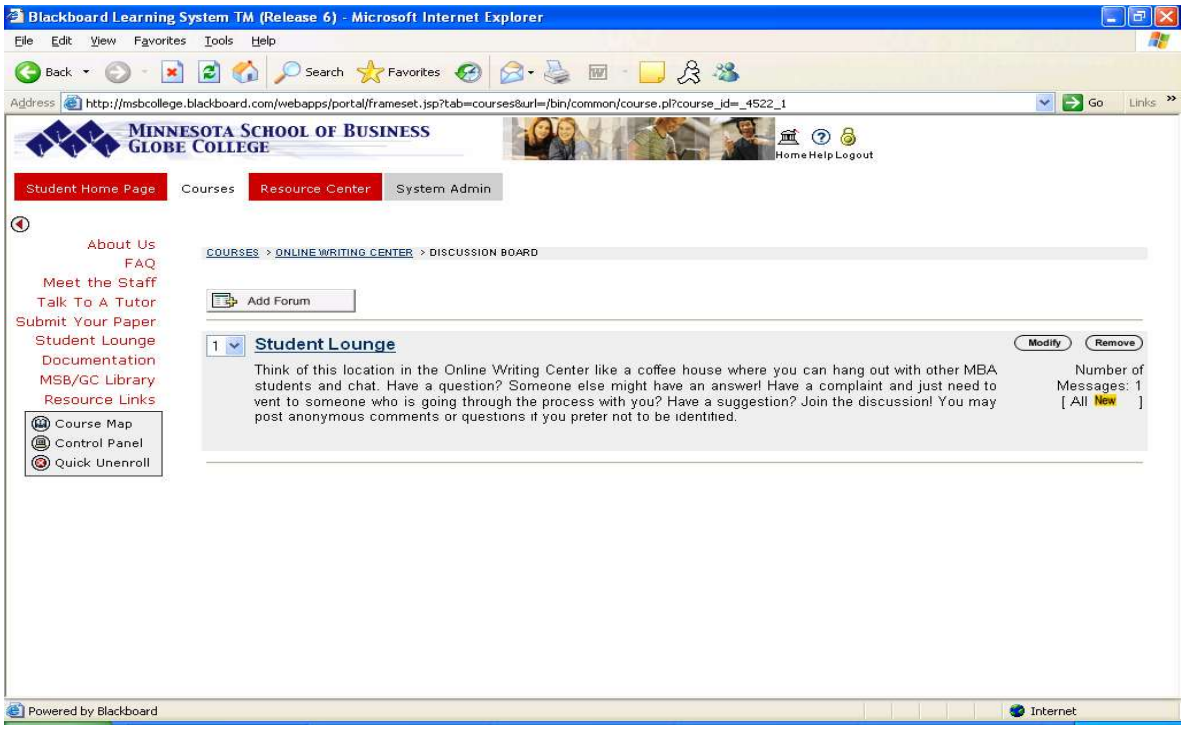
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The system also allows students to post papers through the Discussion Board feature, but doing so would allow other students to view the attachments. At this time, the administration feels it is more important to keep the transactions confidential.

Student Lounge

This menu item is exactly what one might expect—a place for MBA students to gather online.

Figure 9. Screen shot of the Student Lounge page of the MSB/GC Online Writing Center.

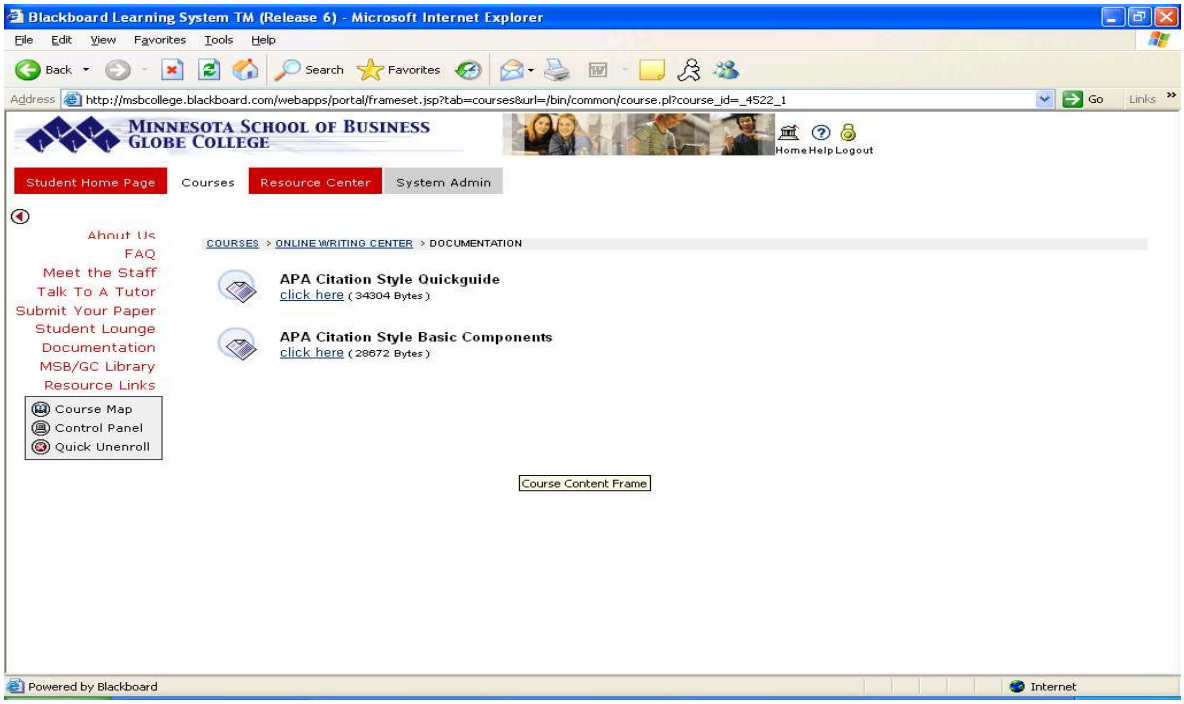


Documentation

Clicking on this menu item takes the student to two important links to handouts on APA Style prepared by MSB/GC librarians: APA Citation Style Quickguide and APA Citation Style Basic Components.

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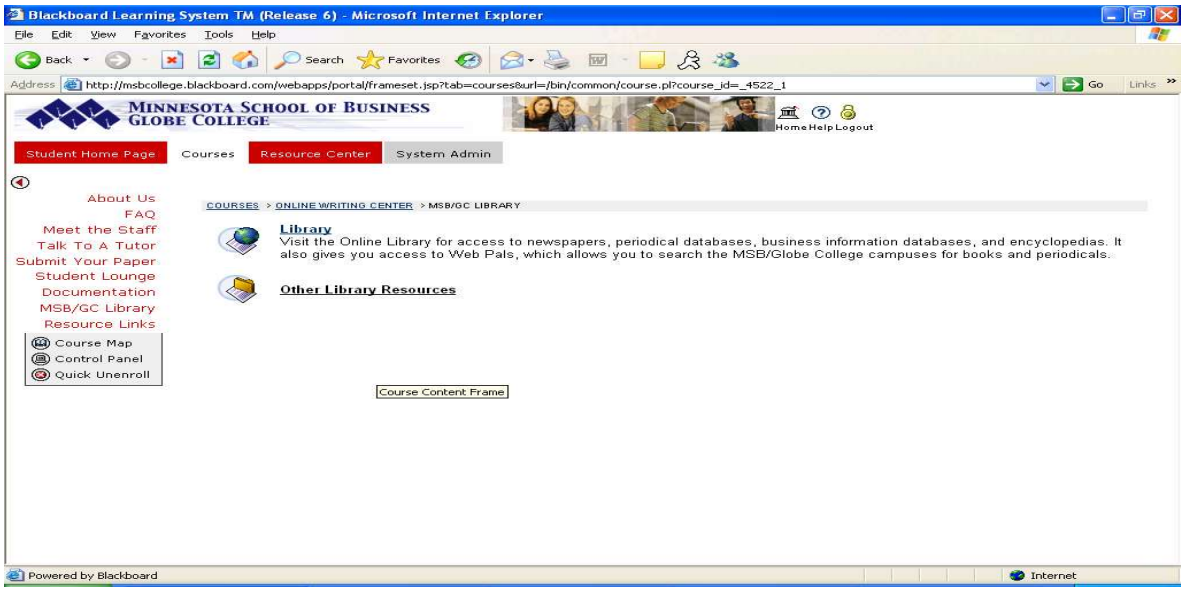
Figure 10. Screen shot of the Documentation page of the MSB/GC Online Writing Center.



MSB/GC Library

This link offers students direct access to the MSB/GC library home page, where they can conduct research. It also allows the online writing center staff the opportunity to look up information while assisting students and while evaluating a student's paper.

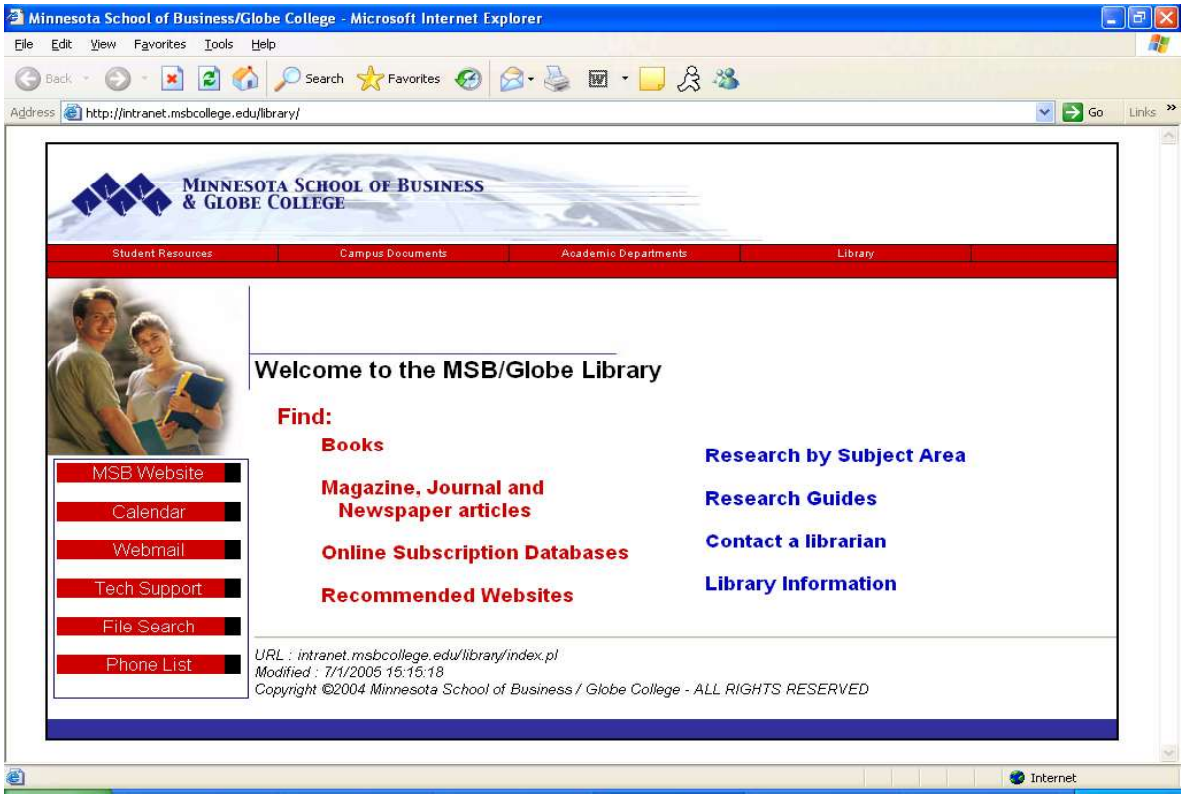
Figure 11. Screen shot of the MSB/GC Library page of the MSB/GC Online Writing Center.



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Once students click on the Library link, they see the screen displayed below.

Figure 12. Screen shot of the welcome to the MSB/Globe library page, displaying a variety of online resources available to students.



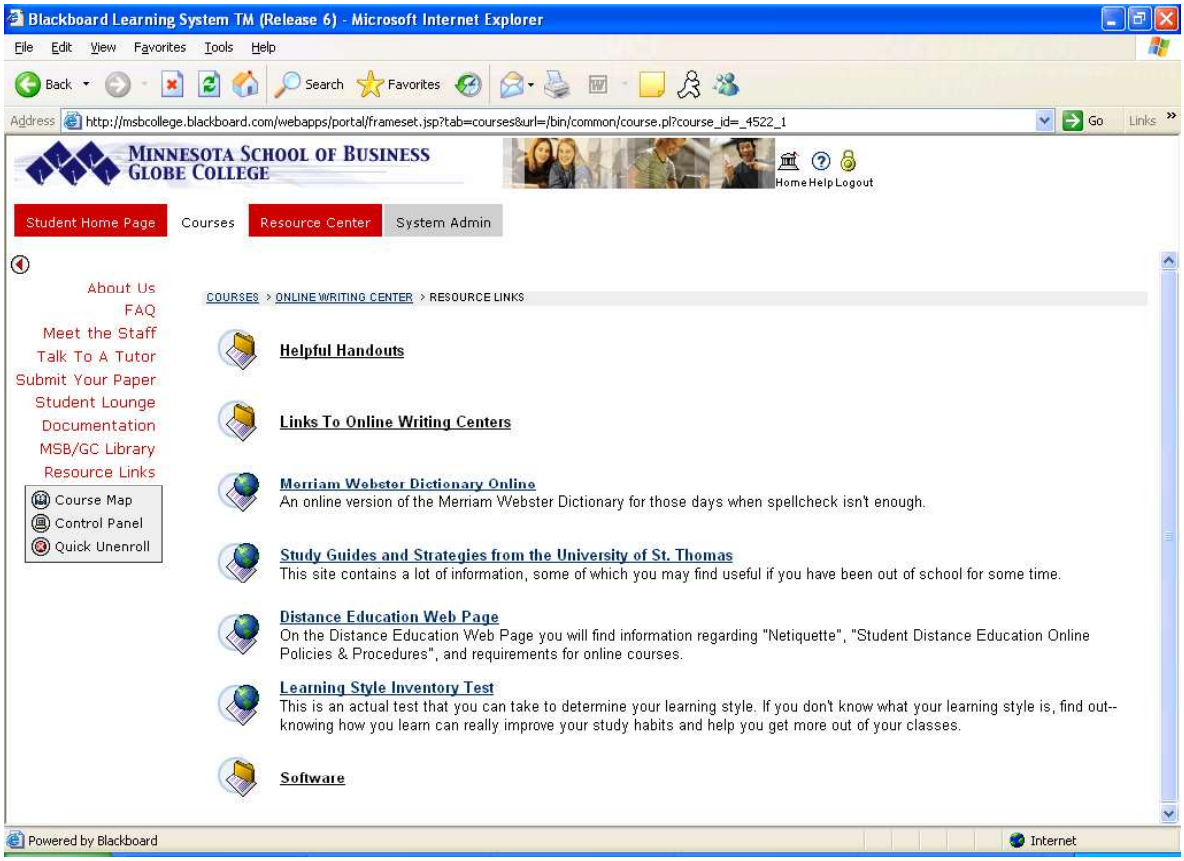
Resource Links

In this section of the Online Writing Center, students find a variety of tools to assist them with their research and writing. Resources are constantly being added to this portion of the MSB/GC Online Writing Center as the faculty becomes more aware of the need to provide such materials for future graduate and undergraduate student use.

- Helpful Handouts
- Links to Online Writing Centers
- Merriam Webster Dictionary Online
- Study Guides and Strategies from the University of St. Thomas
- Distance Education Web Page
- Learning Style Inventory Test
- Software (links to sites where students can download free or trial software)

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Figure 13. Screen shot of the Resource Links page of the MSB/GC Online Writing Center.



Conclusion

Beta testing of the online writing center has proven the need to provide the school's MBA students with access to writing tutors. Many of the students are adult learners who have been out of school for ten or more years. While these students write a variety of documents on the job, the papers they submitted to the staff of the online writing center contained a variety of punctuation errors. The papers also reflected the students' lack of familiarity with APA style. The comments and annotations provided by the online writing center staff resulted in improved student work. The online writing center staff will continue to track students' progress throughout the next year to determine if there is substantial improvement in the quality of the students' work and to ensure that each student is capable of writing the thesis or business plan required for graduation from the program.

References

Anderson-Inman, L. (1997) OWLs: Online writing labs. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy, 40*(8), 650-654. Retrieved from Wilson Education Abstracts database. Document ID 11638589.

Harris, M. (September/October, 1995) From the (writing) center to the edge: moving writers along the Internet. *Clearing House*, 1-5.

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Appendix A: Student Paper One

Information Technology Systems Management: Case Study 1

Grammar or spelling error
Awkward sentence—needs revision

http://www.digitalriver.com/corporate/index.shtml

1. What is this websites business model, as e-business models are defined in the Deital text?

   B2B E-Commerce and EDI

2. Why do you describe it as B2B E-Commerce and EDI?

As described by Deital, (p.41, ¶ 6) According to Deital, "A B2B E-Commerce business model refers to the relationship between two or more companies. Electronic Data Interchange (EDI) systems help businesses manage their supply chains" (2001, p. 41). The above listed e-business offers others businesses help in growing their online business. Listed clients on the digitalriver.com website include 3M, H&R Block, McAfee, and Novell. The testimonials from these businesses indicate that outsourcing marketing and e-commerce management has been the primary service that digitalriver.com provides.

Case Study 1

http://www.digitalriver.com/corporate/index.shtml

A Description of Digital River's Business Concept

The Digital River website states "Digital River offers stability, financial security and a low-risk partnership that is both economic and business savvy: a partnership with one common goal – to grow your online business". (www.digitalriver.com).

Digital River ~~is a company designed to~~ assist helps businesses expand their online commerce and reduce the costs and risks of running an e-commerce operation. Digital River was founded in 1994 by CEO Joel Ronning; ~~and~~ in 2004 ~~had~~ it posted a net sales revenue of $154.1 million. Source?

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Business-to business (B2B) e-commerce is a one of four models ~~described in the book E – Business & E-Commerce.~~ (Deitel, 2001, p. #) One of these companies is Digital River, primarily known for managing transactions that take place in the software industry. Digital River describes itself as a unique commerce service provider, one that supports the internet channel in its entirety for customers. (Vizard, 2000).

Digital River considers itself a global leader in e-commerce outsourcing and lists over 40,000 clients. Some of their its clients include 3M, H&R Block, McAfee Security, Novell, and Symantec. ~~Client testimonials are quoted as saying:~~ "Digital River helped [us] ~~3M~~ enable [our] ~~its~~ distributors to sell online, successfully balancing the Internet with a complex sales channel", says 3M in an online testimonial for Digital River. Digital River, the testimonial continues,

played an integral role in helping us maximize results in our online channel while generating valuable support for our offline efforts. We more than doubled store count. Outsourcing to Digital Rivers provided a cost-savings and leveraged our marketing services and strong e-commerce management expertise for complete outsourcing. (www.digitalriver.com/corporate/clients)

Digital River offers:

- A feature-rich, 100 percent Java e-commerce engine
- A triple-redundant infrastructure with 99.9+ percent uptime
- E-Marketing services
- International capabilities
- Access to a network of online buyers for product promotion

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- Complete range of sources needed to conduct business online including catalog, pricing management, customer service, fraud prevention, fulfillment and reporting (digitalriver.com/corporate/company)

In a world where e-commerce demands great flexibility and constant change, digitalriver.com certainly has competitors always looking to break into the same market. An internet search will list yielded numerous sites; , including pbsco.com, webafford.com; shopkeeperusa.com, etc. CEO Joel Ronning says "We've done a pretty good job dominating the online delivery of software". (~~Ronning;~~ 2005) CEO Ronning feels that that the company has earned its have earned their position in the business by promoting software as a service. DigitalRiver.com specializes in digital delivery, and this gives them an edge over those that provide physical assistance, i.e. delivery of products. CEO Ronning asserts that his company plays it rather conservative, ; his motto is "Under promise and over deliver.". He also says that his business has over 1,000,000 hours of development by expert staff in their e-commerce platform making them experts in the field. In addition, DigitalRiver.com is always finding different strategies to help clients bring in customers. (Ronning, 2005). This service orientated service-oriented philosophy is noted by customers. One client, H&R Block, feels they can concentrate on the business of tax preparation and not spend money and time on IT development. H&R Block has cut costs and helped customers. (Fox, 2004).

Resource List:
Don't list your sources in numerical order unless you are using footnotes or endnotes. Instead, alphabetize your sources.

APA says that, for a stand-alone document, no author identified, no date, you should document the source as follows:

Client testimonials. (n.d.). Retrieved April 24, 2005, from http://www.digital river.com.

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1. http://www.digitalriver.com. Home Page. Retrieved April 24, 2005.

When the place of publication is not a major city, you have to identify the city and the state.

2. Deitel, H.M., Deitel, P.J., & Steinbuhler, K. (2001). E-Business & E-Commerce for Managers. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall.

The next two citations seem to be from magazines since they have a weekly publication date provided. In that case, you document the source like this:

Author's last name, Initial. (year of publication, month and day). Title of article. Title of Magazine, volume number, page numbers.

3. Fox, Pimm (2004, April 19). Don't Own Your IT. Computerworld; vol. 38 Issue 16. Retrieved April 24, 2005, from http://web6.epnet.com

4. Ronning, Joel – Interviews (2005, January 31). Digital River Rides a Rising Tide. Business Week Online. Retrieved April 24, 2005, from http://web6.epnet.com

**********Vizard, Michael

(2000, September 17). Digital River CTO advocates CSP Model. InfoWorld, vol. 22 Issue 38.

Retrieved April 23, 2005, from http://web24.epnet.com

If this is a scholarly journal that paginates by volume (that is, even if it comes out four times a year, the first issue starts with page one and the second issue starts with the number following the last page number of issue one, etc.), then you would document it like this:

Author's last name, Initial. (year of publication). Title of article. Title of Journal, volume #, page numbers.

If this is a scholarly journal that paginates by issue (that is, each issue gets a "normal" set of page numbers), you would document it like this:

Author's last name, Initial. (year of publication). Title of article. Title of Journal, volume # (issue number), page numbers.

Cox, B. (2002, April 1). Sun setting over Digital River. News & Trends, volume number, page numbers.

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Appendix B: Sample Student Paper Two w/ comment

Jane-this is an interesting idea for a web site, but I think it may need some refinement. I understand that the purpose of your site is twofold: to inform potential Greeks about fraternity and sorority life and to sell themed merchandise. You should ask Diane about this, but to me those two aims do not seem to mesh effectively. As a alumna of a national sorority, I can attest to the insularity of these organizations. The sororities don't really "market" themselves (or at least they didn't used to do so in the South); instead, they are usually pretty selective about who they will take. I'm not sure if they would release their charters either, although they might be compelled to by law. Just some thoughts on content.

Now let's talk about the writing—I am on much firmer ground advising you on that. You need to work on using a consistent style; some sections of your paper are written informally and others are written very formally and employ passive voice. You need to work on using active voice throughout your paper; that will help a lot. I have highlighted awkward sentences and sentences in passive voice in green and written suggested revisions in green. You also need to work on your proofreading. I assume that this is a rough draft, but you need to proofread your work before sending it to me so I can determine how best to help you improve your writing. If you proofread this carefully already, I apologize. I have highlighted punctuation and spelling mistakes in yellow.

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The name of my e-business is ~~The purpose of~~ www.WhyBeAGreek.com; it will ~~is to~~ provide potential Greeks and their parents insight into the sorority and fraternity (a.k.a. Greek) community on college campuses. ~~Given these goals the domain name of WhyBeAGreek has been selected because it best exemplifies the goals. The site will be directed towards new colligates as well as high school students looking at potential colleges to continue their education at.~~

WhyBeAGreek will contain the following sections:

- Compare – where up to five different fraternities or sororities can be chosen and a set of standard information will appear in a grid for easy comparison passive voice
- Facts and Figures about Greeks in North America
- F.A.Q. (frequently asked questions)
- Myths – various untruths about fraternities and sororities will be discusses and dispelled
- Need to Know – one section for parents and another for potential members
- Request Additional Information
- Links to the National Interfraternity Council, the National Pahnellenic Conference, the National Pan-Hellenic Council, and each of their member organizations
- Show Your Pride where links to various vendors of sorority and fraternity products will be able to advertise products for sale

To assist in the building and maintenance of the front-end of the website, the portion of the site visitors will see, Homestead web hosting company will be utilized. This company was chosen because of its ability to scale with the site as it grows. passive voice The initial concept of the site will require minimal back-end support. The main back-end feature of the site will be a strong database to house the information gathered by visitors and the data for the Compare section of the

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site. With Homestead when the site moves to offering products for purchase via the site their e-commerce service can be added on to the site to handle payment processing as well as inventory and ordering management. Awkward /underlined words indicate agr error

Given that the site will be gathering personal data in the Request for Information section it is extremely important to have a privacy policy. By having a privacy policy visitors will know The privacy policy will tell visitors how their personal information maybe used passive voice and what information will not be shared. Passive voice Having this knowledge will help a visitor determine if they want to share their information. Another benefit of a privacy policy is to help avoid potential lawsuits. There will also be information informing visitors about the lack of preferential treatment given to passive voice any organization mentioned on the site as well as the lack of responsibility of the WhyBeAGreek site for the content of any link provide on the site.

Given that WhyBeAGreek will be promoting non-profit organizations and that the initial revenue stream will be very limited it is my opinion that neither an Internet incubator nor a venture capitalist would be significantly interested in backing this website. Generally the goal of these individuals is to grow an e-business and profit from that growth and ; therefore, I do not feel that the site would initially ~~have much~~ appeal to these individuals. Though funding and support from an angel investor, who most likely would be a Greek themselves, is something that quite possibly could happen. Awkward/underlined agr error

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Applying Project Management Strategies to Collaborative Projects in Business Communication and Writing Courses

Rebekka Andersen, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

Abstract

In this paper, I argue for more integration of project management strategies in teaching team-based writing projects in business communication and writing courses. I draw from a range of academic and industry-specific literature on workplace collaboration to show deficiencies in current textbook descriptions of effective collaboration and to discuss specific ways that instructors can help students apply project management strategies to large collaborative projects. By requiring teams to create and implement project management tools such as project plans, storyboards, style guidelines, review transmittal sheets, and progress reports, students will be better able to envision all stages of their document development process.

Introduction

Recently, I assigned students in my business writing course a collaborative report project that required contextual analysis of a specific problem, primary and secondary research, and a sequence of smaller assignments: a research proposal, progress report, and evaluation memorandum. To prepare students for successful collaborative work, I selected teams based on student interests and writing abilities and assigned Guffey's textbook chapter "Communicating in Small Groups and Teams" (2003). Then, I conducted several large-group discussions on strategies for effectively working in teams.

Having experienced a number of failed collaborations in other courses, my students were excited to discuss the benefits of assigning roles, particularly a team leader, and capitalizing on each team member's strengths during different project stages. We also discussed the five-step process for successful writing (preparation, research, organization, writing, and revision) presented by Alred, Brusaw, and Oliu in *The Business Writer's Handbook* (2003) and how that process might be applied to collaborative writing projects. My students agreed that time must be allotted for each step and that preparation and organization were critical to the successful completion of a first draft. To help teams visualize their projects from preparation through revision, I assigned a research proposal that required them to outline their research objectives and methods and develop a schedule for completing major project tasks. After conducting several large group discussions and reviewing each team's research proposal, I felt confident that the teams were prepared to carry out the collaborative report project. For the remainder of the project, I periodically checked in with them, providing oral and written feedback.

Based on my observations and review of progress reports, I assumed team collaborations were going well. While reading students' evaluations of their team's collaboration process and final report, however, I was surprised to learn that each team experienced a number of problems that we had not specifically addressed as a class, such as uneven work distributions, communication breakdowns, and task and goal confusion. Many students stated that the problems their teams experienced would

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have been minimized had they assigned a leader and specific roles, established communication procedures, designated tasks, allowed more revision time, and planned for production concerns such as version control. Some students also expressed frustration with particular team members who dominated decisions and completed drafts without informing or seeking approval from other members. The lack of clear roles and documented tasks and deadlines to help all members visualize and participate in the documentation process led some to dominate the project and others to retreat from it.

Although teams had written a research proposal outlining goals, tasks, and deadlines for project milestones, they clearly lacked concrete methods for successfully carrying out those goals, tasks, and deadlines. Equipping them with project management strategies to apply throughout their collaborative process would have prevented many of the problems and frustrations that they had experienced.

In this paper, I argue for more integration of project management strategies in teaching team-based writing projects in business communication and writing courses. I draw from a range of academic and industry-specific literature on workplace collaboration to show deficiencies in current textbook descriptions of effective collaboration and to discuss specific ways that instructors can help students apply project management strategies to large collaborative projects. By requiring teams to create and implement project management tools such as project plans, storyboards, style guidelines, review transmittal sheets, and progress reports, students will be better able to envision all stages of their document development process.

Collaboration Goals and Problems

Learning how to collaborate in written and oral presentations is a primary skill developed in most business communication and writing courses, with the goal of preparing students for successful collaboration in their future workplaces. According to Locker (2000), author of the widely used textbook *Business and Administrative Communication*, "The ability to work effectively in groups is a key requirement for achieving success in today's business climate and is perhaps the most critical 'soft skill' that individuals can employ" (p. 335). Yet few instructors do more than assign teams and lead class discussions on strategies for effective collaboration, trusting that students will apply those strategies to their projects. Vic (2001) points out that effective teamwork requires training in how to work in teams and how to troubleshoot team problems. She argues that instructors need to do everything they can to help the process along (p. 113).

Because most students have minimal experience working on a team, problems inevitably arise in collaborative projects such as dissensus, personality conflicts, unequal work distributions, and time and space conflicts. However, most student teams struggle not because of the abovementioned problems, which are discussed at length in many widely used business communication texts (Guffey, 2003; Locker, 2000; Alred, Brusaw, & Oliu, 2003), but from a lack of training on how to effectively manage a project from planning through production.

Furthermore, team-based writing descriptions in leading business communication textbooks tend to focus on positive relationship and task roles, ways to deal with conflict, and general guidelines for carrying out project stages. While these books do offer persuasive reasons why groups should assign leaders and roles, establish procedures and standards, and outline tasks and deadlines, they do not

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offer specific tools to help teams carry out their goals, tasks, and deadlines and develop procedures for draft exchange, version control, and communication.

For example, in Guffey's *Business Communication: Process and Product* (2003), the focus is on preparing students to work with teams**,** understanding team development and roles, and identifying characteristics of successful teams. One section is dedicated to organizing team-based writing and oral presentations, in which Guffey provides general guidelines on preparing to work together; planning the document or presentation; collecting information; organizing, writing, and revising; and editing, rehearsing, and evaluating. These guidelines, however, are more descriptive than instructive. Locker's *Business and Administrative Communication* focuses on many of the same concepts, though she provides more specific suggestions for planning the document, composing drafts, revising the document, editing and proofreading the document, and making the group process work. Though Guffey's and Locker's descriptions of successful team collaboration are useful discussion generators, neither text provides instructors or students concrete, instructive methods for achieving project goals.

The Business Writer's Handbook by Alred, Brusaw, and Oliu (2003), which is aimed at both an academic and a professional audience, offers some useful strategies for writing collaboratively, including a checklist that students might use to ensure milestone documentation process tasks are achieved. The checklist provides general tasks such as "assign segments or tasks to each team member" and "agree on a standard reference guide for style and format" (p. 92), but, again, the handbook is not supplemented with specific strategies for carrying out each task.

Project Management Strategies as Solution

Integrating project management into large collaborative projects in business communication and writing classes may help students more effectively carry out their proposed project goals, tasks, deadlines, and procedures and standards. Furthermore, it may provide students valuable project management skills that are critical to the success of team-produced documents in the workplace. Since many students are pursuing business degrees, they need training in project management, not just collaboration as defined in Guffey and Locker. Additionally, project management principles may help students visualize and plan for the evolution of their projects from preparation through revision; these principles may force teams to focus more on the process of achieving their project goals and less on the final product.

Because most school-based collaborations tend to emphasize the product of collaboration more than the process of collaboration, many graduates entering the workplace often struggle in team-based writing situations. Freedman and Adam (1996) found that "when on the job as professional writers, students may have difficulty adjusting to the challenges of learning social context and actively collaborating with others to develop documents, yet academic classrooms typically do not model those processes effectively" (cf. Rehling, 2005, p. 100). Rehling (2005) agrees and adds that "even professional writing students exposed to the different collaborative models of professional writers still tend to focus much more on writing products than on the process issues so important in the workplace" (p. 101). In business communication and writing courses, unlike many composition courses, products tend to be graded and processes, while often discussed at length, tend not to be graded; thus, teams are neither held accountable for how they create the product nor given the project management tools necessary for carrying out each phase of a project.

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When not held accountable for a quality collaboration process or given useful tools to carry out that process, teams are likely to face more problems with dissensus, unequal work distributions, and personality conflicts. While reading my students' collaboration evaluations, I learned that many team members struggled with members who had dominant personalities and wanted work completed the way they best saw fit. Some dominant members went so far as to complete the first draft of the final report without gaining team approval and without basing the draft on any agreed upon plan for content, format, or design. Without project management tools such as a project plan, alpha draft storyboards, or progress reports and time sheets, team members had to rely on an appointed or a self-appointed leader to say what tasks should be completed next and when and what tasks have been completed satisfactorily.

Winter and Neal (1995) examine the most common perceptions of what students learn in group writing, and they conclude that the group process should be emphasized more than the final product to help students use group-decision making to produce better documents (p. 24). Yarbrough (2003) further adds that "Too often, success is measured by looking only at the end product…regardless of how many members were involved in producing it….In such cases, teams learn very little about the team process and how to improve it other than understanding that they have to survive it and get the project done" (p. xi). When instructors fail to provide teams with tools to help carry out their project plans and fail to evaluate collaboration processes at each project stage, teams are more likely to struggle through their processes doing whatever it takes to produce a final product for a grade.

Hackos (1994), author of the leading project management text, *Managing your Documentation Projects*, argues that a sound process is the key to consistently producing quality documentation. She claims that "Quality cannot simply be measured at the end of the project. The end of the project is too late. Quality happens as the result of a well-managed, well-organized process" (p. 3). In the workplace, effective technical publication teams know how critical a quality process is to achieving a quality product. They know that a comprehensive and detailed project plan, designated leader and clear team member roles, progress reports and time sheets, and agreed upon standards and procedures for communicating all contribute to a quality publication: the process is reliable, able to be documented, and can, upon review, account for problems in the final product. In school-based collaborations, however, students are often misled to believe that a quality product, no matter how it is produced, is the goal. Hackos warns against such a perspective: "Although manufacturing quality is important to the appearance and credibility of your publications and the professional reputation of your publications group, it fails to account for most of the activities that take up your time in the process of developing technical publications" (p. 10). Because business communication and writing courses aim to prepare students to be effective workplace communicators, and workplace writing often occurs in teams, students need to understand and know how to participate in the activities that account for product quality.

Hackos also warns that while project management tools are useful, they do not ensure quality alone:

> …standards, productive tools, and people do not ensure quality. To ensure that standards are followed, tools are used effectively, and people do the best work they are capable of, you must put into place an effective and sustainable publications-development process….[the] set of procedures, standards, and management methods you use to produce consistently high-quality technical publications. (pp. 19-20)

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Although she is specifically addressing project management for large-scale documentation projects in the workplace, her argument for implementing an effective and sustainable publications-development process can apply to any documentation project, large or small, in an academic or workplace setting. Implementing and carrying out a set of procedures, standards, and management methods throughout a project will, theoretically, help student teams produce higher quality documents and, more importantly, participate in higher quality, more productive collaborative processes. Furthermore, students will learn transferable project management and teamwork skills that will help them adjust to team-based writing situations in both the workplace and future courses.

Project Management Strategies Applied

Instructors can integrate a number of project management activities into large and small collaborative project assignments. Regardless of the project scope and goal, careful planning and implementation of activities are critical to each team's ability to successfully carry out a quality process. Instructors must emphasize the role and benefit of effective project management before assigning team-based writing projects, allow ample time for successful completion of each process-oriented assignment and activity, and focus on and hold students accountable for quality collaborative processes. Furthermore, all required deliverables, such as progress reports and time sheets, storyboards, and style sheets, should be introduced at the same time that the collaborative project is introduced. This way, students know that they will be held accountable for a quality collaborative writing process as well as a quality final document (e.g., report, manual, proposal, handbook). Requiring students to develop a well-organized project notebook that includes all documents related to the project is another way to emphasize the importance of the document development process.

In this section, I focus on types of project management strategies that might be integrated into each writing stage of a large research-based collaborative project. For smaller projects, such as a collaborative request memo or informal proposal, instructors might require students to participate in abbreviated versions of these activities. To help students and instructors visualize how project management principles and activities might be applied to the collaborative writing process, I draw on the five-step writing process—preparation, research, organization, writing, and revision—described by Alred, Brusaw, and Oliu (2003) as a framework to illustrate milestone project stages. The stages help emphasize the document development process and deemphasize the product. Because this five-step process is aimed at single-authored writing projects, however, I add two additional steps—review and evaluation—to account for the role of document review and product and process evaluation in team-based writing projects.

Stage 1: Preparation

Preparation is the first, and most critical, stage of the collaborative writing process. In this stage, teams need to establish their primary purpose for writing, assess their audience, determine the scope of their project, and select the appropriate medium for communicating their message (Alred, Brusaw, & Oliu, pp. xvi-xviii). Before teams can successfully accomplish these goals, however, they should first develop camaraderie and assess team member skills.

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1. *Develop camaraderie.* Allowing time for new teams to get to know each other is critical. Because students bring different personalities, backgrounds, skill sets, and perspectives to a team, they need time to develop relationships with and trust for each other. Guffey calls this stage "Forming"; it allows team members to "begin to develop trust in each other" and "discuss fundamental topics such as why the team is necessary, who 'owns' the team, whether membership is mandatory, how large it should be, and what talents members can contribute" (p. 44). Instructors need to allow significant time for teams to develop camaraderie if they are to participate in a quality process.

2. *Assess team member skills.* Once team members begin to bond, instructors might require teams to assess team member skills. According to Yarbrough (2003), good team communication "begins with assessing each team member's individual communication skills. Such self-analysis helps each member determine honestly and objectively what each can and will offer the group" (p. 12). Having each team member self-assess his or her skills gives teams a concrete way to discuss who may be best qualified to carry out specific project tasks. Instructors might use a number of assessment tools, such as requiring students to fill out a survey, write a profile, or complete an assessment form. Yarbrough offers an excellent assessment form that instructors might modify. It asks students to assess their communication proficiency on a scale of 1 to 5 in areas such as written work, collaboration, media communication, negotiation experience, and performance evaluations/feedback (p. 13). Instructors might require team members to submit their assessments for credit and use their assessments to determine member tasks and roles when developing their project plans. Instructors may also require teams to include copies of the self assessments in their project notebook.

After bonding and assessing skills, teams should develop a plan for carrying out the collaboration process. Aspects of this plan might include assigning project managers and developing performance strategies.

1. *Assign project manager and rotations.* According to Spilka (2004), project managers lead teams of writers and manage a documentation project from start to finish. They work with their team to help establish goals for a project, develop a project schedule and plan, identify potential obstacles to the project's success, and ensure that the final document fulfills the needs and requirements of the target audience. Project managers should also be team advocates and cheerleaders, strong communicators, and effective leaders who are capable of making critical team decisions, assigning tasks and roles, and conceptualizing a project from start to finish. Depending on project goals, instructors may choose to assign each team a project manager for the duration of the collaborative project or allow teams to select their own project manager based on the self-assessment activity. Another option is to require each team member to serve as project manager, rotating the position every few weeks or at each project stage. The project manager's responsibilities should be defined in the project plan.

2. *Develop performance strategies.* Successful teams set project goals and objectives, establish ground rules, plan communication strategies, and determine review and evaluation procedures. Establishing ground rules is particularly important. According to Yarbrough, "if teams are specific and calculated about constructing these, reaching consensus on what the procedures are, how the team will carry them out, and how to make adjustments in these if

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necessary, they can avoid miscommunication or misinterpretation later" (p. 29). Many of the problems my students experienced during their collaborative processes could have been avoided had they developed agreed upon ground rules. Yarbrough also recommends that teams develop a communication protocol (rules of managing team communication) that all team members understand and accept. To do so, teams need to agree on preferred communication channels, such as email, hard copy, phone communication, groupware, or face-to-face meetings, and the situations in which each method may be preferred. McGee (2000) argues that face-to-face meetings and phone communication are most appropriate when nonverbal communication is necessary to clarify ambiguous or uncertainty in a message. When nonverbal communication is not as important to successful communication of a message, she argues that email or written communication can be used (p. 37). Instructors should provide sufficient time for teams to establish performance strategies, which might be submitted in the form of a report or list. Ideally, this should be an in-class activity so the instructor can provide any necessary guidance and ensure that all team members are involved in the decision–making process. Conducting this activity in class also keeps the project workload managable.

Once teams have laid the groundwork for their collaborative process, they are ready to create a plan for achieving project goals. Hackos (1994) describes this stage of preparation as the "information planning" phase, which has two major deliverables: the information plan and the project plan. The information plan, which is similar to Alred, Brusaw, and Oliu's description of the preparation stage, analyzes the target audience for the project document, goals of the audience, and the major tasks they want to perform with the document (p. 29). The project plan outlines project goals and constraints, project milestones and tasks, deadlines for milestone and task completion, team member roles and responsibilities, and work distribution.

1. *Create an Information Plan*
   The main objective of having teams develop an information plan is to get them thinking about the rhetorical context of their project and how it will ultimately shape their research strategy and final document. Instructors might require teams to work on the plan outside of class, ultimately producing a memorandum report, or allow them time to complete the plan as a class activity. Harris (2005) offers an excellent worksheet that students might complete as an in-class activity. The worksheet consists of several questions that help writers and managers consider the factors involved in planning a document and come to an agreement on how those factors are defined: primary reader, secondary readers, reader's purpose, writer's purpose, logistics, distribution and disposition (pp. 39-41). The worksheet could also serve as a way for writing teams and the instructor to agree on preliminary project terms.

2. *Develop a Project Plan*
   The main content deliverable of the preparation stage is the project plan, which specifically addresses team-based writing project concerns. Research proposals, which instructors often assign to help teams outline research goals and methods, qualifications, and a project schedule and budget, are often discussed in textbooks as single-authored documents; teams tend to struggle with writing proposals because those described in textbooks seldom address team-based project concerns. The project plan is widely used for team-based writing in the workplace. It usually includes detailed descriptions of the following:

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- Scope and complexity of the project
- Project goals (of audience, team, and individual writers)
- Project constraints (imposed by the audience, team, and individual writers)
- Required resources (e.g., personnel, software, facilities)
- Milestones (e.g., major deliverables, stages of writing process)
- Immediate and intermediate tasks
- Duration of each task (might create a Gantt or PERT chart that indicates duration of each task)
- Roles and responsibilities of each team member
- Work distribution (identify collaborative tasks and individual tasks; might indicate this information in a Gantt or PERT chart)

Instructors can tailor the project plan to accommodate individual assignment goals and constraints. They may also require teams to include elements of a research proposal, such as a problem definition, research objectives and methods, and team qualifications. Another option is to assign a short research proposal that makes a persuasive argument for project approval and then, once approved, assign the project plan, which focuses on project management. According to Hackos, a major benefit of the project plan is that it "evens out the field, enabling the average player to succeed but also taking some of the potential glory away from the star….When a concrete plan is in place, the stars are not as likely to show once again that they can save the day against all odds" (p. 145). If my students had created a project plan instead of or in addition to a research proposal, dominant team members would not have been as likely to take over the team project. When assigning teams to create a project plan, instructors should consider using project management terminology to refer to different project stages; for example, first drafts are "alpha drafts" and second drafts are "beta drafts," major project phases are "milestones," and the "document review" precedes revision.

Stage 2: Research

During the research stage, instructors need to hold teams accountable for carrying out the goals, tasks, deadlines, roles and responsibilities, and performance strategies agreed upon during the preparation stage. After teams submit an initial project proposal, instructors often trust that teams will carry out their proposed plans. However, teams tend to struggle the most during the research and initial writing stages because they are not sure how to use their proposed plan as a guide.

To help teams carry out their proposed plans, instructors might require teams to track their progress on the project as it progresses through each stage of the development cycle. One way to do this is to require each team member to draft a weekly or bi-weekly progress report and time sheet and submit it to their project manager. The project manager can then draft a comprehensive progress report—outlining work accomplished, problems encountered, and future tasks as they relate to the project plan—and submit one copy to the instructor, one to the project notebook, and one to each team member. Woolever (2005) recommends that team member progress reports be in a standardized form that the project manager can file in a project notebook (p. 148); a memo template or form (checklist format) would also work. Using some kind of standardized form, instead of requiring

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students to write a memo report, also cuts down on the project workload, keeping students focused on the larger project goals.

Stage 3: Organization

The organization stage of the collaborative writing process is perhaps the most critical stage after preparation. In this stage, team members analyze the results of their research and prepare an outline of their alpha draft. It is important for all team members to contribute to the alpha draft outline, regardless of how the team has distributed writing tasks for the alpha draft. When everyone contributes to the outline, everyone has a stake in its content and design. Instructors should allow sufficient in-class time for teams to discuss their research results and prepare an initial outline.

Yee (1988) and Hackos (1994) recommend that teams develop storyboards for each document section. Storyboards, consisting of a heading and a summary, enable each member to visualize what the various sections will contain and provide suggestions for changes. Yee suggests that "Building a model for the document before writing a draft allows writers to produce a consistent style, tone, and focus throughout the document, and thereby helps address the writers' need to understand how their part fits into the whole" (p. 193). Instructors might require teams to develop storyboards as an in-class activity and ask them to submit one copy for credit and file one copy in the project notebook.

During the organization stage, teams should also establish style guidelines (cf. Perkins and Maloney, 1998; Weber, 2004; Oliu, Brusaw, & Alred, 2004; Hackos, 1994). Oliu, Brusaw, and Alred suggest that project style guidelines should address the following at a minimum: levels of headings and their style; spacing and margin guidelines; distinction between research sources that must be cited and those that need not be cited; use of the active voice, the present tense, and the imperative mood; references or works cited format; capitalization of words in the text; standards for terms that should be written as one word, two words, or hyphenated; and abbreviations, acronyms, and symbols (p. 176). Because students will likely be new to the concept of style guidelines, instructors will need to spend a good part of a class introducing the purpose and goals of style guides. Instructors might require teams to submit a copy of their style guidelines for credit and require project managers to address in their progress report how the guidelines are being implemented.

At the end of the organization stage, teams should reevaluate their project plans and team members should submit progress reports and time sheets to their project manager for filing. The project manager, then, should submit one copy of a compiled progress report to the project notebook and one copy to the instructor.

Stage 4: Writing

After developing storyboards, teams should follow their proposed plan for carrying out the writing stage. They might distribute writing tasks to two or three writers or assign one member to write the alpha draft. Regardless of how the writing stage is carried out, writers should use the agreed upon storyboards and style guidelines as guides. The project manager should ensure that writing deadlines are met and verify that project plan goals, tasks, and procedures are on track. Team members should continue to submit progress reports and time sheets for filing and establish version control procedures (plans for tracking drafts) in preparation for the alpha draft review.

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Stage 5: Review

During the review stage, Oliu, Brusaw, and Alred recommend that "team members assume the role of target readers" and review the alpha draft "carefully and critically (but also with sensitivity to the person whose work is being reviewed), checking for problems in content, organization, and style" (p. 178). Team members should also review the draft with the information plan in mind, verifying that the draft achieves audience and project goals. Ideally, teams will hold a face-to-face meeting to discuss the review goals, tasks, and procedures proposed in the project plan before the review process begins. Depending on the review process outlined in the project plan, the project manager might ask members to review the draft and provide oral feedback in a meeting, submit written feedback, or submit electronic feedback through email or an online discussion board.

Oliu, Brusaw, and Alred (2003) recommend that the project manager use a review transmittal sheet to track drafts circulated on paper instead of by email (p. 186). The sheet has a space for each reviewer to sign off as having reviewed the draft, revealing which members have and have not reviewed the project during the review stage. For electronic review, teams might use word processing software revision tools to track changes on a single draft or multiple drafts and to insert comments and edits for other members to review. Oliu, Brusaw, and Alred also offer a useful checklist (p. 181) that instructors might integrate into the review stage, especially if a learning management system is used in the class. For successful electronic review, instructors need to train teams how to use reviewing tools. As with previous stages, the project manager should ensure that review deadlines are met and procedures for version control are in place. Team members should also submit progress reports and time sheets to the project manager for filing.

Stage 6: Revision

In the review stage, team members review the alpha draft and provide feedback. In the revision stage, team members meet to evaluate the feedback of other team members and accept or reject the suggested revisions. After discussing macro-level revisions for content, organization, and style, the best writer should revise the document based on the agreed upon suggestions for macro-level revisions (this role should be defined in the project plan). He or she should also revise for micro-level concerns such as punctuation and grammar errors; inconsistencies in terminology, organization, and design; clarity; conciseness; accuracy; and correctness. Once all revisions are made, the writer should submit the new beta draft for a final team review. After team members provide additional revision comments, another writer with strong editing skills will, ideally, conduct a final proofread, or a quality assurance review. Because the review and revision stages help ensure quality documentation, instructors need to verify that each team's project plan allows sufficient time for these stages.

Stage 7: Evaluation

The evaluation stage helps each team evaluate the success of their project and collaborative process and the performance of the team and team members. Teams might be required to produce two deliverables in this stage: a project wrap-up report and an individual evaluation report.

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Hackos describes the project wrap-up report as "a complete record of the project milestones as they were actually achieved in comparison with how they were planned during the initial planning phases" (p. 511). It should contain a "thorough analysis of project progress, successes, mistakes, and recommendations for change" (p. 519) and should address questions such as "Did the scope of the project remain the same?" and "Was the original schedule maintained?" (see Hackos chapter 26). Assigning the report is an excellent way for teams to reflect on their document development process, using the project notebook as a guide, and to determine how that process accounts for quality in the final product.

In addition to the project wrap-up report, individual team members should have the opportunity to evaluate their team's overall collaborative process and individual members' contributions to the project. Instructors might assign an individual evaluation report as the final document for the collaborative project. This gives team members a chance to confidentially voice any concerns about the project and individual members and reflect on team, member, and self performance.

Conclusion

Applying project management strategies at each stage of the collaborative writing process may help teams visualize and account for all stages of their document development process. By requiring teams to develop a project plan and remain accountable for that plan during each project stage, teams may be less likely to stumble through their process wondering who is doing what and when and whether the final draft will be finished on time. Goals, tasks, roles and responsibilities, procedures, standards, and deadlines will be clearly defined upfront in a project plan, and teams will be forced to constantly reevaluate and carry out their project plan through deliverables at each stage, such as progress reports and time sheets, storyboards, and review transmittal sheets. The project notebook is an excellent resource for students and the instructor because it represents the collaborative process and all the documents contributing to that process.

In some courses, students simply may not have enough time to complete all of the project management activities outlined here. If this is the case, instructors should select those activities that will work best in the context of their course. Many of the activities can be completed in class. Rather than giving teams unstructured class time to work on their projects, instructors might assign style sheet, storyboard, or editing activities that are due by the end of class. This not only cuts down on the time students would have to spend outside of class working on the project, but it also forces them to use specific, concrete methods for carrying out their documentation and communication goals. In addition, it allows the instructor to provide guidance as needed.

Because project management skills are critical to the success of team-produced documents in the workplace, students need to be held accountable for not only the quality of their final project but also the quality of the process they used to develop the product. Thus, if instructors believe that assigning large collaborative projects will help students to achieve course goals, then instructors need to do all they can to help the collaboration process along. Implementing project management strategies in teaching team-based writing projects does take up more class time and increases students' workload. However, by not training students in project management, instructors can only hope that they will engage in a successful document development process.

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An Eternal Conversation within a Corporation: Using Weblogs as an Internal Communications Tool

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Abstract

The Weblog explosion has turned inward in the business sector and companies are implementing weblog networks as a knowledge management and internal communications tool. This paper analyzes how companies use weblogs, or blogs, to make decisions, collaborate on projects, speed up access to vital information, and replace email and instant messaging for informal communication. It also shows how blogs are being used to introduce new employees to corporate culture and mechanisms, create knowledge management databases, keep a running diary of their company, and to connect individuals and create social networks.

Weblogs improve internal communication because of their ability to connect people and ideas, their diary-like format, and the speed of access to information. Companies need to be more competitive, more efficient, and more integrated than ever before and weblogs are a tool that should be adopted to enhance internal communications in all business sectors.

Introduction

Successful organizations attribute part of their success to effective internal communication. Paul Argenti of Dartmouth University's Tuck School of Business says that today's employees want more open communications with management (Argenti, 2003). He argues that a successful company must find ways to open channels of communication internally in order to create an atmosphere of respect, to disseminate vital information, to keep employees excited about their work, and to connect employees with the company's goal and vision (Argenti, 2003).

Advances in technology, especially computers, global communication networks, and the Internet, have played important roles in enhancing internal communication. Firms of varying sizes and industries are also finding that through the use of Intranets, or enclosed Internets that are owned, operated, and protected by the company, they can keep track of information and communicate more quickly and effectively than ever.

A few companies have started building internal and external weblogs, or blogs, to strengthen communications. Blogs began as personal diaries and forums for independent communication on the World Wide Web. But what began as digital rants and personal exposés has become a revolutionary tool that businesses are adopting to streamline and enhance both internal and external communications with their constituencies. Internally, blogs can replace email, spread news quickly, serve as a knowledge database, link employees to corporate vision and culture, and create a forum for collaboration and the exchange of ideas.

The purpose of this paper is to showcase the ways in which some companies are using blogs to enhance and revolutionize their internal communications. The paper demonstrates why more

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companies should develop weblogs to increase productivity and teamwork and to create an atmosphere of respect where co-worker and manager-employee relationships can flourish. Unlike their often-raving counterpart on the Internet, internal weblogs can be focused to help a company succeed both on the individual and organizational level. Weblogs can create an eternal conversation within a company, linking current obstacles with past solutions and current endeavors with future success.

What is a Weblog?

The collaborative, online encyclopedia *Wikipedia.org* offers an authoritative definition of a weblog: "A weblog, web log, or simply a blog, is a web application which contains periodic, time-stamped posts on a common web page. Individual weblog entries are almost always date and time-stamped, with the newest post at the top of the page. Many weblogs enable visitors to leave public comments, which can lead to a community of readers centered around the blog. Because links are so important to weblogs, most blogs have a way of archiving older entries and generating a static address for individual entries; this static link is referred to as a Permalink" (Weblog, 2005).

Weblogs differ from Internet discussion boards and chat rooms in that a blog represents one person's voice, opinions, expertise, and personality—the author's, or blogger's. Anyone visiting the blog can leave a feedback comment that becomes part of the blog entry, but the blog's author and host sets the daily content and discussion of the blog. The conversation that occurs through the public comments can therefore be guided by the blogger. Another conversation that blogs foster consists of the web of hyperlinks that bloggers often sprinkle throughout the text of their entries. These underlined words may lead to a media clip, an electronic article, a corporate website, or to someone else's blog.

Blog pages are often personalized with the latest headlines and updates at other blogs through Really Simple Syndication (RSS) feeds. RSS feeds aggregate short summaries of what is new on other websites. They are published by a website and subscribed to by the host of a blog page or creator of a personal home page. These update feeds come with a link to the actual page should the reader want to know more. Really Simple Syndication feeds are chosen by the blog's author and usually appear as a sidebar of hyperlinks and summaries that are automatically updated. Consider RSS feeds to be like a stock market ticker, anyone visiting the blog is constantly apprised whenever news or new postings are added by the source of the feed.

The first weblog was really the first website—the site built by Internet pioneer and Oxford University graduate Tim Berners-Lee in 1991. As one of the creators of the World Wide Web, Berners-Lee got feedback at his website from users across the Internet (Tim, 2005). The simple concept that people can continuously communicate over the Internet is the core basis of weblogging.

The role of weblogs in contemporary society is that of an increasingly mainstream communication tool. The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the U.S. invasion of Iraq, the natural disasters in Indonesia and New Orleans, and breaking political scandals have made blogs an important and trusted part of Internet communication (Baker & Green, 2005). Technology companies have followed the popularity and are creating software to help people blog and to help others search the vast array of online postings, called the blogoshpere, for vital information.

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A vast amount has been written on the utility of weblogs as external communicaitons tools for business. Firms and individual executives are creating their own, public facing blogs to enhance their image, launch new products, and better their industties. As well, firms have learned to search the blogoshpere to undestand their critics and to spot opportunities and issues early. But blogs, as a communication tool and as a software platform, are also being used inside organizations where they show great potential to effect change.

Benefits and Advantages

Nothing can replace face-to-face communication as the most effective communication tool, but interpersonal communications and other traditional channels of internal communications have disadvantages that blogs can overcome. Interpersonal communication is time-consuming and difficult or expensive over great distances. Print too is expensive, slow, and requires filing, complex retrieval systems, and storage. Because of the digital format and easy filing of computerized information, computers and email have become the norm for internal communication in firms both large and small.

Since the Internet was introduced, most companies have been using e-mail for informal and formal internal communications, but email has limitations. It is time consuming to open, read, and collate and employees must spend time sifting through junk email and brief, unimportant messages searching for the important ones. Accredited business communicator Shel Holtz points out that everything looks the same in an inbox. "An e-mail from the CEO announcing a major initiative looks just the same—carries the same appearance of importance—as one announcing that the server will be down for maintenance for two hours on Sunday night" (Holtz, 2005). By creating different weblogs for different departments and making new postings show up as RSS feeds on the company home page allows messages to carry different weight. Through a blog, messages instantaneously go company or department wide and are archived. Responses to the message are posted for all who read the blog to see, rather than becoming yet another email. Messages directed through traditional communication tools, such as word of mouth, email or letter, become time consuming and are at greater risk of not being effective.

Internal blogs can replace email for both informal and formal internal communications and can avoid the clutter of unwanted messages. Network Clarity, an enterprise management software firm, exemplifies this assertion. The company's vice president of product development, Mark Madsen, was quoted in an interview in *eWeek* magazine as saying that at his company weblogs and RSS feeds have bypassed email and allowed the formation of collaborative forums for his software development team. "When you get a lot of e-mail, it's hard to sort out your relative priorities," Madsen said (Livingston, 2004). Network Clarity also experienced increased productivity because weblogs sort discussions into topics. The company's blog allows employees "to slice and dice those discussions, search them, and attach other information and responses" (Livingston, 2004).

Weblogs are also quicker to access and post. At Sportexe International, a Canadian manufacturer of artificial turf, the company's blog is also the home page on all of its network terminals. Employees have only to turn on their computers or return to the home screen to access and post blogs concerning inventory, distribution, or upcoming orders (Gardiner, 2004).

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Instant Messaging (IM) and Short Message Services (SMS) have replaced email in many firms for brief, two-way conversations because they too can overcome the disadvantages of email. But instant messages are not saved anywhere. Once the message window is closed, the information is lost forever. If a solution or essential piece of information was included in that conversation, it loses its value to others. Weblogs and the comments to them are saved as soon as they are posted and have the potential to become the living diary of a company. As employees communicate ideas, problems, and solutions, each posting is stored and can be text searched by other employees far into the future. It is this unique feature of weblogs that reveals their most valuable asset, Knowledge Management (KM).

Wikipedia.org defines KM as the organization, creation, and communication of knowledge within an organization. "Knowledge Management seeks to make the best use of the knowledge that is available to an organization, creating new knowledge, increasing awareness and understanding in the process" (Knowledge, 2004). In the competitive business environment, it is easy to understand why KM is vital to a company's success. Knowledge of company history, ethics, vision, upcoming events, networks, and collaborative projects are essential to efficiency and productivity. The more information that employees have, the fewer mistakes they will make and the more integrated their efforts will be.

However, employees can find mining the masses of documents on the company Intranet or diving through storerooms of files a major obstacle to gathering information. They can search easily by text in the weblogs. The pure digital format and ease of linking within blogs makes them far more useful than individual word documents, excel files, or reports. Links can be placed in the text of a blog, which can quickly send readers to similar, or other pertinent information. A blog outlining the purpose of a meeting on a particular date can show the date as a hyperlink which leads to a corporate, or departmental calendar where employees see what else is happening in that time frame that may be related or cause a conflict. A blog about a customer complaint can feature links to the corporate policy on responding to complaints. The possibilities seem to stop at the end of one's imagination.

KM experts call weblogs that are specifically KM oriented, Knowledge logs, or K-logs. John Robb, a noted KM guru, posted his explanation of the efficacy and advantages of K-logs on his own blog. Robb notes that weblogs can not only replace traditional systems of communication, they can be cost-effective as well. He quotes a statistic from the Working Council of Corporate Information Officers which claims "workers spend 35% of their productive time searching for information, while 40% of the corporate users report that they cannot find the information they need to do their jobs" (Robb, 2004). The estimated cost of such time consumption is $36,000 per employee per year in large corporations (Robb, 2004).

Robb explains that information in organizations is usually scattered, hidden, unsearchable, or in an unusable format. But weblogs allow individuals to post information in various formats that is locked away on desktops to be quickly posted or linked to. Emails, documents, multimedia, bookmarks, pictures, or news feeds can be posted with a few keystrokes. Since all of this information is in the same place, it can be text-searched by standard search tools. Weblogs also require virtually no training and can give immediate results. Because of these aspects, Robb says that weblogs "radically increase the possibility that meaningful information and knowledge will be captured and archived on the Intranet. There isn't another system that even comes close" (Robb, 2004).

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Creative engineers at Disney have been using weblogs and an offspring of blogs called "wikis." Wikis are an open forum offspring of blogs that facilitate the collaboration of scattered individuals of varying expertise on a single project. Wikis can be compared to each adding another piece to the final product (Mayfield, 2004). Disney reported that it has 100 people that log into six weblogs. One blog alone had about 50 users and the company has had a wiki for over one and-a-half years with 200 users. Disney has found that weblogs help the most where constant change is occurring and the consistent flow of communication and employee awareness of change are critical (Mayfield, 2004).

Besides increasing access to information and enhancing direct communication between employees, weblogs are being used by managers and human resource professionals to hunt for talent, increase productivity, and introduce new employees to the corporate culture. John Robb writes in his KM blog that the presence of employee weblogs increases the chance that experts and potential leaders will emerge within a company (Robb, 2004). Corporate headhunters have started reading the personal blogs of upper echelon job candidates. The same type of talent searching could just as easily take place inside a corporation where promising employees are posting internal blogs.

At Community Connect, a web development company in New York, weblogs have been used to link the observations of several managers after they each interviewed an applicant (O'Shea, 2003). Each manager saw something different in the interviewee and their blogging allowed them to instantly view one another's comments and to comment further until a consensus was reached. The applicant was hired, but the story doesn't stop there. During his first few weeks at the firm, the new employee was encouraged to browse the weblogs of managers and employees to become more quickly acculturated to the attitudes and social networks within the company. In businesses that move and grow quickly, introducing new employees to the culture and individual attributes of a firm is especially important (O'Shea, 2003).

The personal attributes of weblogs are what make them so effective in strengthening a company from within. Even if a blog is professional or oriented toward the organization, it is still a fairly loose form of self-expression. Public Relations consultant Adriana Cronin-Lukas writes (in her blog on business blogs) that weblogs in an organization stress the individual and offer a forum for the free exchange of ideas (Cronin-Likas, 2004). It is this "bottom up approach," she says, that allows employees to feel more involved in the company and allows for more personal growth while increasing understanding and enhancing communication between co-workers, managers, and employees. John Robb agrees. He says that postings on a company weblog can be like a personal business card inside an organization. At the very least a name on a blog provides a contact for further information or assistance (Robb, 2004).

While it may seem that using weblogs as an internal communications tool is the domain of companies that can afford or already maintain an Intranet, neither the size nor the industry sector of a company matters when it comes to internal blogging. Firms with only a handful of employees who access the Internet regularly can take advantage of internal weblogs just as easily. While high-end, enterprise blogging software can go for anywhere from $900 to $10,000, Blogger, Google's blogging software, and Six Apart's Moveable Type and Typepad blogging software are available for as little as $25 per user per year (O'Shea, 2003). Like weblogs on Intranets, blogs on the Internet can be password-protected and can be stored on external servers. But for small-to-medium sized organizations that have an Intranet or IT specialist already in place, open-source, or non-

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copyrighted, blogging software can be downloaded and installed off the Internet for free. The range of possibilities combined with cost-effectiveness make internal weblogs an inexpensive and highly effective business communications tool.

Issues and Solutions

Although blogs can enhance internal communication, few innovations are perfect. As Rebecca Gardiner, author of *To Blog or not To Blog,* writes, "blogs are work" (Gardiner, 2004). The cost-effectiveness of blogs make them just the kind of tool that "underfunded, growing companies love to put to use;" however, when no one can commit the time and effort it takes to create inspiring blog entries, employees may lose interest (Gardiner, 2004). Not all employees are going to enjoy the blogs as much as managers and communications staff might. In order to keep internal communication through weblogs effective, managers and employees must commit their time and effort to update their blogs, keep them interesting, and encourage employees to use them (Gardiner, 2004).

It is also easy to reach an information glut if the format and authors of the weblogs are not regulated (O'Shea, 2003). Furthermore, due to the personal and informal nature that most people associate with blogging, annoyances and embarrassments can be expected at first. Businesses wishing to start an internal blog should consider this and create regulations, codes of ethics and conduct, and/or assign subject matter only to certain authors. A simple guideline could include the following:

- Postings should accurately reflect some aspect of the company's vision or goals.
- Blogs should not offend.
- Postings should not show negativity. Even if someone has bad news to post, the weblog should not be pessimistic or disapproving. Rather, the blog can show what everyone can learn from the incident.
- Blogs should be respectful.
- Blogs that praise or criticize should be evenhanded and fair.
- Not everyone can blog regularly. All employees with access to a terminal should be encouraged to post a personal/biographical blog and update it with career or industry progress notes periodically.
- Blogs can be broken up into team or division blogs in which managers are the central authors. The managers can then delegate specific blog updates to team members when it is necessary or pertinent.

Encouraging employees to utilize internal blogs may be the most important issue a firm will have to address. Short of mandating that the blog page become everyone's homepage, firms are at the mercy of their employees' own volition. As in all communications, it is important to survey the audience before jumping into a new initiative. Moreover, if an organization's internal communications are in disrepair, then implementing a new tool may not be the solution. Cultivating an atmosphere of respect and openness within a clear structure of internal communication is something that electronic tools cannot do for a firm. But if a good structure does exist, then the importance of further enhancing and streamlining the structure cannot be undervalued.

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Conclusion

The weblog is a dynamic, online communication tool that has the potential to make a company's internal communications more vibrant and cohesive. Businesses have already started experiencing the benefits and advantages of the time savings, universality, ease of use, cost-effectiveness, and increased access to information that weblogs bring to an internal communications system. Companies need to be more competitive, efficient, and integrated than ever before and weblogs are a tool that should be adopted to enhance internal communications in all business sectors.

Businesses will find weblogging especially attractive because it requires no knowledge of HTML coding and has universal formatting that offers immediate solutions. RSS feeds and links make blogs an integrated communication tool with a web-like structure behind the computer screen that can keep employees more connected and more informed. Weblogs also foster a communications environment that increases understanding and strengthens communication between co-workers, managers, and employees. Weblogs have a built-in respect for individual self-expression and provide a forum for the free exchange and development of ideas. Weblogs can make employees feel more involved in a company and more connected to the corporate vision, thus making them the most important diary a company can write.

Weblogs can create an eternal conversation within a company that has the potential to connect past solutions with current obstacles as well as current endeavors with future success. Weblogs do not offer all the answers to corporate communications professionals, but if implemented properly, they can unbind the human minds that make up an organization and make internal communication more effective.

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"I Brought You A Good News": An Analysis of Nigerian 419 Letters

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Abstract

Nigerian 419 letters (so called because 419 is the fraud section of the Nigerian penal code) offer fertile ground for classroom activities related to persuasion. Originally sent as paper mail, 419s now appear by the thousands via fax and email. An examination of over 100 emails received by the author reveals several persuasive techniques that make the scam successful. The paper also includes pedagogical suggestions.

Introduction

Congratulate me: I am potentially worth $1.62 billion! This is good news indeed. Not only am I, a lowly writing teacher at a small technical institute, about to become wealthy beyond my wildest dreams, I have received letters from such luminaries as Yassar Arafat's widow, who wants my personal assistance in consolidating her late husband's estate.

All of us, from time to time, have received these pesky emails or, in the olden days, actual paper letters. All promise fabulous riches ***if***--and this is a big if--the recipient will simply forward a bank account number and allow the sender to park substantial funds in that account. While this scam seems to be utterly transparent, many have taken the bait. According to the United States Secret Service, 419 letters account for an annual loss in this country of hundreds of millions of dollars (US Secret Service, 2002). The international loss, since the mid-1980s, is estimated at more than $5 billion ("Nigerian Scam Buster," n.d.).

For those of us who teach business correspondence, 419 letters offer fertile ground for classroom activities related to persuasion. This paper explores this international phenomenon, focusing on the scam, variations on the theme, persuasion tactics, and classroom exercises.

The Basic Scam

Nigeria is the richest country in Africa, courtesy of a mid-20th century oil boom. It is also, however, one of the most corrupt countries on the planet, second only to Bangladesh (419 Eater, 2005). Indeed, notes Femi Oyesanya, corruption permeates Nigerian culture: "Financial fraud is Nigeria's fifth-largest source of business income" (Oyesanya, 2004). One of the more lucrative ventures has been the advance fraud fee initiative, more commonly referred to as the "419 scam," because it violates Section 419 of Nigeria's Criminal Code:

> Any person who by any false pretence, and with intent to defraud, obtains from any other person anything capable of being stolen, or induces any other person to deliver to any person anything capable of being stolen, is guilty of a felony, and is liable to imprisonment for three years. If the thing is of the value of one thousand naira

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> [$7.41US, at current exchange rates] or upwards, he is liable to imprisonment for seven years (South African Police Services, 2004).

The scam began in the 1980s, following Nigeria's oil bust (Delio, 2002) and first involved investment opportunities, typically sent to businesses on stolen letterhead with counterfeit postage. The volume was substantial: in a 1998 crackdown, United States postal officials seized and destroyed 2.3 million letters at JFK Airport in three months (McDermott, 1998), and in the United Kingdom, about 1.5 million were intercepted during the same time period (APCO, n.d.).

With the advent of electronic communications technology, specifically email and fax, the numbers have skyrocketed: some 250,000 scammers, worldwide, send out thousands of messages daily (419 Eater, 2005), using venues such as Internet cafés and free email accounts through conventional providers such as *Yahoo!* and *Hotmail*. Recipients' addresses are gleaned through bulletin boards and public Internet discussion spaces, association and organization lists, illegally purchased email lists, and email address harvesting programs. Scammers have multiple email accounts, and they may change addresses on a daily basis (McGuire, 2000-3).

While the 419 scam is certainly criminal activity, the scammers tend to be white collar professionals, according to the head of Nigeria's Interpol bureau, Hafez Ringim, including "attorneys, chartered accountants, chemical engineers" (Kaplan, 2001). Some, as noted in a 1995 *Economist* article, are viewed as "folk heroes," most notably Fred Ajudua, who sees himself as "a black man's Robin Hood, getting repayment from white men for slavery and colonialism" ("Great Nigerian Scam,"1995).

Once a person's address is in the 419 email system, letters are frequent. Table 1 indicates the breakdown of 419 emails I received during a 10-month period, excluding duplicates. Most notable is the escalation of numbers in the last few months, averaging one for every two working days.

Table 1
Types of emails received

Month	Estate	Investment	Lottery*	Totals
September 2004	3	3	1	**7**
October	1	6	3	**10**
November	2	2	3	**7**
December	3	2	1	**6**
January 2005	5	2	1	**8**
February	6	10	4	**20**
March	2	9	1	**12**
April	7	6	1	**14**
May	9	2	1	**12**
June	8	5	2	**15**
Totals	**46**	**47**	**18**	**111**

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* *Lottery letters are not technically 419s, but they are included in the tabulation as another type of scam increasing in frequency.*

The initial contact is an email from an important-sounding person, such as a lawyer, banking or government official, former politician, Catholic priest, business executive--even deposed royalty! The email offers the recipient the opportunity to reap rich rewards by assisting the sender in one of several ways: estate disposition, real estate purchase, or seductive business deals, such as buying crude oil at below-market prices (US Secret Service, 2002). Following is an example of a typical email, with the spelling, punctuation, and spacing as in the original:

> Good day to you.
>
> I know you dont mind my contacting you by this means since we have not met before this time. My name is Mrs. Neri Keita-widow from Angola. My late husband served in the past Angolan government before his death.
>
> Recently my husband's will was read and to our joy and relief, he has kept the sum of $8million USD in trust for the upkeep of the family.
>
> This money he deposited(cash)with a security deposit/finance company in Europe with a firm instruction that I should seek for assistance to invest it abroad in any good business.
>
> Hence I need your help to invest this money in any good business like real estate there in your country.
>
> This will be a joint venture arrangement that will demand trust and sincerity which you will benefit immensely from this project, as I will rely on you for it's success. Please do indicate your willingness to assist me through my email–neri001@post.cz so that I can give you the details.
>
> Bye while expecting your quick response (October 13, 2004).

The tone is invariably polite and delightfully Victorian, as in the following examples:

- "I have the privilege to request your assistance. . ." (October 16, 2004).
- ". . . I was divinely inspired to contact you" (March 26, 2005).
- "I am contacting you in anticipation of a cordial business relationship" (February 11, 2005).
- "I humbly wish to seek your assistance in a matter that is very important and needs utmost trust and confidence" (March 16, 2005).

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If the recipient responds favorably, either via email or telephone, the scam progresses to the next level, typically a request for money to cover various "processing fees." Heidi Evans, a reporter for the *Daily News*, recounts her brief experiment answering an estate disposition plea, which would entitle her to collect a portion of $10.5 million left by an unknown relative. After answering the initial query, she then telephoned, as directed, a female attorney in Lagos, Nigeria, who asked her for $970 for a "stamp duty free." The newspaper paid, and Ms. Evans was then instructed to pay another fee of $1,550 for "document processing," which her paper declined to pay, thus ending the experiment (Evans, 2005).

For those who keep paying, assuming that "this will be the last request," fees escalate into the tens of thousands of dollars. Eventually, the victim will be asked to meet face-to-face with the principals in Lagos or a European locale where s/he may be greeted with a trunkful of "disguised" money, often stained black with a mixture of Vaseline and iodine. The scammers dip a sample $100 note in an alkaline solution to remove the iodine and voila! Real money! Of course, this is all a ruse, as the trunk contains only black paper, cut to simulate bank notes ("Nigerian Scams," 2000). Furthermore, the victim may be asked to pay thousands of dollars for the chemicals necessary to return the notes to their natural state (APCO, n.d.).

Visiting Nigeria can be dangerous. Scammers will arrange a "special entry" for victims that precludes the need for a valid visa, a violation of Nigerian law ("Nigerian Frauds," 2005), and victims may find themselves kidnapped and held for ransom or even murdered. Citing United States State Department statistics, Michelle Delio, of *Wired News*, notes that "25 murders or disappearances of Americans abroad have been directly linked to 419 fraud. Other people have been held against their will, beaten and blackmailed" (Delio, 2002). Other tales are equally disconcerting: in 2001, 15 foreign business people visiting Nigeria for 419 scams were threatened with physical harm (Kaplan, 2001), and three Americans were held hostage for $30,000 ransom ("Nigerian Victims," 2002). In 1999, Danut Tetrescu, a Romanian businessman who had flown from Bucharest to Soweto to collect his millions, was kidnapped and held for $500,000 ransom ("Nigerian Scams," 2002).

The situation is so threatening that a number of US agencies have issued warnings on the Web, including the FBI, Secret Service, Department of the Treasury, Internet Fraud Complaint Center, and the Better Business Bureau. Internationally, law enforcement agencies in the United Kingdom, New Zealand, Australia, and Canada have also posted warnings.

Yet, despite Internet cautions, people continue to swallow the bait. Apparently, the persuasive nature of the email, combined with the possibility of instant wealth, is sufficiently seductive. And, of course, the documentation the victim receives seems official and real. Once victims enter into the relationship and pay appropriate fees, they receive a wealth of courier-delivered documents, including

- Fund Management Agreement
- Fund Remittance Voucher
- International Remittance Department, Approval Order
- Final Notification of Transfer, Fund Release Order
- Power of Attorney Form
- Authority Verdict of the Panel of Judges
- Affidavit of Fund Ownership

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- Approval/Transfer of Payment Warrant
- Transfer Confirmation Slip
- Confirmation of Banking Particulars
- Certificate of Registration Official Receipt
- Analysis of Fund Transfer of Fund
- Schedule Fund Release Order Form ("Nigerian Scams," 2002)

While these all sound impressive and appropriately bureaucratic to the novice investor, some can be dangerous if they fall into the wrong hands; *e.g.*, the power of attorney form, which empowers the scammer to use all of the victim's personal assets.

According to McGuire (2000-3), the usual return on an email campaign is about 1-2%, with 1% more common: "That means that for every 1,000 letters sent out, at least 10 will get replies. Of those ten, at least one will continue the relationship to the phase that requires money and gifts be sent." Normally sensible people succumb to the allure of instant wealth, as the following cases indicate:

- The Teis from St. Louis paid over $54,000, which included their children's college fund; took out a second mortgage on their house; and spent many hours making arrangements for the visit of Nigerians to St. Louis, including hotel reservations and buying expensive suits for their guests--all for the promise of $5 million. Mr. Tei is a licensed tax preparer (Brooks, 1994).

- Eric, a family man from Singapore, lost $190,751 in payments to a Nigerian scammer who offered a percentage in a non-existent $25 million estate disposition ("Nigerian Scam Buster," n.d.).

- The United Kingdom's National Criminal Intelligence Service indicated that about 150 Britons last year lost a total of £8.4 million, an average of £56,675 per victim. One, who traveled to Africa to collect his share, ended up beaten and tortured ("Nigerian Scam Buster," n.d.).

- Canadians have lost about $30 million to the scam (RCMP, 2003).

- An American businessman who met with Nigerians at a London hotel ended up committing suicide when he discovered he had lost more than $50,000 (APCO, n.d.).

- Two Asian women have lost £25 million, and a Norwegian woman lost £120,000 and her home (APCO, n.d.).

To give an example of the scope of the problem in this country, the Financial Crimes Division, an arm of the Secret Service, has established "Operation 4-1-9"; it currently receives about 300-500 letters and 100 phone calls per day from potential victims (Gamma, 2005). Victims lose an average of $3,864 ("Be Careful," 2003).

Variations on a Theme

Like all good campaigns, the Nigerian 419 scam has legs, a number of variations on the common theme; these include religion, charitable donations, and exploiting current events.

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While use of religion to extort money is certainly not an innovative strategy, imagine my surprise when I received an email, with the subject line "God Bless as You Assist," from the Catholic bishop of Nigeria! Bishop Greg Williams, who, by the way, is non-existent on the Internet and is not listed in the diocesan database for an important international Catholic bishops' conference held in Nigeria in 2003, needs assistance with fulfilling a promise to a "prominent politician" to deal with an overseas account: "You should understand my position that I can not handle this to avoid scandal and blackmail" (September 29, 2004).

A more common ploy is to appeal to the recipient's sense of religious obligation, as in this January 12, 2005, email from Mrs. Aisha Alade Barmaiyi, "a new Christian convert." She is looking for "an honest Christ [sic] or muslim who will receive this fund [of $18 million] and utilise it for things that will glorify the name of God."

Many of the writers who use a religious theme want their very substantial funds to be used for charitable work, a second variation on the basic scam. Mrs. Rose Welsh, in London for medical treatment, wants her late husband's £10 million "to do mighty works for the Almighty . . . to provide succor to poor and destitute persons, orphanages, and widows and for propagating peace in the universe" (January 31, 2005). Similarly, Mrs. Recheal Wely, a Kuwaiti whose husband left her a legacy of $12.6 million, wants his money donated to "churches, orphanages, Research centers and widows propagating the word of God and to ensure that the house of God is maintained" (February 10, 2005).

Despite the humanitarian impulses displayed in these types of emails, they are simply the second verse of the same old song: emotional ploys to appeal to sympathetic people in an attempt to extort money.

A third variation uses current events. The most recent involves scammers who impersonate officials of the Homeland Security Department and then contact the families of slain US soldiers in an attempt to recover money from their now-deceased loved one's friends. In another twist, the bogus "agent" is attempting to track down money purportedly stolen from the Iraqi Central Bank by one of Saddam's sons (MSNBC, February 2005). Assistant Secretary Michael Garcia, of the United States Immigration and Customs Agency, has stated, "This really is one of the worst e-mail scams we've ever seen, targeting the families of American soldiers killed in Iraq. . . . This is really despicable" (MSNBC, June 2005).

Prior events exploited by the scammers include the December 2004 tsunami in Southeast Asia, the 2001 World Trade Center attacks, the 2000 crash of the Concorde, and a whole host of airplane, car, and train crashes, in addition to local African bombings, murders, and other assorted mayhem. Most refer to websites that the recipient can check. A follow-up on the websites, though, reveals that many of the links are either inactive or offer articles that are overviews of the incidents, not passenger lists. Further investigation into Christian Eich, mentioned as a victim of the Concorde disaster in several emails, indicates that he was indeed among those killed; this leads to the unsettling conclusion that scammers may troll victim lists for names of real people to exploit in their emails.

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Persuasion Techniques

Scammers use a number of strategies to reel in their intended victims, including appeals to pity, trust, and avarice. Notes FBI cybercrime agent Dale Miskall, "Nigerians are just great at social engineering . . . and Americans are quite gullible" (MSNBC, June 2005).

Ad miseriocordium, the logical fallacy involving appeals to pity, is one of the most commonly used tactics. To judge by the emails, wealthy Nigerians are dying off at a terrific rate due to all sorts of malicious cancers: breast, pancreas, and esophageal chief among them. They are also suffering from debilitating strokes and hearts attacks yet apparently have enough energy left to send emails all over the world. Their dying wish is for a person with a "good heart" to help them deal with their substantial fortunes. An April 1, 2005, appeal from Larry Moore, a United Arab Emirates merchant dying of prostate and esophageal cancers, is typical: "I am writing this from my laptop computer in my hospital bed where I wait for my time to come. I pray that God uses you to support and assist me with good heart."

Some are ludicrously transparent, such as John Kredoski's November 13, 2004, email. He lives in Reno, has suffered a heart attack, and has chosen to write to me because I am "a fellow American." "Do not," he cautions, "associate this letter as numerous letters we receive from Africa. If you need my passport to prove my identity, I will send it to you." For a native-born American, his syntax and vocabulary are curiously similar to his Nigerian counterparts.

Other pathos-based appeals come from children of deposed politicians and wives of military men murdered in coups, all of whom are either in hiding or have fled their country to avoid a similar fate. Coincidentally, they all have millions of dollars tied up in either hidden domestic accounts or secret foreign accounts.

Another major appeal is trust. Virtually all of the emails, especially those referring to childless couples who have died intestate, use the word "trust," as the following examples show:

- "I am trusting you with my money" (November 13, 2005).
- ". . . I therefore need a honest, trustworthy and reliable assistance of a foreigner. . ." (April 4, 2005).
- ". . . trusting in you and believing that you will never let me down now or in the future" (April 25, 2005).
- ". . . I will need the help of a trustworthy foreign partner to enable us to put claims to this funds. . . (May 6, 2005).

Trust, however, involves a reciprocal agreement, and by their very nature, scammers repeatedly violate trust. A touching summer story on NBC's *Dateline* featured Pam Krause of Almond, Wisconsin. Ms. Krause, out of compassion, thought she was helping a West African mother in desperate straits, only to discover she had fallen prey to yet another scam: she lost $18,000 (MSNBC, June 2005).

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A third major technique is an undisguised appeal to greed. Potential victims are typically offered 5-30% of the fund, in the case of estate dispositions. Investment emails offers a much larger percentage, 20-40%, of a much larger pot, up to $120 million.

Senders claim to be representatives for one of several legitimate-sounding Nigerian or South African companies, such as

- Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (the most common)
- Central Bank of Nigeria
- Anglogold Corporation
- Apex Paying Bank
- Liquefied Natural Gas
- Petrol Ivoire

All the recipient has to do is stand in as "beneficiary" or "overseas agent" and allow the use of a bank account as a parking space for millions of dollars: minimal work for maximum reward. Dr. George Kenneth, of the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation, cautions "utmost secrecy": "I want you to understand that having put in over 25 years of service to my country, my colleagues and I are careful not to have our name and image tarnished" (March 20, 2005).

Classroom Exercises

Nigerian scam letters present a number of possibilities for classroom exploration, limited only by the individual instructor's imagination and the amount of time available.

In-Class Exercises

Small group discussions are effective for having the class analyze a number of issues in a limited time. Divide the class into groups of three or four and give each group a different, but representative, letter. Depending on the goals for the exercise, groups could analyze their letters for any one of the following:

- Persuasive strategies: How does the writer appeal to the audience? What specific techniques are used? How effective are they?

- Audience: Who is the letter appealing to? What are audience traits? Are the typical salutations of "Dear Sir" or "Dear Sir/Madam" effective?

- Language usage: Is the polite 19th-century language charming? Annoying? How effective is the extreme deference? How do ESL attributes affect the message?

- Subject lines: How effective are all cap subject lines such as "URGENT," "REPLY ASAP," or the less conventional "Beloved in Christ," "Fulfill my last wish, please," "You are the only one," or "Cry for help"?

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- Format: Given that printed format is dependent on the printer used, many 419 emails are written in single-spaced 10-point Arial, with wide margins and haphazard paragraphing. Some are in all upper case. How effective is the formatting? How can the writers make the document more visually appealing? Or do they care?

Research Exercises

For instructors who have the luxury of a little more time or who wish to delve more deeply into the factual content of 419s, having students research some of the names mentioned is an enlightening exercise. For example, on November 10, 2004, I received an email from "Peterside Kanyon Doe," purportedly the only son of a slain ruler of Liberia, Samuel Kanyon Doe, who was "brutally murdered by a mentally disturbed soldier named Price Yormie Johnson." Since the 1990 murder of his father, Peterside has been hiding in the Liberian countryside. Before his death, Samuel had secreted a cache of money in Europe, which has only now come to Peterside's attention. He seeks my help in obtaining the money and establishing a "new identity" in America so he can start a new life. For my assistance, he will give me a share of the money. In a postscript, he notes that I can "read about this event in any book on Liberia history past and present." Overall, the email is a plaintive, rather poignant plea for help.

Following up on Peterside's suggestion, I checked an online encyclopedia for information about his father. Samuel Kanyon Doe was indeed killed by a deranged soldier in 1990. But the story is not nearly so sympathetic as his son suggests: at the tender age of 28, Doe was the leader of a 1980 political coup which resulted in the murder of the then-president of Liberia, William R. Tolbert. Doe rose to power after rigging an election and changing his birthdate (the Nigerian constitution requires presidents to be at least 32 years old); he then ruled despotically for the next decade. Notes the source, "The greed for power, the corruption, nepotism and the abuse of human rights which Doe had reproached Tolbert [for] had become a trademark of his [own] regime" ("President," 2005).

Another possibility is to have students examine some of the websites mentioned, which are offered as proof for the information in the email. In an October 20, 2004, email, Gideon Arp Moi asks for the assistance of someone who would be willing to travel to Europe to receive two trunks of money which his father, former Kenyan president Daniel Moi, has left with a security company. The email insists that this money resulted from the sale of gold and diamonds and offers links to two stories on the BBC website.

A check of the stories, however, reveals that Daniel Moi was the subject of some rather intense investigations in one of Kenya's "biggest financial scandals"; the gold and diamonds he allegedly sold did not exist (BBC, 2004). Moreover, he was also implicated in investigations regarding the disappearance of nearly $14 billion from Kenya's Euro Bank, which subsequently collapsed (BBC, 2003).

Conclusions

Using 419 letters in the business communication classroom offers rich pedagogical possibilities for a study of persuasion through small group discussions and student research. As this paper has shown, scammers are accomplished persuaders who garner substantial, albeit unethical, rewards for their

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efforts. Having students analyze these letters helps to develop their critical faculties for evaluation of Web information and provides an entertaining class activity.

"In Nigeria," Finance Minister Ngozi Okonjo-Iweara has said, "we are always amazed that anyone could be stupid enough to respond to such an offer" (419 Eater, 2005). In America, however, the potential of instant wealth is embedded in our cultural mythology: there's always the chance of winning the lottery or of a windfall inheritance from that eccentric uncle, who has stashed thousands of dollars in coffee cans neatly stacked in his basement. It is not stupidity that Nigerian scammers prey upon: it is hope.

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The Internationalising of Business Communication in Higher Education: A Case Study

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Abstract

This paper examines the internationalisation of higher education within the context of the rapid globalisation of business. It discusses internationalisation at a national/sector level and at the institutional level, before exploring it at the unit or course level, as actually experienced by international students. The paper uses a case study approach to explore how one university business communication team responded to the problem of high fail rates for international students. This discussion demonstrates how student learning and academic outcomes can be incrementally but significantly improved via the implementation of a multi-faceted approach to the total teaching/learning context.

Introduction

Internationalisation is a convenient and politically correct catchword within higher education (Knight 2004, Yang 2002). Its elusiveness and allure have undoubtedly been enhanced by its differential usage over time, the different meanings attributed by different writers within different contexts and societies, and the great range of different activities and interpretations made by different users even within the context of education (Altbach 2001; Knight 2004; Rizvi & Walsh 1998; Schapper & Mayson 2004; Welch 2002). The very impreciseness of internationalisation smooths the way for politicians, administrators or academics to safely make claims of having implemented internationalisation and indeed within the literature the self-serving nature of its usage by different stakeholders has been noted (Knight 2004; Yang 2002).

Globalisation and Internationalisation

Internationalisation is closely related to globalisation, and there are some who would use the terms interchangeably (Knight 2004; Schapper & Mayson 2004; Yang 2002). However internationalisation of higher education has been identified as having a longer history than globalisation (Knight 2004; Schapper & Mayson 2004), and globalisation can be viewed as playing a major role within the changing and evolving environment in which the internationalisation of higher education is increasing in importance (Knight 2004). There is an urgent need to develop clear and separate meanings and common understandings for the two overlapping but separate concepts or processes.

The many different definitions in the literature provide a synthesised definition of globalization. Some writers appear to restrict their definition of internationalisation to merely the growing relationships and interactions between national entities and cultures (Marginson 2000; Scott 1998). However there does appear to be significant agreement by most that globalisation is a multi-dimensional process which transcends national borders and involves the flow of economy, technology, ideology, people, products, and ideas. Social groupings move closer together but simultaneously and contrarily maintain a more intensive focus on their localised identities (Chaney & Martin 2004; Jensen 2006; Knight & de Wit 1997; Yang 2002).

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Within higher education, the process of internationalisation can be regarded as both a dimension and a consequence of the globalised environment. It is, however, more difficult to agree on one universal definition of internationalisation as its usage within intercultural, international and education literature not only reveals diverse dimensions, stresses, perspectives, understandings, approaches and emphases. There is also the complication that internationalisation encompassing different meanings within Western and non-Western contexts; conception which is frequently unacknowledged and generally underappreciated. Within Anglo-American societies, internationalisation in higher education is frequently seen to operate as a homogenising, converging influence of Anglo-American thinking and teaching (Schapper & Mayson 2004). Similarly, educators in less-developed non-Western nations may well beware of the potential loss of national identity so that the highly educated students become foreigners in their own land (Yang 2002). The opposing perspective suggests that regionalisation of localised values is part of the internationalisation process (Yang 2002). The evolution of many different conceptualisations and definitions of internationalisation throughout the past decade has been well documented and richly detailed in the literature (Knight 2003; Knight & de Wit 1997). For the purposes of this paper, a simple and concise yet highly flexible definition of internationalisation of higher education is: "the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education" (Knight 2003 p.2).

Internationalisation within Higher Education

It is not a primary focus of this paper to critically analyse in detail the rationales for internationalisation in higher education. The literature provides a consistent general consensus that acknowledges the relatively recent shift away from centuries-old motives that centred on the advancement and dissemination of learning and knowledge. Contemporary internationalised higher education appears to be much more of an instrumentalist and economic process (Schapper & Mayson 2004; Whalley 1997; Yang 2002). This point is a vital one, because it repositions education as a product in an increasingly competitive market environment. Whilst there are some who bemoan the commodification and massification of education (Schapper & Mayson 2004), many Australian politicians use terms such as 'export product' to describe internationalised education and are overtly planning the future of education in terms of the 'knowledge economy' (Fullerton 2005). In many ways, education is now commonly regarded by politicians and managers as a service product or commodity with students as consumers and higher education institutions as service providers. Sadly, the past sacredness of higher education seems to have reduced inversely to its increased availability, although this is not to imply any direct causal relationship.

Levels of Internationalisation

This changing world of increased education for more individuals is positioned within a new socio-political framework of increased political interference. Some Western governments such as in Australia provide less and less funding to universities and expect those institutions to explore new markets of high-fee-paying international students to effectively subsidise the costs of higher education for local students. Simultaneously they impose greater accountability procedures and fiscal controls (Fullerton 2005). In this context it is scarcely surprising that higher education itself is also changing for internationalisation. Knight's updated working definition of the internationalisation process overtly includes a national/sector level as well as the institutional level. The institutional level refers to post secondary, higher education providers. The national/sector level includes education departments but may also include foreign affairs, science and technology, culture, employment and immigration. Both levels are potentially involved in the

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creation and implementation of policies and programs for internationalisation of higher education (Knight 2004).

National/ Sector Level
Within Australia, higher education institutions including 38 universities are registered as education providers within their respective states, but are funded at a national level by the federal Department of Education Science & Training. Departmental policies and issues regarding international education include scholarships made available to high achieving overseas students and Australian language teachers. Yet the far greater focus is on overseas markets, compliance and quality assurance in explicit recognition of the valuable export product created by international education (Department of Science Education and Training 2005).

Since 1996, and despite public denials of university funding cuts by federal government ministers, funding per university student has dropped 6 percent, excluding government fee loans made to students, and university figures show a drop of 22 percent in government funding from 1996 to 2000. Earlier this year the government refused to index funding to inflationary costs of learning. Australian universities have responded to this financial predicament by increasing course fees for local students by offering full-fee places for students who narrowly fail to be accepted for their course of preference and by focusing more and more on trying to attract international students and the educational export dollar in an increasingly competitive market (Fullerton 2005).

Institutional Level
International students are Australia's sixth highest export industry, contributing AUD$7.5 billion each year. Enrolments at Melbourne's Monash University, one of the elite 'Group of Eight' sandstone universities in the country includes 30 percent international students (Fullerton 2005). Figures from Deakin University, a much younger university with two main campuses in Melbourne and regional campuses in Geelong and Warrnambool, reveal 4,286 international students enrolled in 2003, constituting fourteen percent of the total enrolment. However, these students were however largely concentrated in the Faculty of Business and Law, where thirty seven percent of the total student load was occupied by international fee paying students and those studying Deakin programs in other countries. Within the popular Bachelor of Commerce degree program on the Melbourne campus, the international student load was seventy one percent (Deakin University Planning Unit 2005).

Deakin has been attracting and educating international students since the early 1990's, and thus has a relatively sophisticated and comprehensive suite of internationalisation policies and programs available to support those students, particularly those enrolled in the Faculty of Business and Law. Within current university strategic policy documents, the vice chancellor makes note of the changes in higher education in Australia, which she relates to other developments including the massification of higher education and cuts in national funding. Globalisation and internationalisation are also specified as contextual developments for higher education in terms of student mobility, curriculum development, and desire for internationally recognised credentials (Deakin University 2004).

In another policy document, the university details the specific and generic attributes its students will develop. One of the three "citizenship" attributes refers specifically to internationalisation: an understanding of "international perspectives and competence in a global environment" (Deakin University 2000 p.3). Exemplary characteristics of internationalisation are given to include understanding and differentiating between globalisation and internationalisation processes: demonstrated understanding of cultural difference and intercultural communication;

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demonstrated awareness and understanding of intercultural perspectives within their discipline: and effective communication/work with people of different cultures within Australia and the world. Nine detailed examples of illustrative educational strategies are provided (Deakin University 2000). This explicates a more recent, more mature interpretation/application of the concept of internationalisation within the university, whereby the development of an international and global perspective by all its students has become an avowed and explicit policy to be implemented within all faculties and programs.

The university's Faculty of Business and Law is actually an example of internationalisation having been implemented and practised within the classrooms of higher education prior to the development of any official institutional policy (Welch & Denman 1997). This is the place where the real process of internationalisation can be said to occur (Knight 2004). In response to a decade of high international student enrolments, the faculty has conceived, implemented and developed suite of quite innovative programs and procedures, with the overt primary aim of assisting its high numbers of international students to achieve academic success and minimum completing rates. These include an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) bridging unit offered for credit at the first year level and a substantial Support Tutorial Program of concurrent EAP tied to specific units identified as difficult and/or critical for international students (Fermelis 2001). In addition, each unit chair is required to complete checklists to demonstrate the degrees to which their curricula and teaching have been internationalised. In many ways this checklist is an abbreviated version of the excellent practical guidelines for internationalisation best practice developed within the province of British Columbia, Canada (Whalley 1997).

Unit/Course Level: Case Study

Within this faculty environment, business communication was for many years a small scale elective unit/course mostly studied by human resource management students on Deakin's Melbourne campus. In 2001, as a direct response to new university strategic policies relating to graduate attributes and skills (Deakin University 2000), the unit was reclassified as core for all students enrolled in the Bachelor of Commerce degree. This resulted in annual enrolments increasing from approximately 250 to 2000 students and the unit being delivered on three Australian campuses in off-campus mode and off-shore in contractual partnerships with colleges in Singapore and Malaysia. The unit was totally redesigned to reflect the generic skills specified within university strategic policy. Unfortunately, after two years of rapid growth in student enrolments, the fail rates for international students, hovering around 20 percent, were unacceptably high.

The unit chair and her team decided to retain their existing general aims, specific learning objectives and criterion-based assessment methodology. They also decided against reducing targeted skill levels, relaxing marking rigour nor reverting to normative assessment standardisation of students' raw scores. Instead, the total delivery of the unit was closely examined in all areas to identify those in which there was potential for incremental improvement within the total curriculum, including content, delivery, student understanding and assignment outcomes. A number of modifications were subsequently introduced to various dimensions in the belief that their cumulative impact could be quite significant. Most of these changes demonstrated an approach to teaching and learning highly reflective of EAP basic teaching/learning principles. These typically focused on the students themselves in terms of their characteristics and needs within the context of the particular communication skills. The strategic interventions and strategies subsequently chosen frequently utilised deconstructive and highly practical methodologies (Hutchinson & Waters 1989). Many of these strategies are described below. Ironically, effective EAP strategies were in many ways at the same time

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expressions of strong pedagogical principles, which typically result in improved outcomes for all involved, regardless of language, nationality or ethnic background. After two semesters the raw fail rates for international students were reduced by approximately two-thirds, to stabilise at between 6 percent and 7 percent.

Student Characteristics

Length of Time in Australia
As it focused on professional business communication skills, the unit was offered at second-year level in a three year degree program, with 'Management' and any other four first-year level units as prerequisites for enrolment. This precluded enrolment by first year level students but permitted enrolment by international students new to Australia who had been accepted and granted 'advanced standing' credit for previous post-secondary studies at other institutions, which were generally overseas. The unit team felt that the relatively 'high context' nature of the unit functioned as an intellectual and psychological barrier for many newly arrived international students. Therefore faculty course advisors were asked to actively discourage students from taking the unit during their first semester in Australia. They were also briefed to advise international students not to delay taking the compulsory unit until their final semester of study. Failing the unit would require them to repeat it in order to graduate, with the possible consequence of having to remain in the country for an additional four-month period studying that one unit only.

Learning Styles
The total student cohort enrolling in business communication was approximately 46 percent international, and 45 percent did not speak English at home. On the main Melbourne campus these figures were 71% and 73% respectively (Deakin University 2005 Planning Unit 2005). The majority of the international students at Deakin, however, came from Singapore, Malaysia, Hong Kong and Indonesia, although anecdotal evidence indicated that numbers from PR China and the Indian/Sri Lankan sub-continent were on the increase.

These international students were generally from low-context cultural backgrounds but did not leave behind either their cultural or their previous learning experiences. As 'How one learns is culturally determined as is what one learns' (Hall 1976 p.190), it was plainly incumbent on the Deakin business communication academics to take into account existing student learning styles or 'cultural mental programming' (Hofstede 1991). Without ignoring the obvious diversity between these backgrounds of the international students, their home countries were all largely high context cultures, and their education histories largely Confucian heritage cultures. In contrast, Australia has been consistently classified as a low-context society (Hall 1976; Bovee & Thill 2005; Fletcher & Brown 2002).

Recent research into the nature of the international students studying at Australian universities suggests that many enter Australian universities with only simplistic learning styles. These learning styles lie at the prestructural to lower end of multistructural levels of generalised cognitive processing ability (Ramburuth & Mladenovic 2005). Other research suggests that these students are limited by their 'surface approach' to learning (Biggs 1991; Paulusz 2004). The business communication unit team decided to exploit and work within this type of learning style when teaching the curriculum, most notably within the weeks spent on writing positive, negative and persuasive messages and reports. International students quickly recognised the genre approach to organising and structuring the different types of business messages (Swales 1991) presented in their textbook (Bovee & Thill 2005). Tutors suggested that students even type in appropriate temporary subheadings when constructing their documents. In the more theoretical

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topics, communication processes were overtly deconstructed into separate, identifiable stages or phases, with each being exemplified, discussed and then put back together within an appropriate practical context. The purpose was to improve student understanding by working from both top-down and bottom-up directions.

There was also a complementary responsibility for the tutors to extend their students' restricted learning styles into the relational and extended abstract, 'deep, achieving' approaches required for successful study in Australian universities (Biggs & Collis 1982; Biggs 1991). Students needed to be able to operate at these more sophisticated levels in order to achieve particular learning objectives or to develop specific skills within their Australian educational context. Ballard and Clanchy believe that students can, with assistance, adapt to the analytical and critical approach to learning (1984). One area in which this could be done within this unit was in relation to interpersonal communication skills. Throughout the semester students were required to maintain an analytical journal in which they recorded their interpersonal experiences whilst working on their two team assignments. This graded task required them to use and apply the interpersonal concepts and terminology from their lecture and textbook when describing and then analysing their own experiences with the team-mates. International students had experienced immense difficulty in satisfactorily differentiating between describing events and behaviours at a surface level and analysing/interpreting them at a deeper level. They were then disappointed by the low scores they received for the task and their tutors were disappointed at their low levels of learning. This problem was addressed by explaining the task more carefully to students early in the semester, who were then also provided with diverse but successful models of suitable journal entries which were then analysed and discussed in class. Finally, students were required to submit their first journal entry in draft form to their tutor for early feedback and suggested improvements. The analytical and interpretive quality of the journal entries improved significantly; tutors felt that their students developed a deeper understanding of the topic and skill and students were clearly more pleased with their marks.

Language

Part of the skill of second language teaching is to develop an almost intuitive feel for vocabulary and language use with students. Writers have expanded on this dimension in guidelines for internationalising the English language in order to assist native speakers to decrease the possibilities of misunderstandings (Chaney & Martin 2004). Throughout the teaching of the business communication unit, consistent efforts were made to use essentially formal and literal language, to avoid colloquialisms and clichés, to use language and concepts consistently, and to avoid synonyms and ambiguous words. This was practised within lectures, tutorials and practical classes, in student hardcopy and electronic handouts. Efforts were also made to continually practise and model the effective theoretical and practical business communication strategies the students were expected to develop. This meant language had to be concise, clear and correct. Subject lines, headings and sub-headings had to be informative and accurate, dot or bullet points were used for lists, writing was sequential whenever possible, sentences were restricted to the recommended maximum of 25 words and sentence structures were predominantly simple or compound, rather than compound-complex. Ironically this meant that by continually using and modelling effective intercultural communication for the international cohort, the lecturer and tutors were also modelling effective communication strategies for all students.

Student Support

To improve student learning and increase student assessment grades, additional support tutorials were made available to students, conducted by an English for Academic Purposes specialist who was also a regular tutor within the unit. Preliminary evidence from other business disciplines had shown that students who regularly attended the additional support tutorials did appear to gain a

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better overall understanding of content, and demonstrably better pass rates, grades and completion rates (Fermelis 2001). In consultation with the unit chair, the support tutor decided to focus heavily on the two major assignments where international students had previously achieved the least satisfactory scores – the document creation assignment and test and the team formal written proposal. Students were given additional explanations of aspects of the relevant skills and of the task requirements and additional feedback on their planning and draft documents. Many international students still found the real-time document test to be extremely difficult, but the documents they produced were of a discernibly higher quality than previously as were the written proposal documents, so student marks were also higher.

Assessment

Deconstruction of Examination Questions
The examination paper had always included three different types of questions – multiple choice, short answer and analysis – to accommodate diverse student learning and assessment styles. However, examination results showed that international students performed extremely poorly in the open-ended 'document analysis' question on the end-of-semester examination paper. This open question was worth 10 percent of the student's total score and required students to analyse a written message in terms of its various communication weaknesses and to then suggest how these weaknesses could be improved. The unit team decided to try deconstructing the general question into separate, more directive questions on audience, approach, organisational structure, writing style and format. Student results for this section of the exam paper immediately improved.

Additional Requirements for Document Assignment
The assessment regimen for the unit included a real-time test in the computer laboratory wherein students created a memo and a letter in response to given scenarios. This was a culmination of a month's work on how to compose positive, negative and persuasive messages. International students performed very poorly on this test, so the class work exercises leading up to the test was transformed into an assignment worth 5 percent. Test scores improved considerably.

The unit placed a strong emphasis on audience analysis as a critical preparatory stage to the composition of effective messages and on document analysis for the development of improved writing skills. International students produced poor quality responses to these questions on the examination paper, so analysis matrices were included for each document in the assignment leading up to the document test. These analyses matrices were required and students were given feedback, but were not graded. Student responses to the analysis questions on the examination paper improved significantly.

Design of Assignment Marking Criteria
From its inception the course included a wide range of different assignment tasks to assess development of different business communication skills and topics. Criterion-based marking guides or rubrics were provided well in advance of submission for each of the assignments. These enabled students to check before submission that they understood the criteria on which the work was to be assessed. They also enabled the academics who graded the assignments to provide highly rich and detailed feedback within the budgeted marking time and ensured comparability of assignment marks across all cohorts. As so many non-native speakers were studying the unit, the marking guides were re-designed in order to isolate language as one of the many sub-skills being assessed rather than necessarily as an impenetrable barrier. For example, when students were creating letters and memos for an assignment and test, their documents were marked according to different communication sub-skills such as format, organisation, content

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and writing style. If meaning in a document were non-understandable meaning, the document would still receive a fail grade. Grammar errors would certainly result in a low 'writing style' score, but there was still ample allowance for the student to score well for the other sub-skills and achieve a reasonable or better overall score. The test remained the most difficult assignment task for the unit for many international students, but was no longer an impossible barrier.

Academic Teaching Staff

Teaching Skills

The unit chair and founding members of the unit team all had qualifications, skills and extensive experience in English for Second Language, English for Academic Purposes and in teaching international students for whom English was a Second Language. Therefore, from the outset the unit was developed on strong second language teaching principles. Within an era of increasing massification, as enrolments increased, it became necessary to employ a large team of sessional tutors both on-shore and off-shore. In light of the highly internationalised student cohort, and the large proportion of second language students, the unit chair decided that employment preference would be given to sessional staff with second language education skills and international experience.

Staff Experience and Stability

The business communication curriculum was deemed to be pedagogically sound but significantly more complex than other content-based units. From the outset, students had commented favourably on the unusually high levels of experience and teaching skills of those in the business communication team. International students in particular appeared to value and respect more mature teachers instead of the young and largely inexperienced postgraduate students they more commonly encountered throughout their undergraduate years of study. Training a new member of the business communication teaching team required a minimum of four hours orientation plus mentoring of at least one hour per week, so the unit chair decided to make deliberate efforts to attract, train and retain qualified and more mature sessional tutors who over time would develop into an impressive team of experienced human capital.

Additional Tutor Consultation Hours

One serious disadvantage of the increased sessionalisation of higher education is that students may not be able to locate their tutor for advice regarding difficult aspects of the course or assessment. The unit chair in this unit decided that the teaching skills and communication expertise of the part-time tutors were far more valuable than their ability to complete more mundane preparation tasks such as developing class lists, producing overhead transparencies and standing at the photocopying machine. The unit chair presented her sessional staff with a series of proposals. First, all tutors would be assigned between two and four groups (four to eight hours) of paid business communication teaching each week, for which payment did allow generous preparation time. Second, every effort would be made to co-ordinate the teaching time with the tutors' personal preferences including family and other work commitments. Third, curriculum changes would be minimal from semester to semester, although would be more significant every two years when the textbook edition updated. Fourth, weekly classroom teaching activities would be totally prepared, detailed and emailed out in advance by the unit chair. Finally, the preparation of overheads and student handouts would be done for the tutors. In return, the tutors would all make themselves available for at least one hour each week on a regular basis for individual student consultations. This hour would be considered part of the preparation time, and their students would benefit from the increased opportunities for one-on-one assistance outside of class.

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These additional hours proved extremely popular with international and local students alike who appreciated being able to seek additional feedback on assignment drafts on a one-to-one basis from their own or another tutor. Tutors found the experience assisted them to evaluate the effectiveness of their classroom teaching and identify common student misunderstandings. It also resulted in an increase in student skill development as evidenced by the significantly improved standards of student assignment work.

Curriculum Content

The business communication curriculum contained 12 topics, one of which was intercultural communication. The unit chair decided that it was outside of her brief to transform the unit into an intercultural communication unit, but that intercultural and international dimensions should become a communication theme pervading the whole course. This would maximise its future relevance and usefulness for international students and for local students who had a high likelihood of working in a multicultural or international business environment after graduation. This combination of theme and topic would facilitate the development of students' cultural intelligence (Thomas & Inkson 2004). It was decided that intercultural communication would be addressed at three levels very similar to those suggested by Thomas and Inkson: first as awareness or consciousness; second via the explanation of key cultural dimensions on which students could readily draw, such as culture context, directness and individualism/collectivism; third, specific examples would be presented from a range of different cultures such as different types of job application letters of CVs for different cultural audiences. This tri-level approach would provide a theoretical framework, fundamental skills and real life examples, which could thus better facilitate highly practical intercultural communication once the student had graduated.

In the short term, additional intercultural strategies were introduced into the curriculum at a more superficial, micro level. Some of these appeared minor but were at the same time highly symbolic, such as the inclusion of culturally diverse individual and company names and different international locations within assignment scenarios and examination questions. Contrastive and comparative examples from a range of countries were included to illustrate a range of communication principles in as many topics as possible. Alternative answers to assignment and examination tasks or questions were accepted where relevant so long as the reasons or explanation included were culturally consistent. Wherever possible, students themselves were also used as a rich pool of cultural and skill diversity for the purposes of tutorial discussions and team activities.

The decision to enrich the international and intercultural dimensions of the business communication course was made fairly recently and at the time of writing it was too early to judge whether or not the above top-down and bottom-up approach was successful in improving intercultural understanding or communication. The desired objectives would be largely unnoticeable until after the student had left the university, so it will be interesting to see how these are reflected in graduate surveys.

An Incidental Dimension – Unit Reputation

The business communication unit had a student reputation for requiring too much work, with comments to this effect frequently being included within the anonymous student unit evaluations. However, many students noted within the evaluations how well it was taught, and how valuable the skills were. Student feedback varied, but for the past two semesters the unit rated above faculty average in being "well taught," which was quite an achievement for a very

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large, compulsory unit. It also rated well above faculty average for encouraging the student to value perspectives of people from different cultures.

The final word about its effectiveness from an international perspective may well be the following anecdote. During a recent study tour to China attended by the unit chair and local and international students, a "local" (Australian) student and an international student were discussing the business communication unit. They agreed that business communication was a highly useful unit, but that it required a great deal of work. Therefore, they subscribed to the student grapevine strategy that it was best to work hard right through the semester and pass, as it was one unit you definitely would not want to have to repeat.

It is possible to draw at least two conclusions from their agreement. First, whilst they complained about the workload, they did see the value of the unit. Second, the earlier reputation of the unit being a barrier or difficult hurdle for international students had finally been dispelled.

Conclusion

Future directions for this interpretation of the internationalisation of higher education are unclear. However, there are indications of areas in need of further investigation. One of these is for greater academic research on the nuances and evolution of internationalisation within higher education (Knight 2004). Another is for internationalisation to be examined from a non-Western, non Anglo-American perspective (Yang 2002; Schapper & Mayson 2004). A third is for business education teachers to develop a more detailed and empirically supportable and 'internationalised' understanding of student communication needs and of the cultural diversity within the international student population which we so commonly stereotype. Finally, there is a need to discover what might be generic and universal about business communication and what aspects aremain variable, localised and culture specific.

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Use of Professional Codes of Conduct in Ethics Training

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Abstract

Treatment and control groups were used to examine the effects of ethics training on the attitudes, knowledge-based scores, and the ability to solve ethical dilemmas among office professionals. The effects on these three variables were measured immediately after and 90 days after treatment participants completed a six-hour ethics training workshop. In this paper, we describe the development, content, and methodology of the training with a focus on how the Code of Ethics for Administrative Professionals was used**.** We then report feedback from the participants and discuss implications. Results indicate a heightened awareness of ethical issues and application of learning to workplace situations.

Introduction

Today the public is bombarded with news of scandals and wrongdoings in the work environment. We read reports about faculty members admitting to falsification of research data, resulting in a trail of retracted papers (Malakoff, 2000). A university staff employee is prosecuted for embezzling funds over an extended period of time (Kerstetter, 2001). Managers and other people in organizations are seen falsifying expense documents (DeMars, 1997). People trusted by the public to be moral leaders have done a poor job at representing morality (Singer, 2000).

A central theme discussed in the literature, and one of particular interest to instructors and trainers, is whether ethical behavior can be influenced by professional codes of conduct. Somers (2001) found that employee awareness of professional codes can influence ethical behavior in the workplace and produce higher levels of organizational commitment. Higgs-Kleyn and Kapelianis (1999) investigated the regulation of ethical behavior of business professionals and found that 83 percent of the respondents were influenced by professional codes for resolving ethical conflicts. In addition, study participants believed that awareness of codes of conduct are vital to the organization. Hatcher (2002) reports that codes of conduct provide professionals with a standard of what is right**;** however, people often lack the skills and knowledge to make ethical decisions in the workplace.

Ethics training that includes discussion on professional codes helps develop skills and knowledge about professional responsibility**.** Given the increased focus on ethics and the disturbing number of ethical violations reported, corporations and educational institutions are beginning to recognize the value of teaching individuals the responsibility of what it means to be a professional. One example of this is Starratt's (2004) work on ethical educational leadership. He believes that teachers need to be responsible for their own professional behavior, which includes being fully committed to high quality learning for every student. Davis (1993) makes a strong case for teaching professional responsibility in the curriculum. According to Davis (1993), professional codes of ethics are special standards of conduct that govern members of that profession and are more than "common sense." Because professional codes are special standards, they should be included in the curriculum as part

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of a formal education (Davis, 1993). Ethics teaching and training can be used to educate students on the content and purpose of the codes. These codes provide clarity and direction and lessen the burden on instructors to choose which values to include. Students may disagree with some of the statements, but they should accept the source since the code was developed by professionals in their chosen fields of interest.

All too often, ethics research focuses on managers and higher level positions within the organization (Guelecher & Cahalane, 1999; Trevino, 1998). Consequently, there is a paucity of research on the ethical preparedness of employees at other levels. Employees with less education generally are invisible to the organization and receive less training (Gagne & Medsker, 1996). The April 2004 Boston College Center for Work and Family Carroll School of Management Final Report identifies the invisible workforce as those employees who perform everyday tasks and are critical to the success of the organization. The United States has the best educated professional workforce in the world, and the worst educated nonprofessional workers (Gray & Herr, 1998). For organizations and the nation to compete, training investment in lower-level employees must improve (Gagne & Medsker, 1996; Gray & Herr, 1998).

The purpose of the study described in this paper was to examine the effects of ethics training on the attitudes, knowledge-based scores, and the ability to analyze ethical dilemmas among office professionals. This group was chosen because of the new and integral role they play in the future of organizations. Reflecting a higher level of responsibility and, often, a requirement for specialized education, the occupation now carries titles such as administrative assistant, executive assistant, office manager, and office coordinator. In this paper, we describe the development, content, and methodology of the training with a focus on how a code of behavior was used. We then report feedback from the participants and discuss implications for teaching and training.

Methods

Focus Groups

First, individuals whose names were taken from a local chapter of Educational Office Professionals (EOP) membership list were recruited to provide ideas and suggestions for developing an active training ethics workshop for office professionals. Purposeful sampling was used to allow the investigators to select individuals who would be willing to participate and contribute to the project goals (Morse & Richards, 2002). Two focus groups were used. Each focus group was composed of six office professionals. The purpose of the groups was to refine and further develop a basic outline of content that had been developed based on a review of literature and the authors' experience with training. A script with categories of questions was developed by the investigators.

The groups met for one-hour and the sessions were audio-taped. The audio-tapes were transcribed, themes from the focus group identified, and changes to the content modules made based on focus group findings. For example, decision-making strategies were allotted additional time, case studies were revamped to focus specifically on office professional issues, and smaller group breakouts for discussion were eliminated. Current newspaper articles related to ethics, publications, books, journal articles, selected university policies, magazines, and the Code of Ethics for Administrative Professionals were used as resources to develop the workshop. The code can be found at the International Association of Administrative Professionals website at http://www.iaap-

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hq.org/ResearchTrends/ethics.htm. The workshop was then designed to promote an active learning approach to training. According to Silberman and Auerbach (1998), it is important that participants be engaged in the training for learning to occur**.** This approach allows participants to acquire knowledge by being actively involved, as opposed to simply receiving information in a lecture format. An abbreviated module outline for the ethics training workshop is found in the appendix.

Training Procedure

A six-hour ethics training workshop was developed using an active training method based on the principles of learning that encourage participation. We conducted a pre-test and post-test and 3 months later administered a follow-up questionnaire. Quantitative and qualitative methods were used to analyze data. The sample population was comprised of 91 female office professionals located at a large northeastern university. Participants were randomly assigned to the treatment or control groups. The training and control groups consisted of 71 and 20 individuals. The majority of participants in both the training (79%) and control (70%) groups were between the ages of 40 and 59. Training and control participants attended an orientation meeting prior to the start of the study. This meeting included introductions, a brief overview of the study, distribution and collection of informed consent forms and completion of Questionnaire 1. The training group attended three two-hour training sessions that were led by the first author.

In Session 1, Valuing Professional Ethics, participants discussed the ethical responsibilities of the profession and the guidelines of the Code of Ethics for Administrative Professionals. This code was adopted in 1980 and amended in 1998 by the organization now known as the International Association of Administrative Professionals (IAPP). Most participants were unfamiliar with these guidelines. To gain practice in applying the Code, relevant office professional case studies were used. For example, participants discussed case studies involving confidentially, safety, and competence. At the end of Session 1, participants were asked to summarize the session and give four important points in the Code.

For Session 2, Tools for Ethical Decision Making, participants were asked to provide a quick summary of Session 1. A seven–step model for ethical decision making was introduced. Participants were presented with case studies involving ethical dilemmas and used the Code to guide their decisions. At the conclusion of the session, participants were asked to summarize four steps of ethical decision making and discuss how they used the Code in the case study activities. Questionnaire 2 was distributed to the training group at the end of Session 2 and collected the following day at the beginning of the workshop. Members of the control group were sent Questionnaire 2 via e-mail with instructions to return the document electronically or through campus mail.

In Session 3, Strategies for the Ethical Office, participants gave a quick summary of Session 2. We distributed 3 x 5 cards to each participant with a strategy for building an ethical office written on each card (DeMars, 1997). For example, "don't participate in unethical behavior." Participants were asked to tell the class how they could apply this strategy back in their offices. Ninety days later, Questionnaire 3 was sent to all participants electronically with instructions on how to return the questionnaire.

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Feedback from Participants

Knowledge and Use of Ethics Code

Post-training scores on a test of questions taken from the Code of Ethics for Administrative Professionals were higher than pre-training scores. This test measured a basic familiarity with the content of the Code. To determine transfer of training or application of the guidelines to ethical situations in the workplace, additional information regarding use of the Code was collected three months after completion of the training. Participants were asked to give examples of ways in which they had used the Code during the three months since training. Participants' responses to this short-answer question indicated that they consulted the Code when handling difficult situations involving work policies, confidentiality, and fairness issues. It is worth noting that participants indicated that they had responded to racist comments and jokes. For example, Participant 30 wrote: *They told a racist joke….and several people in the office heard. I felt it necessary to remark…it was not acceptable and everyone would appreciate if it didn't happen again.*

Usefulness of Training

Participants were asked immediately after training to respond to a short-answer question about how the training would be useful to them. The most frequent responses reported by trainees were that the training 1) gave them a heightened awareness of ethical issues, 2) would be an aid in ethical decision making, and 3) encouraged their creative thinking processes. After 90 days, participants again were asked about the usefulness of the training. At this point, the number one response, reported by two thirds of the respondents, was that training helped to heighten their awareness of ethical issues. A typical response was one from Participant 2: *It made me aware that everyone has a different perspective on issues and that knowing this and recognizing the needs for conversation and openness.*

In response to a question regarding what was the most useful element of the training, one third of the participants reported that they learned to examine others' perspectives. For example, Participant 25 wrote: *Being more open to other people's ways of thinking and opinions. Thinking of how an issue can affect many things, not just what is right in front of you.* Twenty-five percent of the participants indicated that they had communicated what they learned in the training to co-workers and supervisors at staff meetings. For example, Participant 3 wrote, *I have shared with others in my office what was discussed at the workshop and explained some situations that could have ethical implications.* Further, in the three-month follow up evaluation, office professionals recognized the need for ethics training for other groups and suggested that refresher workshops should be provided to stay current in this area.

Discussion and Implications

Retention and transfer of learning to situations outside the classroom or training setting is always a primary concern. Do people use what they learn? Does it make a difference in their workplace behavior? In this case, participants self-reported that the training was retained and used in ways that made a difference in their workplace behavior. Specifically, individuals seemed to become more knowledgeable about the code of behavior regulating their profession, more aware of ethical issues, and better equipped to make decisions on ethical matters.

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It was expected that participation in the workshop would lead to heightened awareness of ethical issues, since awareness of ethical of issues, ethical obligations, and professional responsibility for decision making were integral parts of the training. Most ethics training programs in academe, government, and corporations attempt to raise awareness on ethical issues to help employees make better decisions in the workplace (Ahmed, Chung, & Eichenseher, 2003). Additionally, ethics programs that focus on real-life work situations help participants recognize the skills they are lacking (LeClair & Ferrell, 2000).

The training model described here is one that could be used by people in a variety of professions. We started with a code of behavior, held focus groups to develop the content and stimulate interest in the training, developed and executed active training sessions in which a code of behavior was a focal point for discussions of professional ethical behavior, and finally asked participants both immediately after and 90 days after training to comment on the usefulness and application of the material learned.

In classrooms, discussions of values and ethics may result in debates about "which values?" and "whose ethics?" Although such discussions are useful in creating awareness of individual and cultural differences of opinion in determinations of ethical behavior, they are less useful in providing examples of what a specific profession considers to be ethical or unethical.
Starting with whatever code of behavior is relevant for the group is a way to focus ensuing discussion directly on standards of behavior for a specific profession. The language that is used in most of these codes still allows for considerable individual interpretation and discussion of cultural differences.

Appendix

Office Professionals Ethics Training Workshop Outline

Session 1: Valuing Professional Ethics
- A. Introduction, Overview, Background, and Objectives
- B. Point of the Profession
- C. Definitions
- D. Code of Ethics for Administrative Professionals
    1. History
    2. Purpose of Code
    3. Understanding the Code
    4. Application of Code

Session 2: Tools for Ethical Decision Making
A. Introduction and Objectives
B. Ethical Theories
C. Mental Filters
E. 7-Step Decision Making Model
Session 3: Strategies for the Ethical Office
A. Introduction and Objectives
B. Building the Ethical Office

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An Exploration of Multicultural Issues to Enhance Interaction with the Disabled

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Abstract

Numerous multicultural studies have focused on the issues and competencies required for successfully interacting with people of diverse backgrounds. While these studies have examined relationships based on race, ethnicity and gender, very few have focused on the issues and skills required to interact successfully with the disabled. This paper explores critical issues which interfere with relationships between disabled and non-disabled members of the supervision triad (supervisor/counselor/client) in a clinical setting, however, the findings can be extended to supervision in any organizational context. A model of disabled identity development is introduced to demonstrate the stages experienced by individuals when dealing with their disabilities. The paper concludes with a series of recommendations for improving the quality of relationships between the supervisor, the counselor-supervisee and the client.

Introduction

Interaction can lead to understanding and appreciation of the perspectives of different professional communities. Ford et al. (2005) states that as the level of perspective-taking between members of different communities increases, both will be better informed and both will experience fewer negative effects. But true perspective-taking requires an effort to create and maintain a relationship. This effort must begin with an understanding of potential underlying issues which frequently govern multicultural relationships.

Multicultural competencies include the knowledge, skills, professional awareness and personal awareness counselors need to effectively work with clients of diverse backgrounds. Ivey and Ivey (1997) suggested that multicultural competencies have focused primarily on racial/ethnic issues, but need to be expanded to include women's issues, gay/lesbian issues, and disability issues. Increasing attention has been given to multicultural issues in counseling and supervision. Constantine (2001) reviewed the multicultural supervision literature and found conceptual writings and empirical studies that addressed issues such as cross-racial dyads, racial and cultural identity attitudes, and interpersonal process issues. There is very little information and research regarding supervision and other diverse populations—especially multicultural issues surrounding disability. This paper will examine disability-related issues to increase multicultural awareness for supervisors and counselors when a member of the supervision triad (supervisor-counselor-client) has a disability.

Identification of Multicultural Issues

Christensen, Hands, Williams, and Ziomek (2002) identified Locke's Multicultural Awareness Continuum as a way to enable multicultural awareness within the supervisory relationship. Multicultural awareness is a life-long, developmental process and involves two types of awareness. The first is self-awareness, which leads to an understanding of one's own cultural "baggage" that is

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brought to every relationship and situation. Examination of intrapersonal and interpersonal dynamics is necessary to clarify one's projections of beliefs, attitudes, opinions, and values. The second type of awareness involves the supervisor's or counselor's awareness of their own culture. One's own cultural experiences create assumptions and miscommunications that can lead to expectations of behaviors. This approach may be helpful to counselors and supervisors for increasing multicultural awareness and exploring assumptions and attitudes toward people with disabilities and its impact on counseling and supervision.

Disability issues may arise in counselor supervision in a number of ways. Any one or combination of the members of the supervision triad may have a disability. For example, the supervisor may be working with a counselor who has a disability. Alternatively, the counselor may be counseling a client with a disability. The supervisor may even have a disability. Therefore, it is important for supervisors and counselors to examine their own assumptions and biases regarding disability and how these assumptions impact the counseling process and supervision.

Attitudinal barriers can emanate from any individual in the supervision triad. Wendell (1997) reminds us that not only can clients sense bias in their counselors, but counselors can sense bias in their clients. Supervisors and counselors need to monitor how they are viewed respectively by their counselors and clients. Supervisors and counselors may not be viewed by some counselors or clients as qualified or effective professionals because of bias.

Several issues must be considered when counseling clients or supervising counselors with disabilities. Hawley-McWhirter (1999a) suggested considerations to include: self-concept and identity; societal and familial attitudes; accessibility issues; understanding of the nature of one's own disability; self-advocacy skills; assertion of control over health factors; a critical awareness of one's own situation; and a positive sense of shared identity, purpose, or experience with peers.

Clients with disabilities may or may not enter into counseling with issues related to their disability. Even when the disability is not the focus, counselors should still research the issue to develop sensitivity, identify possible underlying issues, and increase their understanding of the client's experience. People with disabilities are part of society and may possess societal, familial, and racial/ethnic attitudes toward disability that have been internalized and are reflected in their interpersonal relationships with others. To reduce internal pressures and increase self-esteem, personal and societal attitudes should be explored with the client. (Hawley-McWhirter, 1999b) Societal attitudes shape a person's identity. Leierer, Hunt, Brumfield, and Terminie (2002) used the racial identity development model to develop a disability identity development model for people with congenital physical disabilities.

The Disability Identity Development Model

Disability identity development is similar to racial identity development in that both groups have historically been viewed as being abnormal and inferior to others; are subjected to societal and cultural bias which is perpetuated in the media; have their identity from birth and cannot hide or get away from their identity; have no public role models; and have had grassroots and political advocacy efforts to overcome bias. The major difference is that people with disabilities may lack family members and friends as role models as they mature. And unlike those dealing with gay-lesbian identity development, people with disabilities cannot hide their disability through their behavior

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from society, they do not have to choose when to "come out," and they notice that they are different much younger than those who are gay or lesbian.

Leierer et al. (2002) used the cross-racial identity model to describe five stages through which a disability identity might be developed. In the ***pre-encounter phase***, one is aware of one's own disability but knows little about disability issues and history. The identity is grounded in societal roles with no exploration of disability identity. In the ***encounter phase***, one becomes aware that he or she is different from others. In the ***emersion/immersion phase***, one begins to focus more on disability identity over other aspects of self. One may read more about disability issues, advocate for disability rights, and almost exclusively affiliate with people with disabilities. The ***internalization phase*** is characterized by not defining oneself exclusively by the disability and feeling more congruent with one's identity. The person will associate with people who reinforce a positive disability self-image. The final phase is ***internalization-commitment***, which is characterized by recognizing that disability is an important part of the self but not the only part. The individual remains committed to disability issues but does not exclude other parts of life.

Leierer et al. (2002) provides additional insight into disability identity development by identifying a series of focus shifts. During ***identity confusion*** the individual questions the influence of disability on one's life. During ***identity comparison*** the individual shifts between disability and non-disability identities and has feelings ranging from alienation and rejection to comfort and clarification. In ***identity tolerance*** the individual tolerates a disability identity but does not yet accept it. Individuals in this stage seek others with disabilities. During ***identity acceptance,*** individuals are accepting of a positive disability identity. Next is ***identity pride*** in which individuals take pride in their disability identity and immerse themselves in the disability subculture. They reject devaluation and societal attitudes and devalue those who do not have disabilities. Finally, during ***identity synthesis***, individuals accept disability identity and accept the positive and negative societal attitudes. They are more comfortable in discussing their disability with others. They positively accept those individuals without a disability who are supportive and devalue those who are not.

The Role of Societal Attitudes

Societal attitudes also shape the assumptions and beliefs that helping professionals hold about people with disabilities. People with disabilities face many barriers on a daily basis with the most difficult barrier being that of attitudes held by others (President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities, 1999). Attitudes can stem from fear, misunderstanding, hate, or ignorance. One attitude is that people with disabilities are seen as inferior or "second class citizens" because of a physical or mental impairment. Another attitude is to feel sorry for or pity for a person with a disability. Some believe that when a person is impaired in one area, this impairment "spreads" to other areas of that person's functioning. Others, through ignorance, dismiss the abilities of a person with a disability and do not give them an opportunity to highlight their abilities. Still others measure people with disabilities against different standards and provide "hero worship" to a person with a disability accomplishing an everyday task, hold positive and negative stereotypical ideas, or feel that people with disabilities are given unfair advantages. Still others deny the fact that some people even have disabilities because their disability is "hidden" in nature.

Societal attitudes shape expectations for others. Supervisors need to examine their own expectations when accepting a counselor with a disability. The President's Committee on Employment with

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People with Disabilities (1999) discussed an insidious societal attitude that people with disabilities are not expected to perform up to standards. Those that do can be seen as courageous or at times "over-achievers." Sometimes standards can be set too low and alienate coworkers or fellow students. Sometimes standards may be set too high to purposely have the counselor experience failure and to prove that a task is not achievable. Supervisors of counselors with disabilities need to self-monitor expectations when providing experiences and completing evaluations. If a supervisor has this societal expectation, the counselor may not be provided with helpful feedback or challenged to grow to be a more effective counselor. For counselors-in-training with disabilities, this lack of opportunity and helpful feedback can extend the time during counselor development when one can feel like an "imposter" and create even more doubt in one's ability.

Barriers to Empowerment

Hawley-McWhirter (1999a) identifies barriers to empowerment of people with disabilities to be due to culture, environment, loss of control, and the nature of one's disability. Societal attitudes toward people with disabilities are shaped by Euro-American culture. It is out of this culture that disability is defined in terms of the medical model and the economic model stressing individual and functional limitations. People with disabilities are victims of biology.

Individualism, equality, self-reliance, autonomy, freedom, and responsibility are valued in our culture. Hawley-McWhirter (1999a) promotes the sociopolitical view of disability which is based on the interaction between the individual and the environment. In this view, individuals are not blamed or held responsible for their disabilities. Society takes responsibility for environmental problems requiring intervention.

Environmental barriers are influenced by cultural views that can determine the amount of physical limitation experienced by a person with a disability. People with disabilities may experience a loss of control almost immediately or progressively depending on the disability. Loss of control and lack of information can lead to feeling powerless and unable to be a part of a decision-making process. Clients may experience guilt, anger, fear, and a decrease in self-confidence, self-esteem, and competence. An increase in self-advocacy skills and information can restore some control in their lives (Hawley-McWhirter, 1999a).

Supervisors and counselors need to be aware of dispositional factors (personal characteristics of an individual) and situational factors (characteristics outside the individual) in determining causal explanations or lack of progress. Kelly and Strohmer (2002) explored the effect of disabilities on the tendency of observers to make dispositional rather than situational attributions about the causes of the behaviors of others. While the findings did not support the expectation of over-attribution of dispositional factors, the researchers did find that the tendency to make dispositional attributions about the cause of a person's behavior decreased when the attributing subject had a disability.

The Language of Disability

A discussion of attitudes cannot be complete without examining the language used to speak and write about persons with disabilities. Many people who speak on disability issues promote "person-first" language (Angelocci & Connors, 2002; President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities, 1999). This reminds us that disability is a characteristic just like hair color or height and not the sole identity of the individual. Avoiding grouping terms reminds us that each person is an

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individual and diffuses stereotypical thinking. Avoiding negative expressions such as "wheelchair bound," "confined to a wheelchair," and "cancer victim" can lead individuals away from wallowing in the negative connotations that surround these phrases. Despite these warnings about language usage, one should not eliminate everyday expressions such as "I'll see you later." or "I've got to be running along."

Arokiasamy, Strohmer, Guice, Angelocci, and Hoppe (1994) studied the effects of politically correct language and counselor skill level on perceptions of counselor credibility. These researchers found that the use of politically correct, incorrect, or ultra-correct language had no effect on the participants' perceptions of counselor credibility. However, participants in this study seemed to be strongly influenced by the skills of the counselor. Arokiasamy et al. raised the issue that people with disabilities have adjusted to the public's general lack of sensitivity and can succeed in spite of it. Practitioners and educators should still strive to be sensitive to disability--especially in how they speak or write about it.

Recommendations

People with disabilities and other cultural groups continue to feel discriminated against even by those professionals who aspire to help. Several writers attribute a lack of multicultural awareness to a lack of multicultural training (Constantine, 2001; Wendell, 1997). Wendell outlines several recommendations for increasing multicultural awareness. These include increased in-depth coursework in multicultural counseling, increased active recruitment and retention of minority counselor educators and students, internships and practicums involving multicultural populations, and making sure that counselor educators and internship supervisors have a solid foundation in multiculturalism.

One method of increasing disability awareness is to provide sensitivity training for students, faculty, and off-campus supervisors to increase their knowledge about specific disabilities and comfort levels for working with individuals who have disabilities. Coursework could include more case vignettes describing people with disabilities and practical laboratory work could include counseling practice with people with disabilities. All coursework should include relevant disability information as appropriate to that course. Supervisors and counselors should be made aware of the attitudinal, cultural, and environmental barriers to increase their own self-awareness when working with persons with disabilities.

Galle, Nelson, Luse & Villere (1996) advises that supervisors cannot be effective communicators as long as they feel that their socio-culture position is clearly superior to others. Communication becomes difficult because of the inability to put one's self in another's place with no preconceived ideas. To overcome the natural tendency to judge and evaluate, participants in the supervisory relationship need training in listening with empathy. This refers to the ability to identify with or vicariously experience the feelings and thoughts of another individual. It requires the listener to focus on the other's emotions to understand the other's feelings. If successful, the listener will have a better sense of where the other person is coming from and a better sense of how to respond appropriately to the others concerns and needs.

The President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities (1999) suggested several questions to ask when making accommodations. Areas to explore include identifying an individual's functional limitations, what tasks are affected by these limitations, what equipment (if any) is needed

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to assist in performing tasks, environmental barriers, and policies/procedures that affect an individual's ability to complete a task. Angelocci and Connors (2002) discussed accommodations in the counseling process to include office accessibility, alternative communication methods, accessible assignments/homework, compatible counseling techniques for an individual's specific disability, and appropriate appraisal/testing modifications.

Hawley-McWhirter (1999b) suggested that counselors acquire knowledge about specific disabilities so that interventions can be modified such as imagery exercises or assertiveness training role-plays. This willingness to learn validates and shows respect for a client's experience. Counselors and supervisors must be creative in facilitating communication and meaningful experiences for clients and supervisees with disabilities. An excellent and extensive set of guidelines for interacting with individuals with various disabilities can be found at http://www.easterseals.org/.

Research regarding disability in the supervision triad would further expand the understanding of multicultural issues in supervision. This paper has described many issues that must be considered when a person with a disability is involved in the supervision process. The research studies that were cited in this paper reflected opinions of counselors or other allied health professionals toward people with disabilities or vice-versa. Research is needed to study disability dyads, disability identity, and the attitudes/expectations of supervisors toward counselors with disabilities. Likewise, how non-disabled counselors perceive competency levels for supervisors with disabilities could be studied. Disability research would add to the relatively young field of counselor supervision and help clinical supervisors to be more effective in this multicultural world.

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Compliments and Criticisms in Book Reviews from Business and Technical Communication Journals

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Abstract

This study examines compliments and criticisms in 12 book reviews from three academic journals related to business and technical communication to gauge the extent to which book reviewers balanced positive evaluation—compliments—with negative evaluation—criticism. This analysis, a pilot of a larger study of 48 reviews, shows that reviewers complimented more often than they criticized, but balanced their compliments and criticisms more than prior research suggested they would. Also, reviewers used specific and mitigated criticisms. Finally, books written by female authors received more compliments, suggesting that the gender of a book's author or authors may be related to the evaluation it receives.

Introduction

Many of us who teach and conduct research in business and technical communication read book reviews in journals like *Business Communication Quarterly, Journal of Business Communication, and Journal of Business and Technical Communication.* Indeed, Spink et al. (1998) found that 73% of humanities and social science faculty read 1-10 book reviews per month (p. 367). These faculty said that they found book reviews to be useful, but they also suggested that book reviews containing "critical comments" as well as positive comments are most valuable (p. 371).

These faculty may have been responding to the general perception that book reviews in academic journals tend to constitute a "chorus of praise" rarely diminished by substantive critique (Merritt, 1958, cited in Greene & Spornick, 1995, p. 449). That is, there seems to be a general perception that book reviews are overwhelmingly positive, perhaps stemming from anxiety over appearing uncollegial or incurring professional setbacks. Indeed, Hyland notes that reviewers' criticism can become "a potential source of friction because it can represent a direct challenge to a specific author" (2000, p. 41).

Indeed, prior research indicates that book reviews tend to be favorable; Greene and Spornick (1995) found that 70% of reviews from social science and humanities were favorable (p. 451). Motta-Roth (1996) found that just 12 of 60 book reviews in her study contained final negative evaluations, though she found that discipline played a role the extent to which reviewers used negative evaluations (p. 7).

This study examines compliments and criticism in 12 books reviews from three academic journals related to business and technical communication—*Business Communication Quarterly* (*BCQ*), *Journal of Business Communication* (*JBC*), *and Journal of Business and Technical Communication* (*JBTC*) (see Appendix A for a list of the book reviews). This study pilots an elaborated investigation of compliments and criticisms in 48 book reviews. The first aim of this pilot study is to understand the extent to which book reviewers balance positive evaluation—compliments—with negative evaluation—criticism.

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That is, the aim is to examine the ratio of evaluations like this one (Note that the **bold** numbers refer to the review list in Appendix A):

> That accessible tone is reinforced by the effective textual cross-referencing within the book, which reinforces its usability. (**7**, p. 498)

to evaluations like this one:

> Thus, the authors' dismissive stance of these techniques as just additional "HRM-style regimes" . . . with no empirical support is disappointing and suggests a fundamental lack of understanding of these techniques. (**8**, p. 213)

The second aim is to describe the topics of compliments and criticisms. Such a description can lead to a better understanding of what reviewers prioritize and value in books. Finally, the third aim of this study is to offer a preliminary examination of the relationship between gender and frequency of compliments and criticisms. This component of the study begins an analysis of the extent to which gender plays a similar role in the written and professional discourse of book reviews to the one it plays in spoken discourse.

Methods

The 12 book reviews examined in this study are a subset of 48 reviews examined in a more elaborate study. These 12 reviews, like the other 36, were selected because they were the most current reviews that met specifications for gender of book reviewer and book author needed for an equal distribution, as Table 1 shows.

Table 1
Quantities of Book Reviews from Each Book Review Type and Journal

Book review type	female reviewer / female author	female reviewer / male author	male reviewer / female author	male reviewer / male author
Abbreviation	**F / F**	**F / M**	**M / F**	**M / M**
BCQ	1	1	1	1
JBC	1	1	1	1
JBTC	1	1	1	1

Also, these reviews were selected because they were *not* reviews of edited volumes. Reviews of edited volumes were avoided because they likely address chapters written by authors of both genders, lessening the validity of this study's categorization of reviews by gender.

This study followed previous procedures for quantifying positive and negative evaluations. Compliments (i.e., positive evaluations) were defined according to Holmes:

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> A compliment is a speech act which explicitly or implicitly attributes credit to someone other than the speaker, usually the person addressed, for some 'good' (possession, characteristic, skill, etc.) which is positively valued by the speaker and the hearer (1988, p. 446).

This definition is used by Hyland (2000, p. 45), Hyland and Hyland (2001, p. 186), and Hobbs (2003, p. 249).

Criticisms (i.e., negative evaluations) were defined according to the definition used by Hyland in his study of book reviews:

> . . . the expression of dissatisfaction or negative comment on the volume [the book] (Hyland, 2000, p. 44).

This definition is also used by Hyland and Hyland (2001, p. 186) in their study of teachers' written feedback.

Following Hyland's (2000) method, entire sentences were counted as compliments and criticisms, as opposed to clauses, phrases, or words (pp. 45-46). Under this procedure, even if two evaluative words like *excellent* and *outstanding* or *incoherent* and *confusing* appeared in the same sentence, the entire sentence was counted as one compliment or criticism. So, for example, the following sentence was counted as one compliment, even though it contains two positive words:

> The introductory chapter offers an extensive, in-depth literature review of the central role of language in business settings. (**12**, p. 218)

Similarly, the following sentence was counted as a criticism, even though it contains three negative words:

> In addition to problems caused by crowding and inconsistent design, there are also omissions. (**4**, p. 120)

In other words, both positive and negative evaluations were categorized as whole speech acts. To determine interrater reliability of compliment and criticism coding, 398 sentences from 6 reviews not otherwise used in the study were coded as compliments, criticisms, or non-evaluative sentences. Interrater reliability was determined by calculating Cohen's Kappa. A Kappa score of .97 was found; this is a satisfactory level of reliability for identifying compliments and criticisms.

Results

The Raw Frequency of Compliments and Criticisms

Table 2 shows the raw frequencies of compliments and criticisms in interactions, organized by book reviewer and book author gender. In the 12 book reviews, 95 compliments and 68 criticisms were counted, making a total of 163 evaluations.

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Table 2
Raw Frequencies of Compliments and Criticisms

	Compliments						Criticisms				
	F / F	F / M	M / F	M / M	Total		F / F	F / M	M / F	M / M	Total
BCQ	2	5	7	4	18		19	0	0	2	21
JBC	6	10	7	6	29		1	11	1	5	18
JBTC	9	12	26	1	48		0	9	1	19	29
Total	17	27	40	11	**95**		20	20	2	26	**68**

The frequencies of compliments and criticisms ranged widely across the 12 book reviews. The frequency of compliments ranged from 1 to 26. The frequency of criticisms ranged from 0 to 19. However, 6 of the 12 book reviews contained 0 or just 1 criticism. In those 6 book reviews, the frequency of compliments ranged from 5 to 26. Of the 12 book reviews, only 2 contained more criticisms than compliments, placing them firmly in the category of "negative reviews." One of these 2 reviews contained 19 criticisms but just 2 compliments. The other contained 19 criticisms but just 1 compliment. Thus, this small sample of book reviews suggests that reviewers prefer compliments over criticisms.

Table 2 also shows just 4 reviews contained a similar frequency of both compliments and criticisms. The frequencies of compliments and criticisms in these reviews differed by 3 or fewer. These reviews could be called "balanced" in that they contained a similar amount of positive and negative evaluation. Each of the three journals contained a balanced review; *JBC* contained 2 of them.

The Frequency of Compliments and Criticisms per 500 Words

Of course, book reviews vary in length, so comparing frequencies of compliments and criticisms across reviews is unreliable. Rather, it is necessary to compare frequencies of compliments and criticisms in terms of a set number of words. In this study, the frequency of compliments and criticisms per 500 words was used for comparison of the book reviews. Table 3 shows the frequency of compliments and criticisms in the three journals in relation to the gender of the participants.

Table 3
Frequencies of Compliments and Criticisms per 500 Words

	Compliments						Criticisms				
	F / F	F / M	M / F	M / M	Total		F / F	F / M	M / F	M / M	Total
BCQ	1.25	1.95	4.14	1.32	2.16		11.87	0	0	0.66	3.13
JBC	3.44	2.50	3.76	1.27	2.74		0.57	2.75	0.53	1.06	1.22
JBTC	3.60	3.39	7.36	0.32	3.66		0	2.54	0.28	6.12	2.36
Total	2.76	2.61	5.08	0.97	**2.85**		4.14	1.76	0.27	2.61	**2.19**

Analyzing the frequencies of compliments and criticisms per 500 words reveals that book reviews may be more balanced in term of compliments and criticisms than either the raw frequencies of the present study or prior research (e.g., Greene & Spornick, 1995) suggest. Overall, the 12 book reviews contained a mean of 2.85 compliments per 500 words and 2.19 criticisms per 500 words. This finding suggests that reviews of business and technical communication books may not be as favorable as the book reviews analyzed by Greene and Spornick (1995).

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However, this result indicating a degree of balance between compliments and criticisms is complicated by an outlier in the data (cell shaded in Table 3). This book review contained 11.87 criticisms per 500 words, nearly twice as many as the review with the second highest frequency of criticisms per 500 words (6.12). With this outlier removed from the data, the average frequency of criticisms per 500 words drops to 1.31, substantially lower than 2.19. Under this revised analysis, compliments and criticisms are not as balanced, and book reviews appear to be more positive than they otherwise would. Therefore, under this analysis, the book reviews in this study support the findings of prior research, findings that suggest reviewers' preference of positive evaluation over negative evaluation (Greene & Spornick, 1995; Spink et al., 1998). Further research on a sample of more than 12 book reviews will show whether the outlier in this corpus is an anomaly or whether it truly signals greater variance in criticism frequency.

It is worth noting *why* the outlier review contains more criticisms than the other book reviews. It is dense with criticisms because the reviewer packed a relatively short review with short sentences, many of which contained criticism. For example, four criticisms appear in the following excerpt:

> Finally, there is Lehman's inconsistent use of syntax and terms. Imperative sentences in the tutorial segments are difficult to follow because the syntax and punctuation are not conventional. Some of the problems are the use of commas between commands with bold to signal either a menu or a choice. Terms are not consistent (**4**, p. 120).

Multiple short sentences that convey one criticism each and that are contained in a fairly short review create a high criticism to 500-word ratio. Any book reviewer, given a problematic book and a propensity toward short sentences, might generate a similar, criticism-dense review.
It is also worth noting that any topic is a potential candidate for multiple criticisms, as made clear by comparing the outlier review to the review that contained the second-highest frequency of criticisms. The latter review, excerpted below, focuses on content, not page design and editing, yet manages to convey frequent criticisms in little space:

> This focus on the designer leads to a second problem in the book: intention as something that can be known with some certainty. Early in the book, Fogg skirts the issue of intention by designers . . . . He goes on to further elide the issue when he states that . . . . (**6**, p. 253)

This second review contains sections that are dense with criticisms, like the section excerpted above, but it also contains stretches in which no criticisms appear. These stretches generate a lower criticism-per-500-word frequency. The two excerpts above come from the two reviews that contained more criticisms than compliments, making the two truly negative reviews in this study's corpus. It may be the case that reviewers who write negative reviews are more willing to focus on topics, especially coherence and quality, that positive reviews criticize less frequently. Further research could test this idea.

Compliments in Beginnings and Endings of Reviews

Perhaps the most salient pattern across the 12 book reviews was that the reviews tended to begin and end with compliments. Of the 12 book reviews, 8 begin with a compliment in the first few lines of the review. Two other reviews delay the opening compliment slightly; the reviewers began by

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introducing the topic of the book first, then moved into evaluation of the specific book under consideration. When these reviewers turned the focus to their respective books, they did so with compliments. In cases in which the book reviewers proceeded to offer some criticism of the book, their opening compliments equated to the "buffers" of bad news letters like refusals and rejections (e.g., Jablin & Krone, 1984; Limaye, 1988; Locker, 1999). Opening with a compliment seems to signal good will and honest intentions.

Two of the reviews that began with compliments focused not on the book, but on the author's reputation and prior work. Two compliments from one striking example are excerpted here:

> Even before the publication of her first book, *Writing Like an Engineer* (Erlbaum, 1996), Dorothy Winsor was known for remarkably skillful and insightful studies of engineers writing in the workplace. . . . Her findings from these studies challenged some of our field's most cherished notions about the lasting effects of technical writing classes on our students. (**3**, p. 505)

This review is 1 of 2 that began with author-focused compliments. This one contains 9 compliments and 0 criticisms. The other contains 26 compliments and just 1 criticism. Both reviews are very positive in their overall evaluation, suggesting that touting the reputation and prior work of the book author correlates with evaluations that are overwhelmingly positive.

In addition, reviews ended with compliments: 10 out of 12 did so. Only the 2 negative reviews did not conclude with compliments; these 2 ended with criticisms instead. This tendency toward ending with compliments is seen not only in the overwhelmingly positive reviews, but also in the balanced reviews. Some of these ending compliments explicitly recommended the text, as is the case with this review:

> *The Copyeditor's Handbook* is an excellent reference work for workplace writing and for copyediting that you will want to have on your shelf next to your dictionary and usage manual (**1**, p. 113).

Some recommended the book under review less explicitly, but displayed enthusiasm for the book nonetheless:

> Reading this book energized me and for several days kept me up nights working on lesson plans while the ideas were still fresh in my mind. I am anxious to apply what I have learned to my classes. (**5**, p. 125)

Clearly, book reviewers like to sandwich the bulk of their reviews between compliments. In doing so, reviews display professional courtesy and a willingness to acknowledge a book's contributions—no matter how limited those contributions may be.

Topics of Compliments and Criticisms

The topics of the compliments and criticisms in the 12 book reviews ranged from general to specific. Topics in this range are usefully categorized in Hyland's (2000) description of book reviews.

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As the categorization below shows, Hyland first divides compliments and criticisms into general and specific categories. Then, he further categorizes specific compliments and criticisms into five classes:

General: Overall discussion: e.g., coverage, approach, interest, currency, quality

Specific: Argument: e.g., insight, coherence, explanatory or descriptive value

Style:	Exposition: e.g., clarity, organization, difficulty
Readership:	Value or relevance for a particular readership or purpose
Text:	Exercises, index items, and extent and currency of references
Author:	Writer's experience, reputation, previous publications
Publishing:	Price, quality, and production standards of the book

(Hyland, 2000, p. 47)

Hyland's description is a useful one for analyzing the topics of evaluations in book reviews related to business and technical writing as well.

General compliments were more frequent than general criticisms and tended to appear at the beginnings of the reviews. These compliments evaluated the books' overall approach and coverage of its topic or its significance to its discipline. For example, one review began by noting that the book "is comprehensive and sufficiently complete" (**1**, p. 111). Another review focused on the book's importance: ". . . this book has implications for such matters as framing communication research, developing appropriate classroom discussions, and being confident that students have actually benefited from what they have been taught about communication" (**10**, p. 138). General compliments provided a sense of the reviewer's overall satisfaction with the book.

Most specific compliments focused on the style and readership of the books under consideration. One reviewer, focusing on style, notes that the book was "clear in its explanations of the science described" (**2**, p. 511). Other reviewers focused on the book's relevance to a particular readership. For example, one reviewer writes:

> The fun really begins in Chapter 4, "Classroom Strategies," when the author provides learning activities that are proven . . . to make classrooms come alive. (**5**, p. 124)

This compliment focuses on the benefits of the book for a particular group of readers—teachers.

As noted above, reviews seem to contain fewer general compliments than specific ones, likely because general criticisms undercut the worth of the book as a whole and, therefore, potentially are stronger in force than specific criticisms. Reviewers' most general criticisms focused on book authors' coverage of their topics, particularly topics ignored or examined with insufficient rigor:

> This book suggests a hypothesis its authors do not explore: that scientific writing itself has become more specialized. (**2**, p. 513)

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This criticism's strength comes from its suggestion that the authors have not fully examined the implications of their arguments—a more serious intellectual charge than claiming, for instance, that a particular audience may not understand or value a particular claim.

Specific criticisms tended to focus on style and readership as well. In terms of style, reviewers criticized books for a lack of clarity. For example, one reviewer wrote that ". . . several [anecdotes] were confusing and may lure the reader into the text" (**8**, p. 215). Also, reviewers criticized how well book authors met the needs of relevant audiences:

> While scholars will appreciate the care the authors take to highlight the methodological considerations and emphasize the complexity of their findings, teachers may find it difficult to extract relevant material, particularly in view of the linguistic terminology used by the authors. (**12**, p. 219)

In short, reviewers' general evaluations tended to be compliments, but in their specific compliments and criticisms, reviewers attended to style and readership. Other topics for evaluations that Hyland (2000) found in his study of book reviews were not apparent in the present study. For example, these book reviewers were less concerned with other potential topics for compliments and criticisms, such as currency of the book, organization, indexes, and price. Further research could code and quantify topics to gauge reviewers' priorities further.

Strategies for Mitigating Criticisms

The book reviews employed several strategies for softening the blows of their criticisms. The strategy used most often was a compliment-criticism pair. In these pairs, a compliment is syntactically joined but subordinated to a criticism. For example, one reviewer subordinated compliment (in *italics*) to mitigate his criticism (in **bold**) about an omission in the book's coverage:

> *Although the book is full of illustrations of social capital in action in a variety of settings*, **it does not examine the deeper context that may hinder the process**. (**9**, p. 89)

By pairing a criticism with a compliment, the reviewer generates, in Hyland's (2000) words, "a more balanced comment" (p. 55).

Book reviewers also used hedges to mitigate their criticism. Mainly, they used the modal verb *may* and the epistemic verb *seems*. Modal *may* is used to soften a concluding criticism:

> Readers *may* also find that Nisbett's analysis doesn't square with their classroom experience because their classes have students from the East who have traveled more . . . (**10**, p. 142)

Compare the use of *may* and *seems* to mitigate criticism with the use of the modal verb *will,* which indicates certainty:

> . . . both teachers and consultants *will* be disappointed due to layout and design decisions and some omissions. (**4**, p. 119)

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This criticism comes from the review that contained the most criticisms—the outlier review. It may be that negative reviews are not only more likely to contain mitigated criticisms but also to contain modals that strengthen the force of the criticism, like *will* and *should*.

Other interesting strategies that book reviewers used to mitigate their criticism were to give agency to the text (or elements of the text) rather than the book's author and to use passive voice to obscure the book author's agency. Both of these mitigation strategies (in *italics*) are exemplified in the criticism below.

> However, *the argument needs to consider* opposing views more thoroughly and *be developed* more fully to be entirely persuasive. (**2**, p. 513)

Here the reviewer moves responsibility from the book author to "the argument." She also deflects focus from the book author by using the agentless passive "be developed more fully."

Further research will make clear other strategies that book reviewers use to mitigate their criticisms. More importantly, further research can quantify mitigation strategies. Such studies could reveal reviewers' perceptions of the extent to which criticism topics affect their strength.

The Influence of Gender on Compliments and Criticisms

In some ways, this study's preliminary analysis of the relationship between gender and the frequency of compliments and criticisms in book reviews underscores the findings of previous research. Studies examining gender's relationship to politeness between females and males show that women receive more compliments than men (e.g., Herbert, 1990; Holmes, 1988). For example, Holmes found that women received 74.4% of the compliments she recorded (1988, p. 452). In the present study, book reviewers complimented books written by female authors with more frequency (per 500 words) than they complimented books written by male authors. This finding is shown in Table 4.

Table 4
Means of Given and Received Compliments and Criticisms per 500 Words

	Gender	Compliments	Criticisms
Given (by book reviewer)	F	2.68	2.95
	M	3.02	1.44
Received (by book author)	F	3.92	2.20
	M	1.79	2.18

Table 4 shows that books written by female authors received 3.92 compliments per 500 words. Books written by male authors received just 1.79 compliments per 500 words. Holmes, writing about spoken compliments in conversational interactions rather than written compliments in professional discourse, hypothesizes that "because compliments express social approval one might expect more of them to be addressed 'downwards' as socializing devices, or directed to the socially insecure to build their confidence" (p. 452). Here Holmes seems to be implying that females may receive more compliments because people—both males and females alike—feel more comfortable in evaluating females than they do males and because people feel a greater need to bolster females' confidence. Whether or not this finding holds in a larger sample of book reviews remains to be seen.

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If it does, it could indicate reviewers' conscious or unconscious attempts to create an academic climate that is hospitable to women.

This study's findings, however, also depart somewhat from the findings of previous research on gender's relationship to complimenting behavior. According to previous studies, females compliment more frequently (Holmes, 1988) and use more positive evaluative terms than males (Johnson & Roan, 1992). In the present study, female book reviewers complimented less frequently per 500 words than their male counterparts (F = 2.68; M = 3.02). However, most prior studies examined spoken and less formal discourse, namely face-to-face conversations (e.g., Holmes, 1988). The formal register of book reviews may diminish the relationship between gender and the frequency of compliments.

Far fewer studies have examined how females and males use criticism. In the present study, the outlier review with 11.87 criticisms per 500 words necessitates two descriptions. With the outlier included, female book reviewers criticized with greater frequency per 500 words than male book reviewers (F = 2.95; M = 1.44). This result is somewhat surprising, given prior research suggesting that females tend to prioritize and safeguard solidarity. Without the outlier, the frequency for females drops to 1.17 per 500 words, about the same as the frequency per 500 words for male book reviewers. So, the question of whether the outlier is an anomaly or not arises again.

In terms of criticisms received, with the outlier included, books written by males and females received about the same amount of criticism per 500 words (F = 2.20; M = 2.18). Without the outlier, the number of criticisms received by females drops to 0.27 per 500 words. In other words, if the outlier is accepted as an anomaly, one could speculate that gender was related to the number of criticisms received by a book author, with females receiving far less. It may be the case that book reviewers are less inclined to criticize books written by females. It may also be the case that potential reviewers are less inclined to review books written by females if those books deserve criticism (and largely negative reviews). Given the small sample size of this pilot study, though, these explanations are merely speculative.

Conclusions and Further Research

We tend to think of book reviews as evaluations of one book, determinations of how that book will meet the needs and interests of a particular audience, but book reviews also act as turns in a discipline's ongoing conversation about various topics, such as the effects of cultural differences on business meetings. Thus, there may be a tendency for book reviewers to avoid criticism. It is therefore important that reviewers be encouraged to criticize when criticism is warranted. Indeed, some prior research suggests that readers find reviews that contain criticism as well as praise more useful (Spink et al., 1998, p. 371).

In this pilot study, reviewers complimented more often than they criticized, used specific rather than general criticisms, and mitigated their criticisms, particularly with modals of uncertainty like *may* and *seems*. These findings suggest that reviewers are aware that they are engaging debates through the lens of a particular author's book and that they must be collegial conversationalists. Even so, this study shows that book reviews related to business and technical writing do not constitute the "chorus of praise" that earlier research on book reviews suggested they might be (Merritt, 1958, cited in Greene & Spornick, 1995, p. 449).

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This study also suggests that the gender of a book's author or authors may be related to the frequency with which that book receives compliments. In this study, books written by female authors received more compliments, a finding that parallels prior research on spoken discourse. It is possible that similar results would be found with a larger sample of book reviews, given that research has shown that women receive more compliments than men in general. Further research on book reviews can examine the role that gender plays in reviewers' use of compliments and criticisms.

For now, it is possible to say that book reviews in journals related to business and technical writing point to books' successes with compliments, but they also occasionally temper those delineations of successes with careful criticisms. A forthcoming study of 48 book reviews will tell more.

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Appendix A: Book reviews, ordered alphabetically

1. Armstrong, M. (2004). [Review of the book *The Copyeditor's Handbook.*] *Business Communication Quarterly, 67,* 111-113. **(M/F)**

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2. Black, S. (2004). [Review of the book *Communicating science: The scientific article from the 17th century to the present.*] *Journal of Business and Technical Communication, 18,* 511-514. **(F/M)**

3. Charney, D. (2004). [Review of the book *Writing power: Communication in an engineering center.*] *Journal of Business and Technical Communication, 18,* 505-507.
(F/F)

4. Griggs, K. (2002). [Review of the book *Creating dynamic multimedia presentations: Using Microsoft PowerPoint.*] *Business Communication Quarterly, 65,* 118-121. **(F/F)**

5. Gueldenzoph, L. E. (2002). [Review of the book *Impact teaching: Ideas and strategies for teachers to maximize student learning.*] *Business Communication Quarterly, 65,* 122-125. **(F/M)**

6. Johnson, R. R. (2004). [Review of the book *Persuasive technology: Using computers to change what we think and do.*] *Journal of Business and Technical Communication, 18,* 251-254. **(M/F)**

7. Kostelnick, C. (2003). [Review of the book *Envisioning science: The design and craft of the science image.*] *Journal of Business and Technical Communication, 17,* 495-498. **(M/F)**

8. McNary, L. D. (2004). [Review of the book *Organizational misbehavior.*] *Journal of Business Communication, 41,* 212-216. **(F/M)**

9. Muir, C. (2003). [Review of the book *Achieving success through social capital.*] *Journal of Business Communication, 40,* 86-91. **(M/M)**

10. Page, A. N. (2003). [Review of the book *The geography of thought: How Asians and Westerners think differently and why.*] *Business Communication Quarterly, 66,* 138-142. **(M/M)**

11. Schaub, M. F. (2000). [Review of the book *Playing the corporate language game: An investigation of the genres and discourse strategies in English used by Dutch writers working in multinational corporations.*] *Journal of Business Communication, 37,* 430-432. **(M/F)**

12. Williams, Andrea. (1999). Review of Francesca Bargiela-Chiappini & Sandra J. Harris. *Managing Discourse: The Discourse of Corporate Meetings. Journal of Business Communication, 36,* 218-219. **(F/F)**

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Integrating Global Conversational Customs into Business Courses

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Abstract

Integrating knowledge about global conversational customs into business courses can be very beneficial to students since the number of international students in U.S. schools is increasing and the number of foreign workers in U.S. firms continues to escalate. Understanding why people communicate differently is helpful in the classroom as well as in the work world. Many times instructors do not have the information they need to teach conversational customs in different countries. This paper gives instructors the resources necessary to make students aware of differences in global conversational customs around the world. Learning objectives for students, an instructional module that teachers may include in a variety of courses, a self-check exercise, and recommended instructional resources are included.

Introduction

When conversing with people from other cultures, it is important to know their customs to ensure that the intended meaning is conveyed and to avoid unintentionally offending them. For example, in many cultures it is appropriate to engage in light conversation or chitchat before getting down to business. Ignoring this custom would be viewed as rude and insensitive. When selecting a topic for small talk, it is important to know that some topics are taboo and that in some cultures using humor during conversations is inappropriate. The nonverbal aspects of conversations must also be taken into consideration. In addition, the extent to which people of another culture use informal language should be considered (Martin & Chaney, in press).

Integrating knowledge of global conversational customs into business courses can be very beneficial to students since the number of international students in United States (U.S.) schools is increasing. In addition, since the number of foreign workers in U.S. firms continues to escalate, knowledge of conversational customs in other countries would be helpful to students as they graduate and enter the workforce and as they travel abroad. By providing instructors with the tools to teach global conversational customs, they will be helping their students prepare for the global workforce; as well as preparing themselves for global travel and conferences.

The purpose of this paper is to provide professors with information on global conversational customs that can be included in a business communication course or management communication course by an instructor. This information is provided through learning objectives for students, an instructional module on global conversational customs that teachers may include in a variety of courses, a self-check exercise, and recommended instructional resources.

Learning Objectives for Students

The learning objectives for students include seven global conversational customs. After completing the module on global conversational customs, students will:

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- understand the importance of conversation, including small talk or chitchat,
- learn the forms of verbal interaction,
- consider cultural taboos when selecting topics for conversation,
- learn nonverbal aspects of conversations,
- understand how informal and alternative languages are used in the United States,
- learn how conversational humor is used in some countries, and
- learn specific guidelines for conversing with people in the countries with which the United States conducts a majority of its international business.

Instructional Module – Global Conversational Customs

The following instructional module provides information to be included on the importance of conversation, including small talk; forms of verbal interaction; conversational taboos; nonverbal aspects of conversations; conversational humor; the use of slang and other informal language; and conversational customs of the countries with which the United States conducts a majority of its international business.

Importance of Conversation

Conversation is spoken interaction between people; it involves an exchange of information and thoughts. In some cases, this verbal exchange is substantive, while in other cases it is nonsubstantive. Substantive verbal interaction would include such points as discussions of price and terms during intercultural negotiations. Nonsubstantive conversations would include chitchat at social gatherings and light conversation that occurs during the initial stage of negotiation in many countries. Appropriate topics for chitchat are often related to the culture. U.S. persons, who are considered masters of the art of small talk, discuss almost anything of a nonsubstantive nature, such as the day's news, the weather, and the physical surroundings. Recent movies or television programs, favorite restaurants, and their jobs are other preferred topics for light conversation (Martin & Chaney, in press; Samovar & Porter, 2004).

Problems occur with people of cultures who rarely engage in small talk and in cultures whose topics for chitchat vary. People of cultures who excel at small talk include the Australians, the British, the Canadians, the French, and South Americans. In some countries, however, small talk seems to pose problems. People of Finland, Germany, Japan, and Sweden, for example, are not particularly skillful at chitchat and encounter difficulty when attempting to engage in such discourse with persons from small talk oriented cultures. This can be awkward in social gatherings, such as cocktail parties, where people are expected to engage in light conversation with numerous guests over a period of several hours. Knowing what is acceptable for small talk is also important and a few country differences are included to show the wide range of what is appropriate around the world. In such Latin American countries as Argentina and Brazil, appropriate topics for conversation include sports, the arts, local sights, and international travels. In Chile asking questions about recommended tourist sights and discussions of Chilean art, history, and literature are appropriate. In the countries of Asia and the Pacific Rim, variations exist both in the importance of small talk and in the topics considered appropriate for discussion. The Chinese, who consider chitchat important during initial meetings, also talk about the weather and travel experiences. In Europe some countries appreciate social conversations, while others do not see the value of chitchat. The French, who appreciate small talk, like to discuss art, music, politics, and sports. Germans, on the other hand, do not like to discuss

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nonsubstantive topics, so conversations with them would be limited to such safe topics as sports, travel experiences, and world politics (Chaney & Martin, 2004; Turkington, 1999).

Forms of Verbal Interaction

Understanding how countries differ in their forms of verbal interaction is important. Sometimes there are differences within a country. The forms of verbal interaction are repartee, ritual conversation, verbal dueling or argument, and self-disclosure. In the United States the preferred form of interaction is sometimes called *repartee*, which involves speakers' taking turns. One speaker says a sentence or two, then glances away to indicate that the other person may take a turn. U.S. persons become irritated when people take long turns; rather than listening, they will be waiting for a signal that it is their turn to speak. In addition, speaking for too long a period encourages interrupting, which is considered rude behavior by members of the U.S. macroculture. In contrast, Africans and Middle Easterners tend to speak for extended periods of time (Althen, 2003).

Another form of U.S. conversation is *ritual* interaction. This form of conversation is culturally based; it involves standard replies and comments in a given situation. When people in the United States use the standard greeting of "Good morning; how are you?" they are not really interested in the other person's well being; the same is true of the standard reply, "Fine thanks; how are you?" These standard questions and replies are expected regardless of how the person is actually feeling. Ritual conversations in other countries may be quite different. Middle Easterners, for example, during ritual conversations will invoke Allah's goodwill, while Latin Americans will discuss health issues for long periods of time (Althen, 2003).

Argument is another type of verbal interaction. U.S. persons have been taught to avoid an argument since they feel it may have a negative impact on the relationship. While in some countries arguing would be considered an enjoyable pastime, U.S. persons in the South will avoid arguing by changing the subject or even thinking of a plausible reason to excuse themselves from the situation. However, people in the North enjoy a good verbal argument. A form of argument is *verbal dueling;* this is actually a friendly debate in which one person tries to gain dominance. These interactions are usually lighthearted and are not to be taken seriously. U.S. men, for example, may engage in verbal dueling when discussing sports. They will argue about which team is better or which team is going to win in an upcoming game. While politics is not an appropriate topic for verbal dueling in the United States, in other countries it is appropriate such as in England, France, and Germany (Althen, 2003).

Another form of verbal interaction is *self-disclosure*. Self-disclosure involves revealing information about one's self to develop a relationship. The amount of information people are willing to reveal varies with the culture. In the United States, people reveal little personal information during small talk (Althen, 2003). However, people in Mexico and Japan want to get to know the person before they do business with them to the point of developing a friendship and become frustrated with U.S. Americans due to their lack of disclosure.

Conversational Taboos

Conversational taboos are topics considered inappropriate when conversing with people in one's own culture and with people in another culture. Topics considered inappropriate in the United States include religion and politics since they are considered too controversial, and U.S. Americans prefer to avoid arguments. The exclusion of these controversial topics for small talk by U.S. people

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has at times led people of other countries to erroneously conclude that people of the United States are not smart enough to discuss complex topics. Terrorism and disasters, such as September 11, 2001, are also inappropriate topics for small talk. Some topics are inappropriate because they are too personal. Questions about personal income, how much a person paid for clothes or personal belongings, why they are still single, or why they have no children are too personal; also, comments on body odor and body weight are too personal (Althen, 2003; Chaney & Martin, 2004).

Conversational taboos in other countries vary from discussions of one's personal life to religion and politics. In Saudi Arabia one should avoid asking a man about his wife and should avoid political discussions. In Israel politics is an inappropriate topic for conversation as well; likewise, one should not bring up religion. In Iraq religion and politics should be avoided as well as personal questions and making comments on birth control policies. In South Africa one should avoid asking personal questions, such as a person's marital status, as well as discussions of ethic differences or politics. In Kenya it is acceptable to ask about a person's children but not the spouse; criticizing the government is inappropriate (Devine & Braganti, 1991, 1995).

Likewise, in Europe certain conversational topics should be avoided, including their personal lives or such personal questions as age or marital status. In Spain one should avoid questions related to a person's occupation, as what one does for a living is considered personal. When conversing with Italians, it is best to avoid making comments about the Mafia, Italian politics, taxes, and religion. In England, one should avoid discussions about religion and politics and should not make comments about Scotland or Northern Ireland (Braganti & Devine, 1992: Sabath, 1999).

In Latin American countries, topics to avoid include politics and religion as well as topics that would imply criticism of the country, such as economic problems, social class differences, and the government. In addition to these topics, asking about salary and other personal questions should be avoided in Brazil. (Brazilians may, however, ask personal questions of a visitor – even his or her marital status and religion.) In Bolivia and Colombia, one should not initiate conversations about drug policies or terrorism. In Chile discussions of wars and comments about social classes are inappropriate. A good rule to observe is to follow the lead of the Latin American host; do not make any derogatory remarks about any aspect of the country, its government, its people and their customs, or their sports teams (Devine & Braganti, 1998; Sabath, 2000).

Nonverbal Aspects of Conversations

Nonverbal aspects of conversations include eye contact, facial expressions, gestures, space, and touch. The eyes are important sources of communication during conversations. People in some cultures favor direct eye contact, while those in other cultures are uncomfortable with direct eye contact. Facial expressions while conversing are also important; they can confirm or negate the spoken message. Eye contact is considered very important by persons in the U.S. macroculture. During conversations, people are expected to give direct eye contact as this conveys respect and attentiveness (Althen, 2003; Klopf, 2001). Since the United States is a multicultural society, problems with eye contact between persons of the macroculture and those of various microcultures have occurred. People with Asian, African, Caribbean, and Latin American backgrounds have been taught that avoiding direct eye contact shows respect. This avoidance of eye contact, which is interpreted as disrespect by members of the macroculture, has resulted in confrontations between cultural groups in various parts of the United States (Gudykunst, 2004; Samovar & Porter, 2004).

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In other cultures, however, maintaining direct eye contact may be associated with disrespect. The Japanese, for example, would view eye contact as rude and disrespectful. Latin Americans and Africans likewise would associate eye contact with disrespect. Iraqis avoid eye contact while conversing, especially eye contact between men and women. In Egypt eye contact is associated with gender; men and women who do not know each other avoid eye contact. Germans, on the other hand, favor intense eye contact which exceeds the comfort level of U.S. persons as prolonged stares often signify sexual interest either between people of the same gender or the opposite gender. Likewise, in Middle Eastern countries, eye contact is very direct; they make eye contact for prolonged periods during conversations. In Saudi Arabia, making eye contact while conversing indicates respect and is very important (Turkington, 1999).

Facial expressions often reveal messages not being conveyed through verbal exchanges. Smiling during conversations generally means agreement with what the other person is saying or pleasure at receiving the message. In some countries of Asia and the Pacific Rim, people smile often, while others do not. People of Thailand, for example, smile a lot. The Japanese smile may be positive or negative; the Japanese may smile when they are frustrated, angry, sad, or embarrassed; they may also smile to indicate happiness. Thus, trying to interpret their smiles may be difficult. In European countries, people do not smile as readily as do people from the United States. In Latin American countries, people smile frequently; however, the messages conveyed by a smile may vary from "Thank you," to "Please," or "How may I help you?" (Samovar & Porter, 2004; Turkington, 1999).

Gestures are useful in adding emphasis or clarity to conversations. Gestures related to conversations typically include head and hand movements, as well as posture. People of the United States nod their heads up and down during conversations to indicate agreement (Althen, 2003). In Latin American countries, a certain amount of gesturing during conversations is expected. One gesture that should be avoided, though, is the U.S. "okay" gesture which has a vulgar connotation in many parts of the world. In Mexico avoid standing with hands in your pockets while conversing as this is considered rude (Devine & Braganti, 2000). In European countries variations exist in the types of gestures used during conversations and their meanings. Italians, for example, use a lot of hand gestures when conversing. People from Scotland, on the other hand, rarely use gestures and other forms of nonverbal communication during conversations (Braganti & Devine, 1992). In Asian countries, such as Japan, people will nod to indicate they are listening, rather than to indicate agreement. Pointing with the open hand instead of a single finger is customary in China (Devine & Braganti, 1998). In India people do not use a lot of hand gestures. They will shake their head from side to side to indicate agreement and nod the head up and down to signify disagreement (Samovar & Porter, 2004).

Respecting a person's need for space and touch is an important aspect of interacting with others. Standing too close to people who need a lot of personal space can be intrusive. People will back away if they feel the person they are speaking with is too close, which may be viewed as an insult in cultures in which people prefer to stand close together during conversations. People of the United States like to stand at least a couple of feet away from a person when conversing (Althen, 2003). Canadians, too, prefer to interact from a distance of about 2 feet. Touching, except between good friends, is uncommon during conversations. People of Iraq stand close together during conversations and will engage in physical contact. In Saudi Arabia people also stand close together and touch each other while conversing. Remembering not to back away is important as this would be insulting. In Asian countries people dislike being touched by strangers and prefer to keep a

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respectful distance when interacting with people in important positions. In India it is important to respect the other person's personal space – an arm's length away is recommended (Gudykunst, 2004; Klopf, 2001; Samovar & Porter, 2004; Turkington, 1999).

Informal and Alternative Languages

Informal language in the United States includes slang, jargon, provincialisms, acronyms, and euphemisms. Informal language is often used between people who work together and between family members and friends. *Slang* is an informal nonstandard vocabulary, which may consist of figures of speech, arbitrarily coined, or invented words; it has been referred to as abused English. Computer users, in particular, are known for using such slang expressions as *spike* (to describe a sudden increase in voltage) and *crashed* (to describe a computer that is not functional). *Jargon* is the technical terminology used by people in specific professions or occupational groups. Financial groups may use such expressions as *red ink*, meaning financial loss; and *bottom line*, meaning the actual price. *Provincialisms* are expressions that are used by people in a particular region (Samovar & Porter, 2004). While not considered Standard English, these colloquialisms are familiar to persons within the region. For example, people in the South say *y'all,* meaning you all. Regional variations in pronunciation are also common. In parts of North Carolina, for example, the sound of *r* at the end of a word is often dropped, so the word *father* is pronounced as *fatha* (Klopf, 2001). Likewise acronyms, initialisms, and euphemisms can be difficult for people outside the organization to understand. *Acronyms* are words formed from the initial letters or groups of letters of words in a phrase that are pronounced as one word. An example of an acronym is VAT (value added tax). Initialisms are abbreviations pronounced letter by letter, such as COD (cash on delivery). *Euphemisms* are inoffensive expressions used in place of words with negative connotations. Rather than describing people as old, using the term *senior citizens* has a more positive connotation (Samovar & Porter, 2004).

Argot and *cant* are considered alternative languages, which are used by those in a subgroup of a community. Argo is a vocabulary used by noncriminal, nonprofessional groups, such as truck drivers who use *smoky* to refer to the highway patrol. Cant is the vocabulary of undesirable co-cultures, such as gang members and people who are in prison. For example, gang members would use the term *homegirl* to describe a girl who hangs around gangs; those who are incarcerated would refer to serving a prison sentence as *doing a stretch* (Samovar & Porter, 2004).

Conversational Humor

As more and more companies conduct business internationally and as more people travel to other countries, frequent opportunities exist for people to interact in an attempt to develop a good relationship. Humor is used in some countries to establish a relaxed atmosphere before getting down to business. Types of humor have been categorized as *absurdity* (ideas that defy logical thinking); *exaggeration* (overstating sizes or experiences); *human situations* (situations in which the speaker or situation appear laughable); *playful ridicule* (sympathetic teasing); and *surprise* (related to feelings, events, or facts). Absurdity depends upon the other person's understanding that the statement is untrue. Gross exaggeration seems to be used more by people of the United States than by people of other cultures. Human situations can be humorous, especially those which emphasize your own shortcomings. Teasing can soften the impact when chiding someone for inappropriate behavior, such as arriving late for a meeting; e.g., "We'll have to punish you for this." (Barsoux, 1993). Surprise or an unexpected response can be effective in diffusing a potentially negative

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situation. For example, a clown's falling over may not elicit a laugh, because clowns are expected to fall; however, a prominent politician who falls off the stage provokes loud laughter. By examining these categories of humor, it becomes apparent that each can be used in a positive or a negative manner (Kushner, 1990; Metcalf & Felible, 1992).

People of the United States use humor in numerous business and social situations. Humor is viewed as an acceptable way to diffuse tension and to convey messages indirectly. In the United States, presentations are often started with a cartoon, analogy, or joke related to the topic to be covered. The intention is to establish a relaxed atmosphere before getting down to business. In these situations, however, it is considered in bad taste to use off-color humor, sarcasm, and ethnic, racist, or sexist humor (Chaney & Martin, 2004).

In addition to the United States, most European countries enjoy humor, including during business meetings. The British intertwine humor in their business discussions; they consider understatements as humorous. French humor tends to be intelligent and often at another person's expense. However, they would not use humor during meetings since it would be viewed as flippant. Italians enjoy humor; they like irony. In business situations, however, they can adopt a more formal and serious attitude. Italian humor can be self-deprecating – humor directed at one's own mistakes and vulnerabilities. German humor, on the other hand, is never self-deprecating. Admitting personal inadequacies, even in jest, is simply not done. Germans do not mix humor with business; they take business seriously and do not appreciate kidding remarks during business meetings (Axtell, 1999; Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1998).

The Japanese do not understand American humor; in fact, they take what is said quite literally. In a meeting with Japanese partners, a U.S. businessperson made the statement that the insertion of a certain clause in the contract would blow the deal out of the water; a Japanese colleague asked, "What water?" (Lewis, 1996). Japanese persons find little merit in jokes about sex, religion, or minorities; however, they will laugh out of politeness when a joke is told. Joking or kidding, which is so prevalent in the United States, would be inappropriate in Japan where courtesy, saving face, and indirectness are so important. The Japanese do not use self-deprecation. Some humor is acceptable internationally, e.g., slapstick, restaurant jokes, and humorous stories about golfers. Even so, people of certain countries have their own nuances to make the jokes or anecdotes amusing to members of their own culture. Stated succinctly, people do not all laugh at the same things (Axtell, 1999).

Country-Specific Information

Conversation suggestions for the countries with which the United States conducts a majority of its international business follow. These countries were identified through the U.S. Trade in Goods (2004) website.

In Canada, one should avoid taking sides in a discussion of whether or not Canada should be divided into French-speaking and English-speaking states. Maintaining eye contact during conversations is expected. Touching when conversing in inappropriate; removing sunglasses or hats during conversations is expected; and maintaining a reserved, formal demeanor is important. One should remember that Canadians are conservative when it comes to gesturing; avoid the "thumbs down" gesture, which is viewed as offensive (Bosrock, 1995).

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In China, one should use neutral facial expressions and avoid showing emotion when conversing. In addition, being modest when speaking about personal abilities is important; boasting is considered rude. Since speaking in a loud voice is considered rude, it is important to speak softly. Expansive gestures should be avoided; the Chinese use few gestures during conversations (Sabath, 2002).

In England, people are less direct during conversations. They appreciate the use of humor, especially humor that is self-deprecating and sarcastic. Discussions of politics and religion should be avoided; keeping a suitable distance while conversing and avoiding touching are also important (Braganti & Devine, 1992; Sabath, 1999; Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1998).

In France, appropriate topics of conversation include sports, art, music, food, wine, and travel experiences. Personal topics should be avoided. The French enjoy engaging in lively discussions; they enjoy a debate. Maintaining eye contact during conversations is important but a prolonged gaze should be avoided (Braganti & Devine, 1992; Mole, 1998).

In Germany, it is wise to select safe topics for conversations, such as sports, travel, and world politics. Germans prefer to talk about substantive topics rather than engage in small talk. One should avoid such topics as personal income, family life, and World War II. Smiles should be used with discretion as Germans smile only when conversing with people they know well. Using the hands for emphasis during conversations should be avoided; it is better to appear calm than to use flamboyant gestures (Mole, 1998; Sabath, 1999).

The Japanese like to talk about food preferences and other topics related to eating. They tend to ask personal questions; they view it as a way of showing interest. One should avoid discussing politics, religion, or how much things cost. Periods of silence during conversations are common, as the Japanese value silence. Speaking softly and avoiding a show of emotions when conversing is important. Direct eye contact should be avoided. Keeping a suitable distance during conversations is recommended; it is well to remember that the Japanese do not like to be touched during verbal interactions (Klopf, 2001; Sabath, 2002).

In Mexico, talking about family or other personal topics is quite appropriate. Other topics considered appropriate for small talk include the weather, places visited in Mexico, travel plans, and soccer. Discussions of politics should be avoided, as well as discussions of the Mexican-American War and border violations. Since constant eye contact is perceived as aggressive, it is important to break eye contact frequently while conversing. Touching the arm or patting the back of the person when conversing is common. Mexicans prefer to stand close while interacting; stepping back is considered rude. Placing hands on hips or hands in pockets during conversations should be avoided (Bosrock, 1995; Klopf, 2001; Sabath, 2000).

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In the Netherlands, appropriate topics for light conversation include sports, travel, and world affairs. Discussions about money should be avoided. Standing too close during conversations, as well as patting people on the back or touching them in public, should also be avoided. It is important to maintain direct eye contact while conversing (Braganti & Devine, 1992; Sabath, 1999).

In South Korea, standing close during conversations is common, but one should avoid continuous eye contact as this suggests aggressiveness. Excessive smiling during conversations is inappropriate as this is associated with shallow persons. In addition, touching older persons or those of the opposite gender while interacting should be avoided (Devine & Braganti, 1998; Sabath, 2002).

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In Taiwan, appropriate conversational topics include the weather, travel experiences, and the family. One should be prepared for personal questions and should avoid such topics as communism and politics. Maintaining a reserved demeanor and talking softly are recommended. One should use a minimum of eye contact and keep an appropriate distance when conversing; touching the other person should be avoided (Devine & Braganti, 1998; Sabath, 2002).

Self-Check Exercise, Country-Specific Information

The following self-check exercise can be administered following the presentation of the information provided above on conversational customs in the countries with which the United States conducts most of its international business.

1. Canadians prefer to maintain a reserved, formal demeanor during verbal interactions.
2. The Chinese use few gestures during conversations.
3. People of England do not appreciate sarcasm and self-deprecating humor.
4. The French enjoy discussing personal topics.
5. Germans use expansive gestures.
6. The Japanese are uncomfortable with periods of silence during conversations.
7. Mexicans typically avoid discussions about their families.
8. In the Netherlands, discussions about money should be avoided.
9. South Koreans smile a lot during conversations.
10. In Taiwan avoid touching the other person during conversations.

Answers: 1. T; 2. T; 3. F; 4. F; 5. F; 6. F; 7. F; 8. T; 9. F; 10. T

Instructional Resources

Resource materials that are available to augment lectures include electronic media and reference books.

Electronic Media

Videos can be used effectively to supplement lectures and to add interest to class discussions. Examples of videos currently available are the following:

- *Doing Business in Asia* (1990), four videocassettes, each containing a case study on Japan, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and South Korea. Originally prepared by Northwest Airlines, these videos include nonverbal communication and are now available from Big World Media.

- *Doing Business in Latin America* (1997), a series of videos on the countries of Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Mexico. Each video has a section on communication. Available from Big World Media.

- *Doing Business in Southeast Asia* (1998), a series of videos on the countries of Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia. Available from Big World Media.

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- *Intercultural Communicating* (1999). Video 2 in the Global One series is on intercultural communication. Available from Big World Media. (A booklet describing other videos available from Big World Media may be secured from www.bigworldmedia.com.)

Reference Books

Numerous reference books related to global differences in conversations are available. Books related to intercultural business communication which contain sections on conversation include books by Devine and Braganti, Sabath, and Turkington. The five books by Devine and Braganti include country-specific information on Africa (1995), Asia (1998), Europe (1992), Latin America (2000), and the Middle East (1991). The three books by Sabath on *International Business Etiquette* cover Asia and the Pacific Rim (1999), Europe (1999), and Latin America (2000) and contain country-specific information on numerous topics, including conversation. Turkington's book, *The Complete Guide to Cultural Etiquette* (1999), contains country-specific information on conversation, including topics considered safe for light conversation. Books addressing global differences in communication, including conversation topics and nonverbal aspects of conversations, include Klopf's book, *Intercultural Encounters* (2001), Jandt's book, *An Introduction to Intercultural Communication* (2004), and Samovar and Porter's *Communication between Cultures* (2004).

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The Effect of Rater Training on Reducing Social Style Bias in Peer Evaluation: A Pilot Study

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Abstract

This study employed a quasi-experimental control group design in a university setting to test the effect of a rater training program on reducing Social Style bias in intra-group peer evaluations after controlling for ability based on GPA. Comparison of rating scores of the experimental group to the control group indicated minimal social style rating bias in the experimental group while significant bias was exhibited in the control group. Implications for college instructors who use peer evaluations for grading in team projects are discussed.

Introduction

Many college instructors use intra-group peer evaluation as part of their grading system in collaborative team projects to control "social loafing" and evaluate student contributions to both process and task (Barkley, Cross, & Major, 2005). As typically defined, intra-group peer evaluation is the process of having team members rate each other on a given set of performance or personal characteristics against a set of rating scales (Kane & Lawler, 1978).

Because peer evaluations are used as part of the grading process, instructors should be concerned with the validity and reliability of the ratings. For example, one study of college students (Johnson & Smith, 1997) identified rating bias based on gender and minority status. Another study suggests that students may have negative attitudes about assessing group members for grades and may conspire to give each other good scores (Greenan, Humphreys, & McIlveen, 1997). Indeed, we can expect peer evaluations in educational settings to exhibit virtually every form of rater error that has been documented with traditional supervisor, peer, and self-appraisals in the workplace, including race, gender, leniency, halo, and restriction of range (Farh, Cannella, & Bedeian, 1991; Heslin, 2005).

One particular type of rating error relevant to the collaborative team context is the *similar-to-me* effect (Latham & Wexley, 1982). This error is a tendency on the part of raters to judge more favorably those perceived to be similar to themselves in personality, attitudes, or background. A recent study, (May & Gueldenzoph, in press), documented the *similar-to-me* effect based on Social Styles, a theory that sorts interpersonal styles into four categories (Analytical, Driver, Expressive, and Amiable). May and Gueldenzoph found, after controlling for ability, like-rating-like groups (e.g., Analyticals rating Analyticals) exhibited significantly higher ratings. In addition, in keeping with Social Style Theory, opposites rating opposites (e.g. Analyticals rating Expressives) provided significantly lower ratings, indicating rating error and bias.

This present study extends the May and Gueldenzoph research by addressing the question: "Can we reduce or eliminate bias related to Social Styles through rater training?" The study is important for two reasons. First, because peer evaluation ratings are often used as part of the grading process in student group projects, we should be concerned about the validity, reliability, and fairness of the

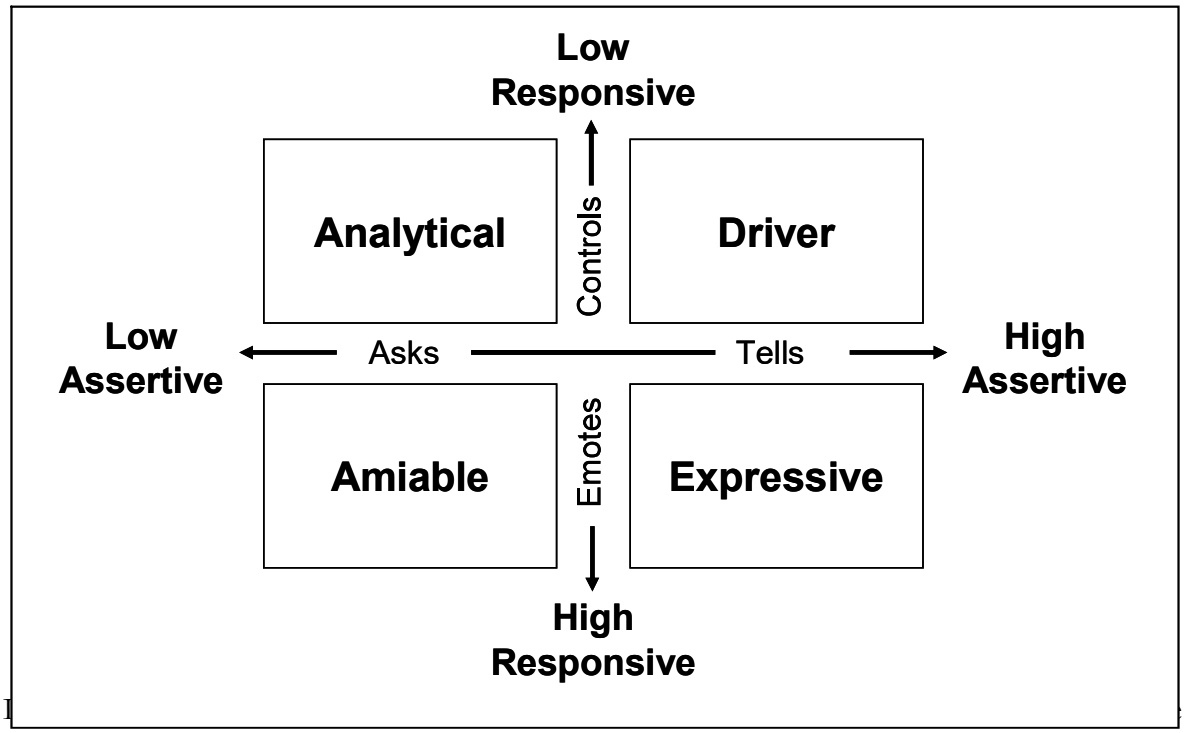
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process. As instructors, we want students to evaluate peer behaviors related to task and process in their team projects, not based on personality, race, gender, or other factors. Second, we know that our students will be asked to use evaluation skills in the workplace, and we need to instruct them on how to accurately access the performance and behavior of others. If a practical rater training intervention can be developed for the college setting that can help reduce bias and rating errors, this would be a positive contribution to both the grading process and preparing our students for effectiveness in the workplace.

Theoretical framework: Social Style Theory

Dr. David Merrill, an industrial psychologist, developed the Social Style Model nearly 40 years ago (Tracom, 1991). Social Style is defined as a particular pattern of actions that others can observe and agree upon for describing a person's behavior. The theory is based upon the analysis of adjective checklists completed by three to five acquaintances of the individual being assessed. Through factor analysis, Merrill identified two reliable scales, which he designated as assertiveness and responsiveness. Assertiveness is defined as the effort a person makes to influence the thinking and actions of others. It is a measure of whether a person appears to ask or tell. Responsiveness, on the other hand, refers to the extent to which a person reacts to influence or stimulation with a display of feelings – whether a person appears to control or express his or her emotions. As Figure 1 indicates, the two dimensions of assertive and responsive behavior can be combined, resulting in four "styles" of observable behavior.

Figure 1
Social Styles Model



independent, results oriented, candid, and pragmatic; however, they can also be poor collaborators, impersonal, abrasive, and shortsighted. If you are more responsive and more assertive, you are

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Expressive. Strengths include being articulate, fast-paced, visionary, and fun loving; however, they can also be poor listeners, impatient, impractical, and distracting. People who are more responsive and less assertive are Amiable. This social style is often diplomatic, dependable, supportive, and people-oriented; yet they can also become conflict avoiders, dependent, permissive, and inattentive to task. Finally, those who are less responsive and less assertive are Analytical. This type is often prudent, painstaking, task-oriented, and systematic; but they can also be indecisive, nitpicky, impersonal, and bureaucratic.

Because social style describes how a consensus of people perceive the way another person behaves in interpersonal situations and how they are impacted by that individual's behavior, the theory has been used in a variety of skill training programs related to communication, sales, and team dynamics (Bolton & Bolton, 1996). Concerning team dynamics, Social Style Theory is often used to help facilitate conflicts because team members with opposite social styles (diagonals on the social style model in Figure 1) tend to have behavior patterns that are annoying to the opposite style (Merrill & Reid, 1999; Bolton & Bolton, 1996). For example, Analyticals who are persistent, exacting, orderly, and very task focused can be irritated by Expressives who are talkative, people oriented, and may be less focused or disciplined in terms of details and deadlines. According to Merrill and Reid (1999):

> For most of us, styles that most closely resemble our own create the least discomfort for us, and we feel positive about individuals with that behavior. Styles that differ most from our own probably create tension – violate our comfort zones – and we may tend to place a negative label on that behavior. (p. 61)

This tendency for feeling positive about those with behavioral styles similar to our own and the tendency for conflict with those who have opposite social styles could be a source of bias when team members are asked to rate each other's performance. Social Style Theory suggests that team members with opposite social styles (diagonals on the social style model in Figure 1) may rank each other less favorably because their preferred behaviors of social interaction tend to conflict. Conversely, we could expect team members who are rating their peers who have the same social style to provide higher ratings. Team members who are rating members with adjacent styles (for example, Analyticals rating Drivers), because they share some behavioral patterns, will tend to have scores that fall between likes rating likes and opposites rating opposites. The study by May & Gueldenzoph (in press) provides support for this expected rating bias.

The Literature on Rater Training

The research on rater training is extensive. Smith (1986), in his review of the rater training literature, identified three training methodologies that lead to improved rating accuracy:

1. *Rater Error Training:* presenting raters with examples of common rating errors such as leniency, halo, central tendency, and contrast errors, and alerting raters to potential biases such as the similar-to-me effect.
2. *Performance Dimension Training:* familiarizing raters with the dimensions and rating scale by which the performance is rated.
3. *Performance Standards Training:* providing raters with a frame of reference for rating performance by providing feedback on practice ratings compared to "true" ratings assigned by trained experts.

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According to Smith, the research suggests that the best way to increase rating accuracy is to combine the three approaches. He concluded that "the more actively involved raters become in the training process, the greater the outcome. Providing raters with the opportunity to participate in a group discussion along with practice and feedback exercises produces better results than presenting the training material through a lecture" (p. 37).

Woehr and Huffcutt (1994), in their review of the rater training literature, included a fourth dimension to the training approaches – behavioral observation training. This approach focuses on strategies to improve and recall observations of specific behaviors related to the performance dimensions through the use of techniques such as note taking, diaries, and frequency counts. According to Woehr and Huffcutt, the research data suggest that behavioral observation training may be a very effective approach to increase rating accuracy. Like Smith (1986), they also argue for a combination of rater training strategies to increase the effectiveness of rater training.

Concerning bias related to personality style preferences, the social styles literature also suggests further approaches to moderating bias by developing understanding of and appreciation for the social styles of others. For example, both Merrill and Reid (1999) and Bolton and Bolton (1996) provide protocols for helping individuals assess and understand the strengths and weaknesses of their own styles, identify the styles of others, and learn how to deal with other styles in a versatile manner.

Taking into account Social Style Theory and the literature review, a rater training program was designed and implemented in a university setting. The objective was to test the following hypothesis: *After controlling for differences in ability based on GPA, students participating in the rater training program will demonstrate less rating bias based on Social Styles when compared to students that did not receive the training.*

Bias in regard to subgroups is considered to be in evidence when (a) raters of one subgroup give higher evaluations to ratees of their own subgroup and lower evaluations to ratees in different subgroups, and (b) the differences are not accounted for by concomitant differences in relevant ability, education, or experience factors (Waldman & Avolio, 1991).

Methods

Subjects. Participants in the study included 58 undergraduates (juniors) from three sections of the Managerial Communications course in the School of Business at Clayton State University. All three sections were taught by the researcher. The gender mix was 71% female, and 64% were classified as minority (predominantly African-American). The average age was 25, and 38% considered themselves to be "non-traditional" students, i.e., out of school for 4 or more years prior to returning for a degree. Non-traditional students tend to be older, with full-time employment and a family.

Project Teams. Teams were formed at the beginning of the semester by using a stratified random method based on grade point average (GPA) and gender. Assignments were then manually adjusted to ensure diversity based on ethnicity and major. Adjustments were also made to ensure each team had a representation of the requisite skills sets (research, writing, and computer skills) based on self-rated surveys. The first half of the semester, students worked collaboratively in their teams on a variety of managerial communication competencies. The project was introduced at midterm and was

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designed to be a capstone experience, requiring the students to integrate and apply the skills they had studied the first half of the semester. The project, in the form of a business simulation, required each team to collect data, reach consensus on a recommendation to management, prepare a report, and make an oral presentation. Each team member completed a Social Styles assessment of other team members at the conclusion of the project. Peer evaluations, as part of the grading process, were also completed at the conclusion of the project.

Experimental and Control Groups. The study employed a quasi-experimental non-equivalent control group design (Campbell & Stanley, 1963). Because each class section represented a different delivery format (traditional classroom, hybrid, and online), teams within each class section were randomly selected into experimental and control groups. A *t-test* indicated no significant difference between the groups based on GPA or age. Table 1 provides a comparison of the relevant characteristics of the two groups and demonstrates that the experimental and control groups were very comparable, which, according to Campbell and Stanley, provides an effective control for the study.

Table 1
Comparison Between Test and Control Groups

Variable	Test Group n = 32	Control Group n = 26
Grade Point Average (GPA)*	2.72	2.64
Age**	25.8	24.2
Female	68.8%	73.0%
Minority Race (Non-White)	62.5%	65.4%

*$t(05,56) = .741$, $p = .462$; **$t(05,56) = 1.01$, $p = .315$

Rater Training Program. Because of the time-bind most communication instructors face in covering existing material in the classroom and in an effort to be parsimonious, the training design for this pilot study incorporated two of the four rater training methodologies: error training (with an emphasis on similar-to-me effects expressed in terms of Social Styles) and performance dimension training. Table 2 provides an outline of the training content. The learning module was developed as a narrated PowerPoint presentation using the software application *softTV* and delivered as a streaming file via WebCT Vista. The learning module was available to students 2 weeks before they were required to complete peer evaluation ratings. The control group received a "placebo" module of the same length related to other course subject matter (listening skills). Students also completed a short quiz to check understanding and verify completion of the modules. Bonus points were offered for completion of the modules and only two students (in the control group) were deleted from the study for non-compliance.

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Table 2
Rater Training Program Content

Title: Evaluating Peer Performance in Team Projects

A. Introduction
1. Importance of evaluating performance of others
2. The goal: fair, unbiased, accurate - based on performance
3. Rating scale overview

B. Typical Rating Errors
1. Restriction of range
2. Halo effect
3. Similar-to-Me effect
4. Introduction to Social Styles
5. Avoiding rating bias based on Social Style

C. Evaluation Criteria Related to 10-Point Scale
1. Attended all meetings
2. Carried fair share of workload
3. Delivered quality work on schedule
4. Easy to work with
5. Communicated with the group

Social Style Measure. Each participant's social style preference was assessed using the Social Style Profile (SSP) instrument developed by Wilson Learning Corporation. The SSP has been used by Wilson Learning to introduce the social styles concept in a variety of workshops that teach interpersonal versatility (e.g., selling skills). Respondents are asked to rate an individual on 30 adjective descriptors (e.g., "takes charge") using a 7-point Likert scale ranging from low (1) to high (7). Wilson Learning provides a protocol for scoring the instrument to determine the degree of assertiveness and responsiveness based on mean scores and assigning an individual to one of the four social style quadrants (Analytical, Drive, Expressive, or Amiable) based on norms from a national database. The SSP has been used to profile over 250,000 people and found to be a reliable and valid measure of the social style dimensions (Wilson Learning Corporation, 1990; Leimbach, 1991). Using Cronbach's Alpha, the internal reliability of the assertiveness dimension was .89, and the responsiveness dimension was .91. Inter-rater reliability for multiple observers using Erbel's Interclass Correlation formula has been found to range from .77 to .85 for the Assertiveness dimension and from .80 to .89 for the Responsiveness dimension (based on 3 and 6 observers, respectively). Content validity is indicated by the use of the appropriate descriptive adjectives of behavior. The scales have been subjected to factor analysis, and only those scales with factor loadings at or above .60 (with no secondary loading above .40) on the appropriate dimension were used.

Student Performance Measure (Peer Evaluation Score). Students scored the participation and contribution of each team member to the group project by using an intra-group evaluation form (Gueldenzoph &

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May, 2002). The form required the student to rate each team member, including self, on five behaviors using a ten-point scale for each behavior with ratings from 10 = strongly agree to 1 = strongly disagree, resulting in a maximum score of 50 points. Example behaviors from the peer evaluation form include (a) "attended every group meeting (both in and out of class)," (b) "carried fair share of workload," and (c) "delivered quality work on schedule." The intra-group evaluation form was developed with input from students across multiple classes. Students were asked to identify the behaviors they felt to be the most important for a group project. Using a consensus voting technique, students agreed on the five most important behaviors for a group project, which were then included in the evaluation form. Subsequent factor analysis based on the data from this research study found that all five items loaded on one construct with factor loadings ranging from .803 to .944. The average factor loading across the five items was .888. Cronbach's Alpha was .933.

Ability Measure. GPA was included to serve as a proxy for ability. Similar measures related to academic performance, such as test grades, have been used as controls in other studies involving students and peer evaluation (e.g., Johnson & Smith, 1997). GPA was chosen because, based on experience and interviews with students and other instructors, it is not only an indicator of cognitive ability but also tends to be a predictor of student participation levels and contribution in group projects. Because a large portion of the group project grade was shared among team members, higher GPA students tended to contribute extra effort to make sure their grade was protected, while lower GPA students were more likely to be "social loafers."

To analyze the resulting data, a table was constructed that captured each team member's peer evaluation rating by other team members and the respective social styles (based on the SSP) for the rater and each person being rated. The table also included basic demographic data for raters and ratees and institutional grade point average (GPA) for ratees.

Given the four social styles, there are 16 possible rating combinations of one style rating another. For the purposes of this research, the data was collapsed into three categories: like- rating-like (e.g. analytical rating analytical), adjacent-rating-adjacent (e.g., analytical rating driver), and opposite-rating-opposite (e.g., analytical rating expressive).

Results

Table 3 presents the means and standard deviations for the peer evaluation scores and GPA scores for the test and control groups. A one-way multivariate analysis of variance was used to examine the subgroup differences for social style with peer evaluation scores and ratee GPA as dependent variables for the group that received rater training. The procedure yielded no significant difference among the social style subgroup means for peer evaluation scores, $F_{(.05,2,113)} = .848$, $p = .431$ and no significant difference between the mean GPA scores, $F_{(.05,2,113)} = .085$, $p = .918$.

The same procedure was used to analyze the control group data. The MANOVA yielded a significant difference among the sub-group means for the peer evaluation scores for the control group, $F_{(.05,2,87)} = 3.131$, $p = .049$, but no significant difference between the mean GPA scores, $F_{(.05,2,87)} = 1.282$, $p = .450$. A test of homogeneity of variances for score indicated equal variances could not be assumed (Levene's test, $F = 6.02$, $p = .004$). Therefore, Dunnett's T3 multiple comparison procedure for post hoc analysis was used (α .05). The post hoc analysis revealed the

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mean evaluation score for Category 1 (like rating like) to be significantly higher than Category 3 (opposite rating opposite).

Table 3
Mean Peer Evaluation Scores and Ratee GPA by Social Style Rating Subgroups

		Test Group		Control Group	
Social Style Rating Group	Statistic	Evaluation Score	Ratee GPA	Evaluation Score	Ratee GPA
Like-Rating-Like	N	40	40	34	34
	M	44.20	2.71	47.21	2.58
	SD	6.54	.49	7.09	.36
Adjacent-Rating-Adjacent	N	54	54	38	38
	M	44.52	2.70	43.61	2.70
	SD	5.26	.36	8.52	.53
Opposite-Rating-Opposite	N	22	22	18	18
	M	42.55	2.74	41.17	2.58
	SD	7.02	.46	11.67	.39
Total	N	116	116	90	90
	M	44.03	2.71	44.48	2.62
	SD	6.07	.42	8.96	.44

Discussion

The results indicate support for the hypothesis. The rater training appears to have made a difference in reducing bias in the experimental group, as no significant difference was identified between the rating subgroups. In contrast, the results for the control group follow the same pattern as identified in the May and Gueldenzoph (in press) study. As predicted by social style theory, students rated team members with the same social style significantly higher than they rated team members with opposite social styles, indicating bias, since there was no difference in ability based on the GPA of the rating subgroups. However, the results have to be interpreted with caution due to the small sample size and extreme standard deviation of the opposites-rating-opposites in the control group. Future studies will include larger sample sizes and an updated rater training program based on student feedback from this pilot study. Additional indicators of rating errors, based on such measures as inter-rater reliability, will also be investigated.

Conclusion

Because grade points are involved, we should be concerned about the validity and reliability of intra-group peer evaluations in a classroom setting. As instructors, we want students to evaluate peer

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behaviors related to task and process in their team projects, not based on personality, race, gender, or other factors.

The findings of this study support previous research and suggest that rating bias based on personality-related behaviors, such as Social Style, can be a problem in student evaluations. In conjunction with other studies demonstrating rating bias, such as race and gender, this study suggests that business communication instructors should consider rater training as part of their instructional design for team projects when peer evaluations are involved.

This research provides preliminary evidence that rater training can be effective in improving the accuracy of behavioral evaluations in a team project setting. Teaching students about common rating errors such as "halo" and "similar-to-me," providing background about Social Style Theory, and making sure students have a good frame of reference for the rating dimensions should help reduce errors and improve confidence in the rating process. It is a psychological reality that "we like those most who are most like us." Yet, we know that our students will be participating in a diverse work force, often working in teams, and evaluating team members as part of their work process. They need to be aware of their propensity to allow personality preferences to influence their judgment of others.

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High/Low Context Communication: The Malaysian Malay Style

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Abstract

Globalization and workforce mobilization have prompted many scholars and researchers to conduct intercultural studies. In studies on eastern intercultural communication, research focus has been on the Japanese and Chinese cultures. However, there are other eastern cultures which are less known to the intercultural scholars. Therefore, the author of this paper hopes to introduce a group of individuals who seldom appear in western literature and probably unknown to many scholars - the Malays. Using Edward T. Hall's characteristics of high-low context communication, this essay illustrates the Malaysian Malay style of communication.

Introduction

> *When you enter a cow's barn, moo, and when you enter a goat's shed, bleat.*
> (A Malay proverb, translated).

The above is a traditional Malay proverb depicting advice by a mother to her daughter when the daughter was about to marry and move out to stay with her in-laws. The mother typically says very little about what she thinks her daughter should do to adapt to the new family, but the implicit meanings behind her advice were bits of wisdom for her daughter to interpret. A similar experience befalls a woman from another culture who was to marry a Malay man. This woman would need a considerable amount of time to learn and understand the new family as well as the even greater task of adapting to the culture of the man she marries.

Culture plays a big role in the development of human thoughts and behaviors. Ignoring cultural differences in an interaction can potentially signal trouble. Numerous articles have been written on cultural differences, their implications, and the ways of dealing with them. One example of an intercultural difference is illustrated by gift-giving. In the article titled, "Wrong gifts may tick off potential trading partners," Philippidis (1999) reminds readers about the consequences of a lack of understanding a trading partner's cultural taboos. For example, presenting a clock as a gift to a Chinese is as though wishing the receiver a short life (Philippidis, 1999), but to a Malay, receiving this gift is a gesture of friendship and thoughtfulness. Another instance of the Malay culture is the use of the left hand. If someone uses the left hand to point or give something to another person, it shows disrespect for the other person. Companies that overlook the salience of intercultural communication differences might face potential relationship problems. This phenomenon can jeopardize long term ties for businesses if companies are less sensitive to cultural differences. Due to the impact on businesses and social relationships, much research focuses on understanding and explicating intercultural communication differences.

In terms of research done on intercultural communication, a dearth of literature exists in work conducted in Malaysia. In the Asian region, studies on intercultural communication mainly focus on Japanese and Chinese cultures but very few can be found on other cultures such as those in countries like Malaysia, Thailand, and Indonesia. This paper therefore aims to add information about

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a group of people who live in the eastern part of the world, the Malays, to the existing body of intercultural communication literature. This will be done by explicating the high and low context communication depicting the cultural dimensions advanced by Edward T. Hall. The concepts of cultural context in this essay are derived from the book *Beyond Culture* (Hall, 1976) and are used to exemplify communication in the Malay culture.

The first part of the essay is an overview of the high and low context cultures as defined by Hall followed by the characteristics of a high-context communication. Then I will explicate several illustrations of high-context communication as seen in a Malay culture and finally close the essay with a summary and suggestions on studying the Malaysian culture.

High-context and Low-context Communication

Hall (1976) claims that those of European heritage believe that what they think is real because they live in a "word world" (p.vii), and anything other than words are considered less important in the communication process. This, to Hall, is a mistake. Words do not convey every meaning in a message. There are underlying subtleties that provide the wholeness, or context, to a "spoken message." Along the same lines, Hall (1998) adds that "high context communication or message is one in which *most* of the information is already in the person, while very little is in the coded, explicit, transmitted part of the message. A low-context communication is just the opposite, that is, the mass of the information is vested in the explicit code" (p. 61). An illustration of a high-context communication as described by Hall (1976) is in his puzzling experience of staying in a hotel in Japan. Hall found himself moved from one place to another, "like a piece of derelict luggage" (p. 61), but was not told the reason for the move. As someone who sees himself to be from a low-context culture, Hall was upset for not understanding why he was treated in such a way. Finally, the answer came. In Japan, when a person joins a corporation, that person has to "belong" to the corporation; otherwise he or she will have no identity. So now that Hall is in this hotel, the hotel was socializing him and was taking care of him. What is interesting here is that a person need not be told explicitly (low-context) about what is being done to him or her but that person would have to follow the crowd to understand what is going on to be able to be part of the group (a high-context communication style).

In addition to the implicit meaning buried in a behavior, Hall (1976) noted that meaning and context are inextricably bound with each other. He stated that "China, the possessor of a great complex culture, is on the high-context end of the scale. One notices this particularly in the written language of China, which is thirty-five hundred years old and has changed very little in the past three thousand years" (p. 91). This shows that meaning is embedded in the context in which the communication occurs and rarely in the written communication. To illustrate this point, for someone to be literate in Chinese, one has to be conversant with Chinese history and to know the pronunciation of the words to understand the four tones which carry a different meaning for each tone. Knowing the context of a message conveys the meaning intended. Understanding both words and context gives the full picture.

Importance of Context

Edward T. Hall (1976) highlights the importance of context in culture. Hall claims that although the communication field gives context a considerable amount of attention, context has not been sufficiently explained. To make his point, Hall illustrates how understanding context makes a

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significant difference in the meaning of a particular problem. In one incident, the U.S. government spent millions of dollars to develop a system which can translate foreign languages into English. Unfortunately the effort was unsuccessful. Rather than having a machine translate languages, the government realized that the translator should be a human and not a machine. Humans take into consideration factors such as paralinguistic and intonations when translating language, which gives a different meaning to a message rather than its literal meaning. Hall concludes that the failure occurred because the message was not taken in context and that understanding the linguistic code is only part of the message and not complete by itself.

Characteristics of High-context and Low-context Communication

High-context and low-context communication can be differentiated based on four characteristics: emotions in a close relationship, directness of message conveyed, use of nonverbal communication, and use of digital or analogous language.

First, high-context communication involves emotions and close relationships while low-context interactions use the logical part of the brain and are less personal (Hall, 1998). For example, a typical Malay tradition is to serve beverages and local cakes when guests visit their homes. Malays like their guests to feel comfortable and welcomed when the guests pay them a visit, so the way to do this is to provide a hospitable atmosphere. This practice is brought into their organizational business meetings during which business partners are typically served refreshments and light snacks during meetings. To the Malays building relationships comes before getting down to business. In one observation, Abdullah (1996) notes that, "Malays tend to engage in social pleasantries before getting down to business. They see it as a form of 'ice-breaker' which can smoothen [sic] the flow of conversation and enable both parties to assess one another" (p. 79). On the other hand, Westerners are more direct and explicit (Abdullah, 1996) and would like to put the cards on the table and get down to the business.

In most Western negotiations, rationality is favored over emotionality. Individuals are encouraged to negotiate using the principled negotiation approach (Rothwell, 2004), where negotiators remain unconditionally constructive throughout the process. This technique outlines a set of rules that focus on content with an emphasis on results that are based on objective standards. Unlike soft bargaining which value building relationships and friendships (Rothwell, 2004), principled negotiation can be categorized as low-context communication.

The second high-context communication characteristic is indirectness. According to Hall (1976) a high-context individual would talk around things expecting the interlocutor to understand the cues. The speaker provides part of the message and leaves the remaining pieces to be filled by the listener. For example a friend says that he is hungry but could not leave his work to buy food. For a low-context person this means that the friend will be hungry until he finishes work, but a high-context person may get the signal that his friend would like him to get food for him. Saying this directly might appear demanding, so by talking around what he wants, the listener might be able to pick up the cues. In this case Hall (1976) notes that in-group members in high-context cultures are expected to know what is troubling a group member. Details are not specified but considered to be known by the other person placing the burden of understanding and responding to the problem on the interlocutor.

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In contrast, North Americans are perceived to be assertive as compared to the Japanese who are perceived as to "love indirect and ambiguous modes of persuasion" (Niikura, 1999, p. 48). According to Niikura, this perception, in part, is due to Japanese culture being seen to have "deep respect for the other" and to be direct when expressing negative feelings implies impoliteness. However, Niikura claims that the Japanese when compelled to express disagreement will do it indirectly (for example later after the meeting or in another room).

Another example of indirectness in high-context culture is demonstrated in a study by Leets (2003), who investigated perceptions of non-Whites (Asian, African, or Hispanic American) on racist speeches by a White (European American). The author discovered that Asian Americans were more sensitive to the indirect racist speech (notably the communication context) as compared to European Americans, who evaluated the direct meaning in the speech and were not disturbed by the indirect slurs. Leets's study affirms that one's cultural context provides the basis for the interpretation of messages conveyed.

The next characteristic in high-context culture is that individuals learn to understand others through nonverbal responses. Kitayama and Ishii (2002) assert that information in the verbal content of East Asian language is relatively low so nonverbal cues and contexts provide the missing link in the communication process. For example, in Malay culture, a child who interrupts elders who are speaking is seen as behaving rudely. One way a parent "informs" a child that the behavior is inappropriate is to shake the head or maybe look at the child long enough so that the child notices that the parent is watching him or her. The child then gets the message and will refrain from further interrupting the parents' conversation. To a low-context person, the parent's behavior merely signifies that the parent is just listening to the child speaking.

In a nonverbal communication study conducted by Dsilva and Whyte (1998) on Vietnamese refugees' conflict style, the authors found that the Vietnamese refugees made no response to a negative statement conveyed by an alderman. Even though angered by the lack of concern of the alderman for their loss of face, the Vietnamese chose to remain silent to avoid conflict. For someone to understand the message behind the silence, one has to "read" the nonverbal cues of the Vietnamese. The nonverbal behavior (silence) is a gesture to show respect and to maintain harmony. The authors postulate that high-context communication draws its understanding of human behavior and thoughts through nonverbal communication which thus makes comprehension intuitive. Alternately, low-context communication relies on verbal communication to enable someone to understand the messages.

In response to the observation made by Dsilva and Whyte, Ramsey (1998) asserts that silence should not be perceived as negative. "It is critical that silence be not interpreted as absence of thought. It may mean time to formulate an opinion, a gathering of courage to speak in another language, providing time to allow a senior to speak first or is the form of a generally less confrontative, softer way to convey disagreement" (p.120).

Finally, language can be digital or analogous. In defining these terms, Bennett (1998) explains, "Verbal language is digital, in the sense that words symbolize categories of phenomena in the same arbitrary way that on/off codes symbolize numbers in operation in a computer. Non-verbal language by contrast is analogous – it represents phenomena by creating contexts which can be experienced directly" (p. 17). To this end, Hall (1976) notes that "English is strongly digital … it provides speakers with many words to name particular affective and cognitive states" (p. 17) in

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contrast to the Japanese language, which is more analogous than digital. It demands that "its speakers imply and infer meaning from the context of relatively vague statements …" (p.17). This characteristic explains the reason for the many words in English to describe a particular situation, for instance, the varying degree of a state of emotion such as dislike (can mean despise, hate, disgust, loathe, and detest). In an analogous language, when a word is uttered, the receiver would have to figure out exactly what the speaker means by putting into a context the way the statement was said, who said it, when it was said, in which situation it was said, and other statements that were said before or after (Hall, 1998).

Anthropologists often live with the people they wish to study. Immersing oneself in the culture is a way to experience the embodiment and enactment of the unspoken values and beliefs of a particular culture. Geert Hofstede, a renowned cultural scholar, when asked about his involvement in culture said that "there is a difference between knowing and practicing" (Hoppe, 2004, p. 79) as "culture hides much more than it reveals" (Hall, 1998, p. 59). The hidden messages often times are unexpressed emotions or behaviors demonstrated in a form only understood by individuals in that culture. In both ways, "culture is saturated with both emotion and intelligence. … [and] a great part of human activity is either the direct result of conscious thought or suffused with emotion and feeling" (Hall, 1959, p. 81). In other words, as we learn to understand and get acquainted with someone from another culture, it is not only words that explain the action but also more the unspoken language.

In the attempt to understand culture, Hall (1976) suggests that we consider the amount of time and effort we should spend on "contexting" (p. 92). Too much "contexting" takes away our focus and time from the core tasks, but too little time spent understanding the context results in incomplete understanding. There needs to be a way to determine the optimum time and effort for contexting.

The Root of Cultural Context Divide

At least three possible reasons can account for what led to the divide into high-low context culture: perception of information ownership, basic economic structure, and religion or spirituality. Kitayama and Ishii (2002) observe that there is a difference in how ownership of information influences communication. The authors believe that low-context practices in North America stem from the belief that individuals are independent of each other and are "informationally insulated" while high-context cultures see themselves as interdependent and therefore "informationally connected"(p.53). When information is not shared, individuals are more likely to gather as much information as possible for themselves in order to feel secure and hence the strong dependence on verbal communication. On the other hand, when the sharing of information occurs, individuals do not need as much information because they know that they can rely on other members for the information.

Another possible reason that could have caused the divide in cultural context is the work individuals in preceding generations did for a living. Traditionally, social mobility and population density were dependent on the economic resources of the community. People whose economic lifestyle was based on hunting, gathering, and herding had to move from one place to another, so they were less likely to remain in one place for a long period of time. The nature of such a lifestyle hampered the sharing of information and the way individuals ensure that they had information necessary for survival was through the exchanges of explicit verbal messages. This low context communication was common in the historical development of European civilization (Hall, 1976). For those who had

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an agriculturally-based economy, social mobility was low resulting in a high population density. Here individuals could get together easily which made the sharing of knowledge convenient. This scenario is typical in many Asian civilizations where people share a long history together and thus are part of a culture that is more high-context than the Europeans (Hall, 1976).

Religion can be another factor which leads to different forms of cultural context. Even though there is a dearth of literature in this area, some studies have shown that religion plays a significant role in communication especially for Muslims (e.g. Abdullah, 1996). The word "patience" in the Qur'an (Al Asr, verse 3) which reads, "Except those who believe and do righteous good deeds, and recommend one another to the truth and recommend one another to *patience* [italics added] …" (Al-Hilâlî & Khân, 1993, p. 967) can be interpreted in several ways. Patience here can mean abstain, forgive, endure, calm, persist, tolerate, bear and wait depending on the situation or context of the occurrence. For instance, if someone hit your friend's car, the first thing your friend might do is to dash to the person who hit his car and start a fiery argument. In this situation a Malay person would say to the friend to be patient which means "calm down" or if the argument persists the patience might now be interpreted as "hold on and please tone down the argument." So for the Malays (who are generally Muslims), their communication cultural root is partly shaped by the religion they embrace. In the workplace, high-context cultural practices seem more prevalent among Malaysian [Malay] managers where religion forms the basis of workplace behavior and treatment (Storz, 1999).

Impact of Cultural Context on Managerial Practices

In consultancy services, low-context consultants generally formulate strategies based on the information they gather from surveys and company documents. These consultants often overlook information not found in documents or verbal messages such as people's background, experience, and knowledge (Hall, 1976), which, in many cases, serve as useful supplementary information. Hidden messages in a company history can be found in the artifacts, organizational culture, and background of the organization. When conducting consultancy jobs, omitting the aforementioned organizational sources can result in poor evaluation of the organization and possibly a failure in the intended change initiative.

One such occurrence happened in a large government organization. This department was working to achieve the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) certification for the past two years but with little success. ISO auditors noted that policies and procedures were well-documented, but the problem was that it lacked compliance. In a high-context culture, change should occur in both the organizational structure and procedures and employee attitudes and behavior. People come from different backgrounds, and this needs to be addressed. In this context, Hall (1976) adds, "High-context actions are by definition rooted in the past, slow to change and highly stable" (p. 93).

Cultural context can have significant implications on negotiation processes and outcomes (Graham, Mintu & Rodgers, 1994; Parnell & Kedia, 1996). Studies show that negotiations resulting in deadlock were generally due to a lack of understanding of the bargaining partner's cultural background. To understand a culture's negotiation styles, Osman-Gani and Tan (2002) studied three major ethnic groups in Singapore: Malays, Chinese, and Indians- and discovered that these three groups employed different negotiation styles. The authors reported that, in general, Malays are non-confrontational and choose to avoid hurting relationships. In terms of negotiation style, Malays are intuitive in that they are "warm and animated when making statements, flexible and creative during negotiations, fluid and able to adapt to changing subject and situation" (p. 824). To a person from a low-context

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culture, these mannerisms are difficult to understand and therefore unable to control in the negotiation process. In essence, to avoid miscommunication we need to learn, understand, and accommodate cultural differences, particularly during the process of communication.

Contextualizing Malaysia

Malaysia is a multi-racial country, which is comprised of Malays, Chinese, Indians and others. Although a large segment of the cultural dimensions of these three large races are similar, there are differences in terms of degree and priorities of values. For instance, the Malays ranked honesty as first on their list of values, the Chinese placed courtesy as number one, and the Indians, family (Fontaine, Richardson, & Yeap, 2002). However, non-Malaysians who conducted research on cross-cultural management tended to overlook this phenomenon and presented their findings about Malaysians as though Malaysians were a homogenous group (Fontaine & Richardson, 2003). In their observation Fontaine, Richardson and Yeap (2002) state that "Malaysian Malays and Malaysian Chinese share some similar values but, Hofstede treats all Malaysian culturally similar" (p. 63). In order to make clear that Malaysian culture is basically made up of three main races - the Malay, Chinese, and Indians (and smaller groups like the Dayaks and Ibans) - it would have been ideal to discuss the groups separately. But due to space constraints the following discussion focuses only on one group - the Malaysian Malay.

The Malaysian Malay Way of Communication

The Malays are individuals who make up a majority of the population in Malaysia, Indonesia, Brunei, and the Philippines, with a lesser number in Singapore in what was once called the Malay archipelago. Many Malays are Muslims except for those in the Philippines who are mostly Christians (*Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, 2005)*. Some Malays are also found in Vietnam, Cambodia, Sri Lanka, Hainan, and South Africa. To avoid generalization of Malay communication for all Malay communities in the different geographical regions, the Malays in this essay are specifically Malaysian Malays. In the discussion that follows, Hall's characteristics of high-context culture are employed to provide illustrations of Malaysian Malays' communication cultural context.

In making a request, Malays are generally indirect. It would appear impolite to make a request outright, so Malays talk around what they intend to convey in the hope that their message is understood. "During meetings, it is not proper to come straight to the point. …Don't get too excited over a 'yes' or a 'no'" (Culture briefings, 2001, p. 12). One way a Malay generally expresses his or her gratitude when the boss has done a favor is to give a gift or to invite the boss to dinner. What appears to be important is to maintain the relationship.

Indirectness can be also be observed in a social setting, like in a marriage. When a man has the intention to marry, the man's parents would make the proposal to the woman's parents. In some cases, the woman does not even know about the proposal until the man's parents come to the woman's house. In traditional Malay custom, the proposal is conveyed in poetic verses and rhymes to express their intention to have the girl's hand in marriage for their son. A typical verse commonly used is, "It has come to our knowledge that you have a beautiful flower in your garden. Would it be possible for us to pluck the flower for our son? Has anyone owned that flower?" If the receiving party accepts the proposal, then the wedding would be arranged. However, modern Malays today forego the subtleties of a traditional Malay proposal done in poems. The couples choose to decide

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between them if they want to get married and then leave the formalities of the proposal and wedding arrangement to the parents.

When a Malay woman experiences menopause, in most cases no one knows about it. The woman sees it as unnecessary to expose her private life changes and, in fact, feels that her womanly dignity is eroded if she talks about her "body." The contrary occurs in Western countries where women are encouraged to discuss the biological changes that occur in their body so that they can share and inform others of their experience. In North America, studies on menopause are considered public knowledge intended to educate women on the natural womanly phenomenon and what to expect when it occurs (Breheny & Stephens, 2003). Breheny and Stephen's study conforms to observations made by cross-cultural theorists that low-context individuals need information about things that happen around them, but the high-context culture relies on feeling and sensing. The high-context versus low-context communication differences in cultural values strongly suggest a need to explore the underlying factors related to the differences in values between the two styles of cultural communication.

Not much information can be gathered from just speaking with a Malay. A lot of hidden messages are intertwined in the nonverbal communication and background of a Malay. One personal experience is about my sister who once related to me about how upset she was with her daughter and the communication that occurred from then on. It had been a routine that they rode together to work every morning in a car driven by her daughter, but because she was upset, my sister rode with her husband instead. My sister did not say anything about not riding in the car with her daughter, but because her daughter understood her mother's behavior (and communication style) the daughter made various attempts to coax her mother into riding in the car with her again. Very little exchange of conversation occurred to express her emotions towards her daughter, but her daughter could read the implicit messages that her mother conveyed.

Hall (1998) describes a high-context individual as someone who engages feelings in a relationship. This reminds me of my encounter with a Malaysian student, Anuwar, who was flying back to Malaysia on Malaysian Airlines (MAS). MAS air tickets are generally more expensive than some other airlines, and so I was curious to know why Anuwar had chosen MAS when he could have purchased a lower-priced ticket. Anuwar answered, "I feel like I'm at home when I travel with MAS. The environment is familiar." I, too, feel the same emotional attachment flying on Malaysian Airlines because there is warmth and hospitality, just like home – Anuwar did not have to say more, I understood his emotions.

In negotiation, the Malays' compromising and obliging conflict-handling styles (Wafa & Tee, 1997) are probably manifestations of their collective nature (Abdullah, 1996; Tamam, Hassan, & Said, 1996) who prioritizes group over personal interests. In compromising and obliging styles, negotiators are more concerned with maintaining relationship and safeguarding their partner's feeling, hence the seemingly perceived "weak styles" in goal-oriented negotiation. To the Malays, even though achieving their negotiation goals is important, their values in preserving harmony and respect for elders (Abdullah, 1992) take precedence in the negotiation process.

One other characteristic found in the Malay culture is that Malay language is more analogous than digital. A word like "give" has twelve meanings in the English language (Random House Roget's Thesaurus, 2001) but the Malay language has only one literal meaning which is *beri*. In *Kamus Inggeris Melayu Dewan: An English-Malay dictionary* (1992), *give* may mean present, provide, accord, donate,

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hand over, allow to have, pay in exchange, hold (e.g. a party), offer, sacrifice, and cause to feel. For example, if a Malay speaker says "to **give** an opinion," an English speaker would say "offer an opinion"; or a Malay says "to **give** a project assignment," an English speaker would "assign a project." In the Malay language, the word *beri* is used both to mean offer and assign.

Contemporary Malaysian Malay cultural communication

Malaysian Malay culture now, as I perceive, is going through a cultural-context form of communication change where once a high-context, collectivist community is gradually becoming more low-context and individualistic. In the workplace, administrative policies and procedures have been made more explicit than before where the once "go ask your boss what to do" practice is disappearing and replaced by "check with the organizational procedure manual." Working as a team though encouraged, seldom bears collective effort due to individuals striving to get better personal performance appraisal. Interactions seem to be more direct in order to achieve goals rather than to build relationships while objectivity has replaced subjectivity. Rationality is preferred over emotionality.

In social interactions, Malay communication has become more low-context. Previously, if a wedding were to be held in the "afternoon", guests can come anytime after 12 p.m. (or even late in the evening). Now the reception time is fixed so if someone arrives late, there may not be any more food left to serve. In traditional Malay culture, a wedding is held in the bride and bridegroom's house where the community helps with the serving, cooking, and cleaning. The community helped without being asked but now this scenario has changed. Modern Malays would rather have their weddings in restaurants or hotels because people are busy. Invitations to weddings were once through word-of-mouth but now cards are distributed to specify the time and location of the wedding reception. Only invited individuals attend the reception.

This changing phenomenon, I believe, is a result of global mobilization. As people travel to other countries, they pick up new ways of seeing and doing things and incorporate them into their value system. Although tricky in the beginning to adjust and adapt to others' culture, the longer a person lives in a culture different from his or her own, the more time he or she becomes accustomed to the new culture. The Malays, too, are no exception.

Conclusion

A high or low context culture is portrayed through communication. The differences lie in the use of either a digital or an analogous language, verbal or nonverbal behaviors, emotional expressions and relationship-building, and directness or indirectness when communicating. Individuals from a high-context culture would particularly emphasize another's feeling in the communication process and so care to be less direct, use more analogous language, be more personal, and prefer nonverbal to verbal communication.

In order to understand a person and the culture that person comes from, one has to look around, past and inside that person. There are deeply embedded values and thoughts which have molded and shaped a person's behavior. Words alone cannot tell. In this respect Hall (1976) remarks that in cross cultural communication there are "two things [that] get in the way of understanding: the linearity of language and the deep biases and built-in binders that every culture provides" (p.61).

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The observation Hall makes regarding high-low context communication seem appropriate and in line with the Malay culture. Malays are often indirect in expressing their views and opinion which are embedded in the nonverbal behaviors as an attempt to secure a close relationship with the other party. While doing so, emotions play a key role in ensuring that face value for both sides is preserved. For the fact that Malays tend to use fewer words in their interaction, the Malay language is more analogous than digital. A single word can be used in many different contexts. For instance, "patience" has one meaning in the Malay language, which is *sabar,* but has twenty-six synonyms in English (Random House Roget's Thesaurus, 2001). It is not that *sabar* has one meaning in Malay language but the meaning lies within the context of the word used.

What seems problematic in the study of high-low context in intercultural communication literature is the presumption that many Asian countries such as Malaysia, Japan, and China have a dominant culture. Even though this might be true for Japan and China which are racially homogeneous, researchers tend to overlook the fact that Malaysia comprises three dominant races that practice their own cultural heritage. Other than culturally heterogeneous, there exists an additional "new culture" as a result of the mixing and the blending of the three cultures. What is then interesting is for researchers to discover the characteristics of this "new culture."

As a final word, this paper has introduced a rarely researched group of people, the Malays through explicating the way they communicate. Even though education and socialization have changed some of the practices of a traditional Malay culture, I believe that many of the values, beliefs, and practices are still intact which identifies them as a high-context culture.

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Beyond Hofstede: Cultural Applications for Communicating with Latin American Businesses

William Wardrope

Abstract

This essay explores the culture-specific aspects of Latin America which are related to business communication. Building upon the foundation established by the popular cultural research of Geert Hofstede, Edward T. Hall, and others, the current work offers an insight into relational values practiced in mainstream Latin American business culture. Applications for successful communication with Latin American constituents are provided to enrich the intercultural component of the business communication classroom.

"Treating others with dignity and respect, and expecting to be treated in the same way, is the hallmark of Latin American culture" (Lenartowicz & Johnson, 2003, p. 278).

The Importance of Latin America to Global Business

Latin America is one of the fastest-growing economies in the global market. With a population of over 550 million and a GDP exceeding $3 trillion (CountryWatch, 2005), the region is replete with natural resources and emerging service industries which make it globally competititve. Seventeen of the world's largest 100 cities and commercial centers are located in Latin America (WorldAtlas, 2005) and Mexico and Brazil are the 8th and 11th largest economies in the world, respectively (Anderson & Cavanaugh, 2000). Foreign direct investment into Latin American countries almost doubled from 1995 to 1998 (Characteristics, 1999) and the increase of exports to Latin America surpassed those of other parts of the world in the latter part of the 1990s (Forging, 2001).

The United States accounts for a significant portion of Latin America's economic activity. More U. S. foreign direct investment flows into Latin America than to the Middle East, Asia-Pacific, or Africa (U. S. Department of Commerce, 2003); twenty-one percent of U.S. exports go to Latin America, and twelve Latin American countries are among the United States' top 50 trade partners (Forging, 2001). The United States is also the principal trading partner of many Latin American countries, including Colombia and Venezuela. The emergence of partnerships between the United States and Latin America, relatively insignificant prior to 2000 (May, 2001), has been fueled by numerous political and fiscal reforms in the region over the past two decades, and through various existing and emerging free trade agreements across the Western Hemisphere.

The continued development of U. S. trade with Latin America is promising. In 2002, United States President George W. Bush was granted Free Trade Authority, a "fast-track" to establishing trade agreements with countries across the Western Hemisphere. The ultimate goal of this action was to create a hemispheric trade zone that will economically integrate over 30 countries. Chile was the first country to sign a bilateral trade agreement with the United States in 2003. Moreover, the Central

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America Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA), which will establish a free trade zone within the United States and five Central American countries, is expected to liberalize trade and will eventually eliminate tariffs on most products within the member countries (Wikipedia, 2005). The agreement, modeled after NAFTA (Washington Office on Latin America, 2005), is expected to open new opportunities within the manufacturing, agricultural, textile, and other industries (United States Trade Representative, 2003).

The prevalence of Latin American consumers in the the global marketplace is significant, trade agreements nonwithstanding. Currently, there are more Spanish speakers than English speakers in the world, 358 to 341 million, respectively; Spanish-language countries account for about 7 percent of the world's output (Daniels & Radebaugh, 2002); Latin Americans now comprise about 13 percent of the total U.S. population (over 37 million people), a population which is expected to grow to over 18 percent by the year 2020 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2005). Moreover, there are more than 47 million Spanish-speaking consumers online, as well as 19 million speakers of Portuguese (Businesss News America, 2002); these figures are growing substantially (Global Internet Statistics, 2003).

Given the enormous potential for increased business with Latin American constituents, it is incumbent on U. S. entrepreneurs to approach, negotiate, and maintain relationships with Latin American business professionals whose cultural backgrounds differ from their own. Research affirms the importance of cultural understanding to the development of partnerships with international constituents (Baldauf, Cravens, & Wagner, 2000; Ali & Swiercz, 1991); are business programs adequately equipping their students with the cultural foundations they need to develop fruitful business relationships with their counterparts in Latin America?

The answer may be "no." Curriculum research suggest that business programs offer only superficial, if any, introduction to cultural aspects of Latin America and other regions. In his study of 100 international business programs, Wardrope (2003) found little attention given to the social, cultural, and political aspects of Latin American business communities, echoing Varner's (2001, 2000) concern that most intercultual research focuses on the "general context" of particular courses. Wardrope and Minifie (2005) learned from AACSB business deans that programs emphasizing Latin American interests are far outpaced by those emphasizing Europe and Asia in terms of faculty and student exchange agreements and the number of region-focused business courses being taught. Moreover, while many business communication courses deal perfunctorily with intercultural communication issues, there seem to be even fewer courses in existence which explore Latin American business communication practices (Wardrope, 2003).

Basic Characteristics of Latin American Culture

Latin American culture is most commonly understood through the concepts of *Power, Uncertainty Avoidance*, *Individualism/Collectivism*, *Masculinity*, *Context*, and *Time Orientation* as defined by Geert Hofstede (1980) and Edward T. Hall (1959). Hofstede identified the culture-based constructs of (1) ***Power Orientation,*** the manner in which people in a culture defer to legitimate authorty in familial, societal, and organizational authority structures; (2) ***Uncertainty Avoidance,*** the extent to which a culture relies upon, and expects, information to accomplish a task; (3) ***Individualism / Collectivism,*** or the degree to which a culture or subculture emphasizes the well-being of a group

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over the benefit of an individual; and (4) ***Masculinity,*** a culture's perspective about the roles that men and women play in society. Additionally, Hall's work on cultural differences (1959) revealed the constructs of (5) ***Context,*** the "pattern of physical cues, environmental stimuli, and implicit understanding that convey meaning between two members of the same culture" (Thill & Bovee, 2005, p.70), and (6) ***Time Orientation,*** a culture's attitudes toward time as distinctive cultural aspects. Figure 1 compares Latin American and U.S. characteristics across Hofstede's and Hall's dimensions.

Figure 1
A Comparison of U.S. and Latin American Cultural Dimensions

Dimension	U.S.	Latin America
Time Orientation	Monochronistic; people value punctuality	Polychronistic; time is flexible
Context	Low Context; Words have literal meaning	High Context; words interpreted according to situational and nonverbal factors
Uncertainty Avoidance	Low Avoidance; feel comfortable working with limited information	High Avoidance; seeks thorough information before making decisions
Power	Low Power; feel free to question and challenge authority	High Power; defers to authority with little or no resistance
Masculinity	Low Masculine; men and women are equal in authority	High Masculine; men hold authority
Individualism/Collectivism	Individualistic; Emphasize individuals' rights	Collectivisitic; place value on the group's well-being

Source: Extrapolated from Hofstede (1980) and Hall (1959).

These basic cultural traits are accompanied by a body of other research which finds that Latin American cultures are highly relationship-oriented (Kras, 1994), and favor long deliberations before engaging in business (Ober, 2001; Devine & Braganti, 2000). They may also engage in long conversational rituals as a precursor to business deliberations (Samovar & Porter, 1991), and ask personal questions about family (Devine & Braganti, 2000) before discussing business. Taken together, this body of research confirms that Latin Americans place great value on establishing long-term, close relationships with interactants on a personal, as well as professional, level.

Latin American Cultural Constructs

In addition to the popular body of knowledge which compares cultures' traits on the dimensions provided by Hofstede and Hall, other work focusing specifically on Latin America provides an even greater insight into Latin American communication patterns. For example, the culture-specific concept of s*impatía*, or kindness, is a "cultural norm which requires individuals to be friendly, even if

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there is strong conflict between two people" (Gomez, 1994, p. 32). Simpatía is also often understood as agreeability in the face of disagreement (Antshel, 2000). Another Latin American construct, *confianza*, (trust) refers to the importance of having a personal relationship between interactants (Brasch, 1973) and typically implies the expectation of mutual interpersonal reciprocity (Dictionary of Society and Culture, 2005). In many Latin American subcultures, for instance, an "insider" who has an established relationship with a company has a distinctively competitive advantage over an individual whose relational history is not as well established (Trujela, 2005).

Two other constructs--*respeto* (respect) and *personalismo* (interpersonal warmth)—are conceptualized in mainstream Latin American culture in a number of ways. Respeto refers to the expectation that people should be treated with dignity (Lenartowicz & Johnson), and is reflected commonly through appropriate nonverbal behavior toward another person (Conlogue, 2004) and through a desire to protect self-dignity (Franquiz, 2004). *Personalismo* refers to the degree of warmth of a personal relationship (Paniagua, 1994; Cuellar, Arnold, & Gonzalez, 1995). It is grounded on the culture-based value that people are worth more than material possessions (Brasch, 1973), and may be expressed by showing an interest in the other person's language and culture (Antshel, 2002).

Taken collectively, these cultural nuances may seem at odds with contemporary Anglo-Saxon business communication practices. For example, a "bad news" letter written in accordance with traditional Latin American cultural standards may differ from the typical bad news model that is prescribed by most popular business communication textbooks, an approach which generally adheres to the following general pattern:

1. Buffer
2. Reasons for Decision
3. Presentation of Bad News
4. Alternative/GoodWill

This structure might be ineffective if applied to a Latin American reader with no knowledge of U.S. business practices, because it violates the concepts of simpatía, personalismo, confianza, and respeto. A more culturally sensitive model might be:

1. Greetings to Reader; Expression of Goodwill for family and associates
2. Reasons for Decision or Description of Decision Process (The decision is implied)
3. Alternatives, Future Action
4. Reiterated Goodwill (separate from Alternative)

The differences between the two models are slight, but culturally meaningful. In the second model, the reader: (a) exhibits personalismo by relaying formal, polite greetings; (b) builds confianza by expressing goodwill to the reader's family (c) protects the reader's feelings of potential embarrassment by avoiding a clear statement of bad news; and (d) maintains the relational confianza by reiterating personal goodwill at the end of the letter. To a Latin American reader, the implicit meaning behind this letter—that payment is due and that collection efforts may be undertaken—is as strong as the explicit statement, "Pay your bill or we will turn you over for collection" that Ango-Saxon readers might expect.

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How would the second model be applied to a bad-news business message? Figure 2 shows a sample letter following a more "Latin American" format, with content translated into English.

Figure 2
Sample Latin American "Bad News" Letter

Hernandez Fabricante Industrial y Distribuidor
Avenida Ramirez No. 272
Distrito Morales, Quito, Ecuador
Tel. 593-55555-5555
Fax 593-55555-5555

12 Junio del 2002

Señor
Juan Antonio Perez Marcela
23 Avenida San Pedro
Guayaquil, ECUADOR

Estimado Sr. Perez:

We send our best wishes to you and to your family and hope that all is well for you in Guayaquil.

In accordance with Contract #123, we are anticipating your response and hope that you have made suitable arrangements for payment. You are one of our best clients and it would please us to know that you have already taken care of this matter.

Please, tell us about any problems you may have. We look forward to hearing from you and to continuing working with you and your associates.

Atentamente,

Maria Patricia Sanchez Rodolfo

Maria Patricia Sanchez Rodolfo
Directora General

Model extrapolated from Conaway & Wardrope (2002).
Intended as a sample only; each situation may require variation.

Numerous aspects of Latin American culture may be observed in this letter. First, the use of

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mothers' surnames (Marcela and Rodolofo, respectively) is standard fare in Latin American correspondence, although these names are usually not used in spoken address. Second, there is no direct statement of debt or its amount, nor is there any explicit threat of legal remedy. Third, the tone is continually positive and personal, with frequent use of first and second-person pronouns (use of "I" and "we" is common, whereas contemporary U.S. business communication authorities generally frown on such practice). Finally, the letter resounds with a strong, implicit (high context) message—"Please tell us" may as well mean, "when are you going to pay your bill?" Such implicity also is a way of helping the reader save face—or avoid shame—which is especially important in high-context cultures (Rosenberg, 2004).

These Latin American conventions may vary by country (Lenartowicz & Johnson, 2003) and may also differ according to the degree of exposure a business has had with Anglo-Saxon correspondence standards. Therefore, legal attention should be given to any contractual implications before correspondence is finalized. In general, however, Figure 3 provides some goals and methods for creating successful business communication with Latin American constituents.

Figure 3
Cultural "Rules" for Communicating with Latin American Businesses

Goal	Method
Initiating Contact	Offer polite self-introduction, goodwill statement for reader, associates and friends
Using Titles	Use of *señor, señora*, or professional titles; avoid first names on initial and early contacts; include Mother's maiden name in correspondence
Showing Respect and Knowledge of Culture	Use at least some of reader's language; show interest in reader's country & company
Building relationship	Develop personal rapport first; inquire about family; communicate frequently; visit country or offer to host;
Giving Gifts	Send or bring gifts to potential associates*
Handling Bad News	Present news implicitly and with high regard for reader's feelings and reputation
Maintaining Personal Tone	Frequently use pronouns; express formal, yet personal, goodwill for family and associates

*Country-specific research should be conducted to determine appropriate gifts.

Conclusion

Understanding the nuances of a particular culture—not just how the culture "compares" to other mainstream cultural groups using a universal set of criteria—is essential to effective international business communication. The importance of culture-specific research is particularly true with regard to high-context cultures such as Latin American societies, which place a premium on relational constructs such as personalismo, simpatia, confianza, and respeto. Failure to "read between the lines" can destroy a potentially successful business relationship; failure to *write* between those lines

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may prove even more disastrous. Careful study of Latin America's societal norms and communication practices will prepare today's professionals for productive and enjoyable international business outcomes.

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