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INTERPERSONAL SKILLS IN THE EMPLOYMENT INTERVIEW:
INTENDED MEANING

by

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INTERPERSONAL SKILLS IN THE EMPLOYMENT INTERVIEW:
INTENDED MEANING

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Western Michigan University, 1989

Recently employers have been including references to
communication skills in their advertising for employment
opportunities. This research examined what people in
business and industry mean when they use the phrase
"interpersonal skills." A questionnaire was developed and
administered to 60 people associated with personnel
practices in business and industry. Content analysis of
questionnaire responses found the subjects to identify the
interpersonally skilled employee to be "effective," to be
"sensitive" and to have a "positive attitude."

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In the last several years, large numbers of employers have been including a reference to communication skills in their advertising for job applicants. In fact, many of these advertisements identified communication skills as a necessary prerequisite for managers and executive and as a criterion for employment interviews in their employment advertisements. Some of the terms used in this advertising included "interpersonal skills," "strong interpersonal skills" and "good communication skills." More specifically, a review of "Advertisements for Job Opportunities" in the four issues of the National Business Employment Weekly in the month of April, 1986, showed over 28% of the advertisers for management and executive jobs require "strong interpersonal skills," "excellent interpersonal skills" or "interpersonal skills" as a stated job qualification.

In the field of communication the phrases mean something specific. For example Spitzberg (1983) discusses competence as an expression of relational interaction within a context. Wiemann (1977) defined

communication competence in terms of choices of behaviors in a model which includes affiliation, flexibility and interaction management.

On the other hand, the writers for advertisements are typically personnel managers, human resource directors or recruitment specialists. They, as laypersons, do not have a communication background. As a result, the question arises do the people who write these advertisements know what the phrases mean. More specifically,

1. Do they have specific definitions in mind when they use communication terms? Or are they just using buzz words?

2. If they have specific meanings, then are there commonalities among their meanings?

3. If they have specific meanings, then do their meanings compare to professionals in the field of communication?

Statement of the Problem

With questions such as these in mind, the objective of this research was to understand what employers, as laypersons, mean when they describe a preferred job applicant as one with strong interpersonal skills. The theoretical context for this research was based,

primarily, in the existing research and theory on communication competence.

Preview

Chapter II will review the layperson's understanding of the competent communicator and establish a review of the literature identifying what communication researchers say about communication competence. Chapters III will describe the method of collecting data that reports what people in business and industry mean when they use the term "interpersonal skills." The development of the questionnaire and procedures for coding will also be discussed. Chapter IV will report the results of the coding and subsequent analysis by identifying response categories, their frequencies, and the behavioral dimensions reported. Subject demographics will be examined to show any differences in the use of the term "interpersonal skills" by people in business and industry. Chapter V will report conclusions and provide the forum for general discussion on the research.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Since this thesis was concerned with the meaning
laypeople who write employment advertisements have in mind
when they use specific communication terms, and how their
meaning might compare to professionals in the field of
communication; it was necessary to review literature
relevant to both perspectives. Therefore, the review that
follows includes work on theoretical models of
communication competence and related concepts, research on
the correlates of communication effectiveness, and a
review of studies concerning layperson's understanding of
the communication competence concept.

Theoretical Models of Communication Competence

Bochner and Kelly (1974), Wilmont (1979), Spitzberg
and Cupach (1984) and Spitzberg and Hecht (1984) developed
theoretical models of communication competence. Bochner
and Kelly (1974) reviewed previous research to develop a
model of interpersonal competence. They concluded that
interpersonal competence is made up of three groups of
skills: (1) ability to formulate and achieve an

objective, (2) ability to collaborate effectively with others, and (3) ability to adapt appropriately to situational variations. They identified five observable skills: empathic communication, descriptiveness, owning feelings and thoughts, self-disclosure, and behavioral flexibility.

Wiemann reviewed effectiveness and competence literature and derived another definition and model of communication competence. He defined communication competence as the ability of an interactant to choose among available communicative behaviors to successfully accomplish his or her own interpersonal goals. His five part model of communication competence includes empathy, affiliation/support, behavioral flexibility, social relaxation and interaction management.

Wilmont (1979) developed a third model, which emphasizes the actual use of interpersonal skills. Communication competence is the ability to both analyze and perform. The communication skills of self-disclosure, confirmation of the other, and transaction management are necessary to achieve communication competence.

Spitzberg (1983) identified competence as an impression resulting from three perspectives: behaviors of the relational interactants, the context, and the characteristics of the individuals involved. He found

that to assess interactants' competence one must obtain
the relational participants' views of their own and the
other's appropriateness and effectiveness in that episode.

Spitzberg and Hecht (1984) further developed the
relational competence model with four components:
motivation, knowledge, skills, and outcomes. They defined
communication competence as "a process through which
interpersonal impressions are shaped and satisfactory
outcomes are derived from an interaction." Relational
competence was defined "as the extent to which objectives
functionally related to communication are perceived to be
fulfilled through interaction appropriate to the
interpersonal context."

Themes of "effectiveness" and "sensitivity" emerge
from reviewing these models. The effectiveness theme can
be culled from each researcher's work. Bochner and Kelley
(1984) mentioned achieving objectives, collaborating
effectively and behavioral flexibility. Wiemann (1977)
discussed accomplishing goals and interaction management.
Wilmont (1979) used transaction management. Spitzberg and
Hecht (1984) discussed outcomes and knowledge, both
components of effectiveness.

The sensitivity theme is evidenced in Bochner and
Kelley's (1984) discussion of owning feelings and self-
disclosure, Weimann's (1977) empathy, Wilmont's (1979)

self-disclosure and Spitzberg's (1983) relational
participants views.

Correlates of Communication Effectiveness

Norton (1978), Brandt (1979), Hale (1980), Cegala
(1981) and Douglas (1984) studied correlates of
communication effectiveness. Norton (1978) developed a
foundation of a communicator style construct.
"'Communicator style' is broadly conceived to mean 'the
way one verbally and paraverbally interacts to signal how
literal meaning should be taken, interpreted, filtered, or
understood'" (p. 99). The dependent variable was
communicator image. Communicator style is contingent upon
context, situation, and time.

Brandt (1979) studied impression formation in
initial interactions as a function of an individual's
communication style. He identified patterns of
relationship between communicative style, interpersonal
attractiveness, and effectiveness variables. He suggested
further research should address "the possibility of both
context-specific and cross contextual relations between
components of interactive style" (p. 236). He found
communicative effectiveness, social attractiveness and
task attractiveness were intercorrelated.

Hale (1980) studied cognitive complexity and cognitive simplicity as a determinant of communication effectiveness. She wrote that communication effectiveness depends on linguistic capabilities, audience sensitivity, and linguistic selection.

Cegala (1981) cited an interaction involvement dimension of communication competence. He found that perceptiveness was highly correlated with interaction involvement.

Douglas (1984) examined the script perspective in initial interactions. His research indicated "that high self-monitors' ability to use conversation more purposefully derives, in part, from those acting skills associated with the self-monitoring construct" (p. 216).

Again, effectiveness and sensitivity are a part of the correlate development. Brandt and Hale discussed effectiveness. Cegala discussed perceptiveness, a sensitivity component, as important to communication competence. Hale cited audience sensitivity. Douglas commented on the self-monitoring construct of sensitivity.

Layperson's Idea of the Competent Communicator

Yet, the lay person's concept of communication competence is important to the communication practitioner. Pavitt and Haight (1985) examined the lay person's concept of communication competence. This research is of particular interest to those teaching communication classes, job advertising writers, human resource development professionals, interviewers and professional recruiters.

Pavitt (1981) and Pavitt and Haight (1985) attempted to determine how people define communication competence through object-based belief structures to communication theory. Cognitive representation systems have potential for explaining communication phenomenon. Their research was based on previous work by Cantor and Mischel (1979), who studied prototypes of person perception. Pavitt and Haight (1985) hypothesized that people possess a particular implicit theory, an ideal model, of the traits and behaviors of a prototype "communicator." This ideal serves as a basis of evaluation of observed communicators in specific situations. The employment interview qualifies as such an evaluation situation.

They drew the following conclusions:

1.   Conceptions of communication competence consist of a prototype, or ideal communicator, defined by a group of relevant attributes.

2.   These conceptions were used as the basis for judging the extent to which an individual fits the competent communicator category.

3.   If the perceiver attributes features of the competent communicator prototype to a specific communicator, that communicator becomes judged to be competent.

Summary

As the review of the literature indicates, communication theorists vary in their definition of communication competence. Each author proposed a different list of skills or attributes. There appears to be no clear agreement among them on the definition of this concept, although there are some similarities. We may expect similar confusion among those who are using related terms in employment advertising.

The research described in this thesis is an extension of that done by Pavitt (1981) and Pavitt and Haight (1985). There are two differences in the research design that are most significant. In their original design they surveyed students on traits and behaviors of

competent communicator to identify the "ideal" or
"prototype." Instead of studying layperson's meanings for
"communication competence," this research instead
investigated meanings assigned to the term "interpersonal
skills." Secondly, the subjects in this research were
professionals, who were asked to interpret the term
"interpersonal skills" in the specific context of making
hiring decisions. The research may contribute to an
understanding of how those outside the communication
discipline view the concept of interpersonal skills and
may result in useful insights for those seeking employment
as well as those making hiring decisions.

In addition to what people in communication field
postulate about communication competence, our other
primary concern is of those in business and industry.
Thus, the question investigated in this research was the
following: What language do people in business and
industry use to describe the job applicant with
interpersonal skills? Of significant interest was
determining the extent to which professionals involved in
hiring decisions were able to describe interpersonal
skills in behavioral terms which may be more carefully
measured in concrete terms.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Measurement

In order to establish what people in business and
industry mean when they use the term "interpersonal
skills," an open-ended questionnaire was developed to
elicit subjects' descriptions of interpersonal skills.
The questionnaire was pre-tested in two graduate-level
communication classes and then revised. A second pre-test
resulted in the addition of one question. A complete copy
of the revised questionnaire is contained in the
Appendices.

The questionnaire asked the subject to describe how
the employee with interpersonal skills communicates when
disagreements occur, with coworkers, with subordinates,
with clients and customers, and in the employment
interview. It also asked how the subject "measures"
interpersonal skills during the employment interview.

Subjects

Subjects in the study included two groups of people
in business and industry. First, the board of directors

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of a personnel association gave permission to survey their members. At a meeting of the organization surveys were made available, but this method of distribution produced only six responses. Next, the surveys were mailed to 193 organization members. Each mailing included a letter of explanation (see Appendices) and a business reply envelope. Three weeks after mailing, follow up phone calls were made to remind subjects of the survey and to urge participation. Forty completed surveys were returned.

The second group of subjects consisted of a random sample of 100 members of business women's network association. Twenty completed surveys were returned from this sample. Of the total 293 questionnaires mailed, 60 were returned with a response rate of 20.47%.

The demographic characteristics of all participating subjects are listed below:

1. Gender split was 22 male and 38 female. Males provided 36.3% of the data. Females provided 63.7% of the data.

2. The number of employees in companies represented by the subjects ranged from 1 to 22,000.

3. The number of subjects who had completed an interpersonal communication course was 33 out of 60, or 55%.

4. Selection interviews were performed by 43 of the 60 subjects, 72%. Entry level employees were hired by 35 subjects, 58.3%; managers, by 33 subjects, 55%; and executives, by 17 subjects, 28%.

5. Employment advertisements were composed by 33 subjects, 55%. Five, 8%, used recruitment agencies or advertising agencies to write their advertisements. Fifteen, 25%, used the term interpersonal skills in their advertisements .

Data Analysis-Coding

Glaser and Strauss (1967) developed the constant comparative method of qualitative analysis to address the question of incidental data, integration of categories, organizing the data into theory and theory writing. They advocated use of another coder to code, categorize, integrate and compare the analyst's notions to develop additional theoretical ideas.

Two coders coded the data (Scott, 1955). One coder has a Master of Arts in communications from Western Michigan University and an employment background in government, business, and educational institutions. The other coder, the researcher, has a similar employment background.

Subjects' responses were recorded on index cards. Each card included demographics about the subject, subject identification number, the question number which elicited the response, and the exact language used by the subject. The coders first sorted the cards into piles by the exact language. Next, the coders merged the stacks with other stacks having a close or related meaning. For example, "body language," "non-verbal" and "smiles" were collected into one category. The coders continued merging in this hierarchical fashion until a logical and consistent argument could not be made to merge another time.

When disagreement occurred, the two coders discussed the definition and supposed intended meaning of the subject's response. The coders either agreed on the category in which to place the card, or noted the lack of agreement on the card. The coders discussed the integration of categories and sorted the final collection of card stacks.

After the coders noted the final categories on the card faces, another distinction was made. All the cards were divided into one of two perspectives: behavior or attribute. Again the coders marked each card with its designated category and the differences were either debated to agreement or noted on the cards.

These procedures resulted in eight categories developed by the two communication based coders: attitude, clothes, effectiveness, listening, nonverbal, sensitivity, task oriented, and "other." A selection of the types of responses contained in the categories are described in Table 1.

Table 1

Final Categories and Their Components

---

1. attitude: breadth of interest, polite,

                     tactful, well-mannered,

                     respectful, open,

                     friendliness.

2. clothes: properly dressed, appearance.

3. effective: asks questions to clarify and

                     understand, calmness, flexibility,

                     asks good questions, is diplomatic

                     yet firm, assertive, objective,

                     articulate, humor, likeable, listens

                     and paraphrases to serve as mediator,

Table 1--Continued

<table>
<tr><td></td><td></td><td>listens and weighs facts to decide, listens with patience and clarifies the disagreement.</td></tr>
<tr><td>4.</td><td>listening:</td><td>listens well, gives feedback, listens for feeling, listens carefully, checks with active listening phrases, listens to their ideas and complaints, shows willingness to listen.</td></tr>
<tr><td>5.</td><td>nonverbal:</td><td>body language, smiles, good eye-contact, entire body shows interest, posture forward, tries to show positive body language characteristics.</td></tr>
<tr><td>6.</td><td>sensitivity:</td><td>client point of view, concerned about the situation and people involved, aware of position, non-accusatory, uses "I understand how you feel" approach, sensitive to others, says appropriate remark in a tactful way.</td></tr>
</table>

Table 1--Continued

7. task oriented: task-oriented, does work in a
                  timely manner, getting things done,
                  getting things accomplished, stays on
                  subject matter at hand.

8. other: lack of response or unintelligible
                  responses, does not refer to my
                  business.

Reliability of Coding

Since the coefficient of reliability has been
criticized (Scott, 1955, Bennett, Alpert & Goldstein,
1954) because it does not take into account the extent of
inter-coder agreement which may result from chance, the
researcher applied the Scott's (1955) pi measurement of
reliability. This index corrects for the number of
categories in the category set and for the probable
frequency with which each is used.

Scott's pi was performed to establish reliability of
the intercoder relationship and outcome.

$$pi = \frac{\text{\% observed agreement} - \text{\% expected agreement}}{1 - \text{\% expected agreement}}$$

Observed agreement was 98.16%. Reliability was calculated at 97.39% agreement.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The results are an evaluation of language about
interpersonal skills as generated by subjects in the area
of business and industry. This compilation was created by
the two communication based coders. Several dimensions
became apparent and are described in three parts: (1)
responses most frequently used by the subjects, (2) the
difference between the behavior and attribute dimensions
and (3) patterns of responses found among the individual
questions.

Categories and the Frequency of Responses

This is the order of the categories when ranked by
frequency of use according to the two coders: effective,
sensitivity, attitude, listening, "other," nonverbal,
task oriented, clothes. The most frequently used
description of the person with interpersonal skills fell
into the category of "effective." Out of the 952 total
responses, 411 responses or 43.2% of the data fell into
this category. It represents a judgment of the conse-
quences of one's communication. Examples of "effective"

responses are "communicating effectively with all level employees" and "confidence and maturity." Effective was derived from the following sub-sets: "asks questions," "evaluates," "facilitates," "has knowledge," and "flexible." "Flexible" had sub-sets of "humor/likeable," "relaxed/calm," "persuasive," "assertive" and "objective/articulate." One can be flexible without being effective, yet effectiveness depends on a degree of flexibility and decisiveness. We decided that "calm" was not meant as a personality trait but as becoming objective during conflict and controlling emotions in a professional manner.

The "sensitivity" category contained 169 responses or 17.8%. Examples of sensitivity responses are "Uses 'I understand how you feel' approach" and "is sensitive to others." This category was created by combining the more concrete categories labelled "team-oriented" and "feelings."

"Attitude" contained 160 responses or 16.8% of the data. Examples of attitude are "does not gossip" and "is polite." The category combined "friendly," "honest," "respectful" and "professional."

"Listening" contained 88 responses or 9.2% of the data. Examples of listening responses are "listens" and "attentive." Responses did not include "listens and

weighs facts to decide" or other listening phrases which indicated a transactional approach to the definition of listening for the expressed purpose of taking action. Such listening related phrases were taken to mean effectiveness and sorted accordingly.

"Other" responses were 50, or 5.3% of the total. Examples are "blank," "unknown" and "not applicable to my business."

"Nonverbal" responses were 41, or 4.3% of the total. Examples are "smiles" and "enthusiastic." The category emerged from the sub-sets of "eye contact," "body language" and "smiles." This group was not merged further because one can have eye contact and smile without being effective, task oriented, or sensitive. The body language of control can be perceived as cold and uncaring which is usually understood to be ineffective.

The "task oriented" category contained 29 responses, or 3.0% of the total. Examples are "follows through" and "investigative skills." The coders agreed that one can be "task oriented" without being "effective" and decided upon no further merging of this category.

The "clothes" category contained four responses, or 0.4% of the total. Examples are "neat" and "professional appearance." These responses were different from non-verbal responses. "Clothes" were not merged as a sub-

category of "non-verbal" to determine any appearance bias
or respondents' sense of "dressing for success." As with
Pavitt and Haight, there were only a small number of
responses for this category.

The final decision in pyramiding the categories was
whether any category was subordinate to another. The
coders asked: If the behavior or attribute of "x"
category increases, would one necessarily become a more
"effective," interpersonally skilled communicator? If the
answer was "yes," then the named category was included as
a sub-set of "effective." For example, if one "listens"
more, does that person necessarily become more
"effective?" The answer was "no," and therefore "listens"
remained as a category and was not folded into the sub-
groupings of "effective."

Behavior and Attribute Dimension

Overall 69.6% of responses were coded as descrip-
tions of behavior while 30.4% were coded as descriptions
of attributes of a person with interpersonal skills (Table
2). As with Pavitt and Haight (1985), what a person
"does" was coded as behavior, and what a person "is" was
coded as an attribute.

The behavioral dimension contained a higher per-
centage of the responses in every category except

Table 2

Attributes and Behavioral Dimensions

Categories	Attribute Dimension	Behavioral Dimension	Total Number of Cards
Effective	95	316	411
	23.1%	76.8%	
Sensitivity	41	128	169
	24.3%	75.7%	
Attitude	78	82	160
	48.8%	51.2%	
Listening	15	73	88
	17%	83%	
Other	47	3	50
	94%	6%	
Nonverbal	8	33	41
	19.5%	80.5%	
Task	1	28	29
Oriented	3.5%	96.5%	
Clothes	4	0	4
	100%	0%	
Totals	289	663	952
	30.4%	69.6%	100%

"clothes." Responses in the "attitude" category were
split most evenly with 48.5% as attribute and 51.2% as
behavior.

Pattern of Responses to Questions

The questionnaire instructed the subject to think of
an employee in the subject's organization who has
interpersonal skills and to keep that person in mind as
the subject completes the questionnaire. (See Appendix.)
A pattern emerged from examining the response categories
in each question (Table 3). This pattern gives us a
snapshot of the interpersonal communicator as described by
people in business and industry. A question by question
review of the findings follows.

Table 3

Questions and Categories of Responses

Question Number	Effective	Sensitivity	Attitude	Listening	Other	Non-Verbal	Task Orientation	Clothing	Total
1	41	23	6	12	1	3	4	0	90
	45.6%	25.6%	6.7%	13.3%	1.1%	3.3%	4.4%	0	100%
2	62	17	7	15	1	1	9	0	112
	55.4%	15.2%	6.35%	13.4%	0.9%	0.9%	8.0%	0	100%
3	45	22	19	7	2	0	4	0	99
	45.5%	22.25%	19.2%	7.1%	1.2%	0	4.0%	0	100%
4	27	19	30	9	2	1	1	0	89
	30.3%	21.3%	33.7%	10.1%	2.2%	1.1%	1.1%	0	100%
5	40	23	22	6	2	0	2	0	100
	40.0%	23.0%	22.0%	6.0%	2.0%	0	2.0%	0	100%
6	39	23	27	9	4	2	2	0	106
	36.8%	21.7%	25.5%	8.5%	3.8%	1.9%	1.9%	0	100%
7	48	14	21	10	13	8	2	1	117
	41.0%	12.0%	17.9%	8.5%	11.1%	6.8%	1.7%	0.9%	100%
8	72	9	10	11	10	19	1	2	134
	53.7%	6.7%	7.5%	8.2%	7.5%	14.2%	0.7%	1.5%	100%
9	37	14	18	9	15	7	4	1	105
	35.2%	13.3%	17.1%	8.6%	14.3%	6.7%	3.8%	1.0%	100%
Totals	411	169	160	88	50	41	29	4	952

X^2 (56, N = 952) = 195.54956, p <.000

Question 1 read "When you think of the interpersonal skills that person has, you remember that person has a certain knack of." The responses to this question generally fit the pattern of responses of all the questions. The "listening" category had its second highest number of responses compared with the overall pattern.

Question 2 read "When disagreements occur, the employee with interpersonal skills communicates in the following way: "Effective" scored 55.4%, its highest number of responses for all questions. Subjects were less likely to respond to this question with an attitude description than on any other question. Attitude responses made up 6.3% of the responses to this question, but were 16.8% overall. Subjects were more likely to give a task oriented response in this question. The task oriented responses made up 8.0% of the responses to question two, but were 3.0% overall.

Question 3 read "Describe how the employee with interpersonal skills communicates with bosses such as the supervisor, manager, or executive." Responses fit the overall pattern with the exception of the non-verbal category. Respondents were least likely to give a non-

verbal response to this question and question 5 with a zero response rate.

Question 4 read "Describe how the employee with interpersonal skills communicates with coworkers." Responses to this question were least likely to fall into the effective category and most likely to fall into the attitude category when compared with the responses to other questions. Effective responses made up 30.3% of the responses to this question, but were 43.2% overall. Attitude responses made up 33.7% of the responses to question 4, but were 16.8% overall.

Question 5 read "Describe how the employee with interpersonal skills communicates with subordinates." Sensitivity responses were more likely to be found in this question than others. The sensitivity responses made up 23.0% of the responses to this question, but were 17.8% of the responses overall. Listening and non-verbal responses were less likely to occur in this question. Listening responses made up 6.0%, the lowest percentage with 9.2% overall. As in question three, non-verbal scored 0%, with an overall response rate of 4.3%.

Question 6 read "Describe how the employee with interpersonal skills communicates with clients and customers." Responses fell within the normal pattern and no extreme highs or lows were found.

Question 7 read "Describe how the employee with interpersonal skills communicates in the employment interview." As in question 6, no extreme highs or lows were found in the response categories.

Question 8 read "How do you measure interpersonal skills during the employment interview?" Two categories of sensitivity and task oriented collected the least number of responses when compared with the responses of other questions. Sensitivity responses made up 6.7% of the responses to this question, its lowest rate, with an overall percentage of 17.8. Task oriented responses made up 0.7%, its lowest rate, with an overall response rate of 3.0%. Non-verbal and effective responses were more likely to be given in this question. Non-verbal responses made up 14.2% of the responses to question eight. This was the highest non-verbal rate with an overall response rate of 4.3%. Effective responses accounted for 53.7% of the responses to this question, its second highest rate, but were 43.2% overall.

Question 9 read "Describe any other traits, behaviors, or personal characteristics of the person with interpersonal communication skills." Responses again fit within the pattern without any high or low levels.

An interesting reverse of the pattern of responses occurred in question 8, measuring interpersonal skills

during the employment interview. The normal pattern was of a lower number of "non-verbal" responses than number of "sensitivity" responses. In this question the "non-verbal" responses were most likely to occur than in any other question, while a "sensitivity" response was least likely to occur.

The responses to the questions showed a strong pattern of "effective," "attitude" and "sensitivity" categorical choices. Subjects chose "non-verbal" responses more often when answering questions concerning measuring interpersonal skills during the selection interview.

Subjects and Response Categories

There were two noticeable patterns in the response preferences developed from the data generated by people in business and industry. Subjects in all demographic subgroups responded with "effective" answers most frequently. The second most common response was either an "attitude" response or a "sensitivity" response (Table 4). Pattern one (ESA) was the "effective," "sensitivity," "attitude" sequence. The second pattern (EAS) shows the "effective," "attitude," "sensitivity" sequence. The two most frequently used response sequences were ESA and EAS.

Table 4
Response Patterns

Subject Group	Effect-ive	Sensitiv-ity	Attitude	Pattern of Responses	χ^2
Hiring	43.2	19.9	16.1	ESA	
Non-Hiring	43.0	12.0	18.6	EAS	16.56 p <.05
Compose ads	38.6	21.5	17.3	ESA	
Do not compose ads	48.3	13.6	16.3	EAS	19.76 p <.01
Interview	43.9	18.5	16.1	ESA	
Do not interview	39.5	14.0	20.4	EAS	10.79 p <.148
Males	47.1	19.9	31.3	ESA	
Females	40.9	16.5	18.2	EAS	18.88 p <.01
Communica-tion course	41.3	19.4	15.7	ESA	
No communica-tion course	46.1	15.1	18.6	EAS	10.28 p <.17
Personnel associa-tion	45.1	18.2	16.0	ESA	
Business women's network	38.8	16.7	18.7	EAS	16.82 p <.02

(7, N = 952)

Those who hired, composed advertisements, interviewed, have completed an interpersonal communication course, are male, or were members of the personnel association respond in the ESA sequence. That is, their responses most frequently fit the effective category, followed by the sensitivity and attitude categories. Those who did not hire, did not compose advertisements, did not interview, have not completed an interpersonal communication course, are female, or were members of the business women's network follow the EAS pattern. Their responses also most frequently fit the effectiveness category, followed by the attitude and sensitivity categories. That is those who do the work reported the ESA pattern, those who do not or are female reported the EAS pattern.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

The data generated from people in business and industry to describe the "interpersonally skilled" employee support the following conclusions. Each conclusion is a reflection of the reoccurring patterns in responses to the questionnaires.

Conclusion 1: The interpersonally skilled applicant was reported to be one who behaves in an "effective" manner. "Effective" responses accounted for 43.17% of the data (Table 2). But effective was also the most frequent response of all subgroups of gender, hiring, composing ads, etc.

Conclusion 2. Sensitivity was reported as an important behavior. Sensitivity was an important response category to the ESA and EAS pattern (Table 4). Sensitivity was the second or third most frequently used response for all subgroups. Sensitivity was a key skill when the employee participated in disagreements at work (Table 3).

Conclusion 3. Positive attitudes were reported as important skills for the interpersonally skilled employee.

"Attitude" was a descriptor used frequently throughout the responses. Attitude was the second or third most frequently used response for all subgroups. It appeared as an element of both the EAS and ESA pattern (Table 4).

Discussion

In addition to these conclusions, there were several other areas of interest which emerged from the data. One might expect that nonverbal cues would have been strongly reported given the research of Imada and Hakel (1977), Schlenker (cited in Gifford, Ng., and Wilkinson, 1985) and Gifford, Ng and Wilkinson and others. However, overall responses in this category were only 4.3%. The category did collect 14.2% of the responses in the question about measurement of skills in the employment interview.

According to this data, people in business and industry did not respond with the nonverbal cuing language expected from the research on nonverbal behavior in the interview. The words they chose to respond with were most often folded into the "effective," "sensitive" or "attitude" categories. These words they chose to use indicated an emphasis on relationship within a context and emphasis on the outcome of non-verbal cuing.

For example "calm" was folded into "effective"; yet it is based upon not only speech patterns and intensity of delivery, but also based upon nonverbal cuing. If the respondents had chosen the words "calm appearance," the response would have been coded nonverbal. Instead, "calm" was taken to mean calmness for an outcome of "effective" behavior and coded accordingly.

How one does the job was more important than the task orientation for the interpersonally skilled employee. Effective behaviors, attitude and sensitivity responses were given more often than task orientation. In fact, task orientation responses were least likely to be given in the question asking about measuring the interpersonal skill during the interview (Table 4). Only four of the 105 responses to this question were coded as "task oriented."

Perhaps because the record of an applicant's task orientation can be culled from the resumé and references, the emphasis during the interview shifts to the *process* of information gathering and relationship development. This emphasis helps the interviewer establish how the applicant interacts and to evaluate the applicant's suitability for the interactive portion of the employment position offered. Locus of control for managing the task of the selection interview rests with the interviewer, not the

applicant. For the applicant to display task oriented behavior during the interview, may give the impression of being out of role.

The sensitivity responses were favored in both the ESA and EAS patterns (Table 4). However, the category elicited its lowest response rate in the interview measuring question (Table 3). The sensitivity response may have been low because the applicant usually has little history or personal knowledge of the interviewer about which to empathize (Wiemann, 1977). Often, the applicant is limited to the self-disclosure dimension of the sensitivity category during the interview. Perhaps this is why more jobs are filled through networks, rather than through "cold" appointments arranged through the advertising route. Of note is that responses of the relational dimension of the sensitivity category were recorded in client or employee/employer relationship questions.

Since the subjects reported behavioral data for 69.5% of the total and since behaviors are more easily measurable, the subjects' idea of "good interpersonal skills" could be actively evaluated by pre-established criteria in the hiring interview (Table 2).

In summary, the interpersonally skilled applicant was reported as "effective." "Sensitivity" was a key

skill when an employee participating in disagreements at work. "Attitude" was a descriptor used frequently throughout the responses.

To be considered "effective," the applicant must be flexible, be assertive, be a facilitator, ask questions, be persuasive, be self-confident, be relaxed, be likeable and have knowledge. Much of "effectiveness" is communicated non-verbally to the interviewer through eye contact, body language and smiling. Effectiveness along with appropriateness are key components of Spitzberg and Cupach's relational model of communication competence. Here appropriateness can be understood by the categories of sensitivity and attitude. Indeed this relational aspect is of particular note, since recruiters advocate evaluating how an applicant will fit with others in an organization (Stevens, 1981).

These categories were differentiated and validated. Therefore, there is a meaning to differentiating among the dimensions of interpersonal communication as perceived by the coders. The fact that the EAS and ESA patterns are differentiated beyond chance indicates that these are meaningful distinctions. They are meaningful not only because coders could create this sequence, but also because responses were across variables and across demographic subgroups. This variety of data source

provides some validity to the discrimination among the categories and has application among other variables.

The interview is a process of information gathering and judgment formation. The subjects' responses reflected an emphasis on process over fact and use applicants' behaviors to access their traits. How the applicant interacts during the interview appeared more important than the actual task of transferring the information about job skills, history and credentials.

The literature review indicated deductive theory pointing to various expressions of the competent communicator. This research developed a description of the interpersonally skilled job applicant by an inductive method of content analysis. The descriptors of "effectiveness," "sensitivity" and "attitude" relate to the components of theoretical models. "Effectiveness" is related to transaction management and interaction management of the dyad. "Sensitivity" is related to Bochner & Kelley's owning feelings and self-disclosure, Weimann's empathy and Spitzberg's relational views. "Attitude" is related to effectiveness and sensitivity in that mannerly, respectful behavior (Table 1) affects one's ability to be effective and sensitive without necessarily ensuring either.

Several practical applications emerge for the applicant, interviewer, and communication practitioner. Practical applications for the interviewee include realizing the power of displaying flexibility, knowledge, assertiveness and calmness--all aspects of effectiveness-- during the selection interview. To emphasize task oriented behaviors during the interview may appear abrupt or inflexible, and thereby, less effective.

Interviewers should be aware of the attributions they derive by their own observance of the applicant's behaviors. They should be keenly aware of their interpretations of their perceptions of the interview process and the specific applicant. If the employment position in question requires an individual with strong task orientation, the pattern of hiring someone who does not emphasize this behavior may be undermining the best interests of both the interviewer and the applicant.

Interviewers should have a clear, written evaluation tool to use during the interview in order to hire the actual skills deemed necessary to best suit the job function in question. No subject indicated the use of such a tool in the measuring of skills question, number 8. Interviewers should be aware that one may have a parti- cular skill that is not easily demonstrated during the selection interview setting, yet be wary of the "role

play" technique which may not necessarily demonstrate the skill either.

Communication practitioners should be aware of the needs of those in business and industry when introducing them to theories of communication competence and the literature on the selection interview. The communication practitioner should teach the use of selection inter- viewing tools within the framework of the communication discipline. In deciding what to teach, the practitioner should include the theoretical development of the concepts of communication competence and interpersonal skills or risk passing on unfounded generalities and misconceptions. If application of research is to have value, it must be in usable frameworks and consistently applied to the base of common knowledge.

Skill is the practiced and polished learning of technique. The skill of interpersonal communication depends upon varieties of experiences, relationship development, role and context. An applicant may have a desired skill that is not demonstrated during the inter- view for a variety of reasons. For instance, the appli- cant may be unaware of the need for the particular skill or think that the previous employment record implies performance of that skill.

Based on the findings of the present study, potential for future research is indicated. It would be valuable to replicate the procedures using a larger sample size. In addition, a system of nationwide poling of members of a personnel association, training association or recruiting organization would access a higher number of possible subjects directly related to the issue and could improve response rate. Follow up research relating the subjects responses to the content and outcome of actual interview interactions is recommended.

Several related research questions remain such as

1. How many writers put this term in the advertisement because it is the current trend?

2. Do they actually interview and decide on this basis?

3. How do applicant's understand the use of the term?

4. Can interpersonal skills be measured in the interview?

A key to developing a tool of measurement for the interviewer may be the method of Bochner and Kelley's study identifying observable skills.

This study focused on the applicant in the selection interview. It reported the outcome of the coding of responses by people in business and industry to the

questionnaire asking them to identify what they mean by the use of the term "interpersonal skills" when used to describe employees or prospective employees. The research did not show that these subjects actually use this intended meaning in evaluating the applicant or their current employees.

Because of the exploratory focus of this study, only the initial semantic responses were available for statistical analysis. No audio or video tapes of actual interviews were available.

APPENDICES

Pilot
Questionnaire

Think of an employee in your organization who has
interpersonal skills. Keep that person in your mind as
you complete this questionnaire.

1.   When you think of the intepersonal skills that person
has, you remember that person has a certain knack of

_____

_____

2. I want our employees to communicate like this person
in that they

_____

_____

3. When disagreements occur, the employee with
interpersonal skills communicates in the following way:

_____

_____

4. The employee with interpersonal skills communicates
with bosses such as the supervisor, manager, or executive
by

_____

_____

_____

5. The employee with interpersonal skills communicates
with coworkers by

_____

_____

_____

6. The employee with interpersonal skills communicates
with subordinates by

_____

_____

_____

7. The employee with interpersonal skills communicates
with clients and customers by

_____

_____

8. The term interpersonal skills was used in the
advertisement because

_____

_____

9. List any other traits, behaviors, or personal
characteristics of the person with interpersonal
communication skills.

_____

_____

Please fill in the blanks.

1. Did you write the advertisement? _____.

2. Will you interview the applicants yourself? _____.

3. Are you male or female? _____.

4. Estimate the number of employees in your company _____.

5. If you want the survey results mailed to you, please provide me with your name, title, and correct business address.

_____

_____

_____

Thank you for your assistance.

Please fill in the blanks.

1. Are you a graduate student? _____.

2. Are you employed outside the home? _____.

3. How many previous jobs have you held? _____.

4. How long have you worked at your current job?_____.

5. Do you write advertisements for employment? _____.

6. Do you interview job applicants?_____.

7. Are you male or female? _____.

8. Estimate the number of employees in your company. _____ .

9. Circle your age group.

18-22   23-26   26-30   30-38   38-50
over 50

Letter to Businiess Women's Network Members

May 25, 1987

«Name»
«Company»
«Address»
«City»

Dear «code»:

I am surveying the membership of the <code 2> Network to
identify how you use the phrase interpersonal skills.
This survey is part of a larger study to establish how the
phrase is used in business and industry. As a member of
Network, I value your professional opinion and experience.

More and more employers are mentioning interpersonal
skills. This use may be related to productivity or
employee qualification, and therefore it is important to
explore what this trend might mean. The outcome of this
study may help you achieve productivity in the hiring
process and in employee training and devlelopment.

It is only through the responses of professionals in
business and industry that the field of human resource
management and executive development can continue to
focus, streamline and excell in response to the mission of
the corporation.

As a participant in the survey you will be mailed the
results which will help you compare your ideas of
interpersonal skills to those of your competitors. Of
course as with any professional and academic research,
your personal name and company name will be held
confidential and remain unpublished.

Sincerely,

Sharron Meisenhelder

Letter to Personnel Association Members

September 30, 1987

Dear <code 3> Association Member:

Last spring I began a study of interpersonal skills in the
employment interview by surveying your membership. I
received the cooperation of many of you, yet need more
responses to have statistically significant data.

I ask those of you who did not fill in the questionnaire
earlier to participatie in the project now. It takes an
average of ten minutes. I have some interesting
findings, and your willingness to join your colleagues can
make a difference in the reliability of the research
findings.

This study allows for confidential responses, so some .of
you who receive this mailing have already sent in your
copy. In that case, please disregard this copy. *Do not
send in a duplicate*. Your contribution has already been
processed and noted.

Remember to fill in your name and address at the end of
the questionnaire, if you wish to have a summary of the
results mailed to you. As with any professional or
academic study, your responses will remain confidential
with me.

Thank you. I appreciate your help in a project which has
become more thought provoking than I anticipated.

Sincerely,

Sharron Meisenhelder
Researcher

enc

Final Survey Instrument: Questionnaire

Think of an employee in your organization who has interpersonal skills. Keep that person in your mind as you complete this questionnaire.

1. When you think of the interpersonal skills that person has, you remember that person has a certain knack of

2. When disagreements occur, the employee with interpersonal skills communicates in the following way:

3. Describe how the employee with interpersonal skills communicates with bosses such as the supervisor, manager, or executive.

4. Describe how the employee with interpersonal skills communicates with coworkers.

5. Describe how the employee with interpersonal skills communicates with subordinates.

6. Describe how the employee with interpersonal skills communicates with clients and customers.

7. Describe how the employee with interpersonal skills communicates in the employment interview.

8. How do you measure interpersonal skills during the employment interview?

9. Describe any other traits, behaviors, or personal characteristics of the person with interpersonal communication skills.

10. Do you hire new employees?

Yes   No

If so, how many each year in the following categories?

Entry level _____

Managerial or supervisory level _____

Executives _____

11. Do you compose employee wanted advertisements?   Yes   No

Do you use an advertisement agency or recruitment agency to compose your employee wanted advertisements?   Yes   No

12. Do you interview prospective employees?   Yes   No

If you answered no to numbers 10, 11 and 12, proceed to section II.

13. Do you ever use the term interpersonal skills as a description of the job applicant in your employee

wanted advertisements?   Yes   No

If so, why?

Section II.

Please fill in the blanks.

1. Are you male or female?_____.

2. Estimate the number of employees in your company _____.

3. Have you ever completed an interpersonal communication course?_____.

4. If you want the survey results mailed to you, please provide me with your name, title, and business
    address.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Thank you for your assistance.

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