Interpersonal Skills in the Employment Interview: Intended Meaning

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INTERPERSONAL SKILLS IN THE EMPLOYMENT INTERVIEW: INTENDED MEANING

by

Sharron McCarthy Meisenhelder

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Submitted to the
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Department of Communication

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1989
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I thank each of my committee members, Dr. James Gilchrist, Dr. Steven Rhodes and Dr. George Robeck for their support and guidance in the implementation of this project. I offer special gratitude to my committee chairperson, Dr. Gilchrist, for his interest in the various aspects of the research and particularly his editorial and technical guidance. Marianne Orr McNally gave intellectual challenge and commitment to coding and analyzing the data.

I thank my parents, husband and children for their patience, support and commitment. I dedicate this thesis in memory of Elizabeth Sullivan McCarthy and Marguerite Sheehan Kavney for their perseverance in times of adversity, commitment to education and delight of the inquiring mind. Marguerite smiled and told me to "Look!"

Sharron McCarthy Meisenhelder
INTERPERSONAL SKILLS IN THE EMPLOYMENT INTERVIEW:
INTENDED MEANING

Sharron McCarthy Meisenhelder, M.A.
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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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.

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
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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Final Categories and Their Components</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. attitude: breadth of interest, polite, tactful, well-mannered, respectful, open, friendliness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. clothes: properly dressed, appearance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>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,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. <strong>listening:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. <strong>nonverbal:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. <strong>sensitivity:</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</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.
Observed agreement was 98.16%. Reliability was calculated at 97.39% agreement.

\[ \pi = \% \text{observed agreement} - \% \text{expected agreement} \]
\[ 1 - \% \text{expected agreement} \]
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 consequences 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 descriptions 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 percentage of the responses in every category except
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Attribute Dimension</th>
<th>Behavioral Dimension</th>
<th>Total Number of Cards</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Effective</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>316</td>
<td>411</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensitivity</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonverbal</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oriented</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
<td>96.5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clothes</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>289</td>
<td>663</td>
<td>952</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>30.4%</td>
<td>69.6%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
"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

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

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject Group</th>
<th>Effective</th>
<th>Sensitivity</th>
<th>Attitude</th>
<th>Pattern of Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hiring</td>
<td>43.2</td>
<td>19.9</td>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>ESA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Hiring</td>
<td>43.0</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>18.6</td>
<td>EAS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>16.56</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compose ads</td>
<td>38.6</td>
<td>21.5</td>
<td>17.3</td>
<td>ESA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not compose ads</td>
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<td>13.6</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>EAS</td>
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<td>$p &lt; .01$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>43.9</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>ESA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not interview</td>
<td>39.5</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>20.4</td>
<td>EAS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>10.79</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Males</td>
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<td>31.3</td>
<td>ESA</td>
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<td>Females</td>
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<td>18.88</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication course</td>
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<td>19.4</td>
<td>15.7</td>
<td>ESA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No communication course</td>
<td>46.1</td>
<td>15.1</td>
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<td>Personnel association</td>
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<td>$p &lt; .02$</td>
</tr>
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</table>

$(7, N = 952)$
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 particular 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 interviewing 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 interview for a variety of reasons. For instance, the applicant 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
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. 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.

6. Are you a graduate student? _____.

7. Are you employed outside the home? ________________.

8. How many previous jobs have you held? ____________.

9. How long have you worked at your current job? ________.

10. Do you write advertisements for employment? ____________.

11. Do you interview job applicants? ____________________.

12. Are you male or female? ________________________.

13. Estimate the number of employees in your company.

14. Circle your age group.

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

   over 50
Letter to Business 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 development.

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 excel 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
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 participate 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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