

**Better Preparing Business Students' Communication Skills:
Methods Employers Use to Identify and Assess These Skills in a Job Interview**

By

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Abstract

It can be challenging for business communication instructors to find better approaches of teaching *effective* speaking, writing, and listening skills to students to improve their success in professional job search upon graduating. To do this, however, it is necessary to understand better the skills employers look for in candidates during the job interview itself, to assess whether or not a candidate has the communication skills needed to function effectively on the job. Most literature reviewed discussed the obvious communication skills of speaking, writing, and listening, but less of subtler traits like non-verbal communications. A qualitative approach was taken by interviewing four employers to answer two research questions: 1) How do employers assess potential candidates' communicating skills in a job interview, and 2) What methods are used to explicitly identify and assess these communicating skills? The results indicated that speaking was the communication skill employers most frequently mentioned used in determining the effectiveness of a candidate's communication skills. For methods used to explicitly identify and assess candidates' communication skills, a combination of the organizations' procedure and the participants' own criteria was discussed. Future research might explore whether communication skills used in a job interview are those used in the job itself.

Chapter 1: Introduction

As a business communications course coordinator and instructor in a post-secondary institute, one of my goals is to facilitate students' success in transitioning into their professional careers. I have found that although my students learn appropriate content skills, some important skills that are important for their success may often be missing. I have chosen to focus on one area that is not explicitly taught, but that is likely needed: *effective* communication skills within their employment context. The question of how to better prepare students is a continuous quest. Overall, while the courses are designed to teach students the skills they will use within a business environment, which includes being able to present information in a way that is easily understood, whether it is through written or oral communication, there currently may be something missing in the course or what instructors are teaching that could further improve communication skills and thereby increase the students' chances for success. Communication skills are considered important in performing well within a business environment, so providing additional instruction facilitates stronger communication skills and probably would be worthwhile.

Guffey and Almonte (2007) state that although people are born with the "ability to acquire language and to listen" (p. 3) instructors do their best to instruct and further develop these skills in their students in order for them to function at an expected level within a business environment. But could existing instruction adequately improve the needed communications skills for students? What does it mean to communicate, and exactly how are the skills defined? Guffey and Almonte (2007) define communication as the "transmission of information and meaning from one individual . . . (the sender) to another (the receiver)" (p. 4). More specifically, "Communication skills are the set of skills that enables a person to convey information so that it is received and understood. . . . [They] refer to the repertoire of behaviors that serve to convey

information for the individual” (“Definition of”, n.d., para. 4). So although Guffey and Almonte point out that most people are born with the ability to send and receive messages, it is the refinement of the skills used to transfer information that may contribute to the success of graduates transitioning into the workforce. These skills are, as Morreale (1998, 2002) indicates, “a key indicator of professional competence and work readiness” (as cited in Grant, 2004, p. 413).

Given their complexity, importance, and interest to researchers, there is not a consensus around communications skills. Despite this lack of agreement, Wellenstein (2009) believes that the reading of these skills is grounded in the values of the person receiving the communication. He states that even though one communicates orally or through writing, one also communicates through images, languages and values. The receiver, therefore, will interpret the sender’s message based on his/her own point of view or state of mind. So the sender may be saying something with one intended meaning, but the message being received may be interpreted by the receiver based on what his/her state of mind is at that point. The receiver may be listening to the other person but may be collecting only information he/she wants to collect or “hearing only what he/she wants to hear” based on past perceptions, interpretations, and mindsets that filter or colour the incoming information. Each individual is impacted in this way, in that he/she has his/her own reality and perceptions. These differences can cause miscommunication and misunderstandings (Center for Good Governance, n.d.).

As effective communication skills play a key role in the ability to adapt and participate in social situations and relationships, they are, ironically, a skill-set that is often overlooked in the workplace (Radzuan, Ali, Kassim, Hashim, Osman, & Abid, 2008). Relating this to considering the communication skills required for an entry-level position, where do employers focus, and

how can they identify or assess the level of these skills within potential candidates to better assess communication skills and reduce communication-related hiring mistakes?

Communication is far more than just being able to communicate with an employee's immediate coworkers; it is also the ability to "interact with people at various levels, as well as in other work units" (Krapels & Davis, 2003, p. 92). Because this interaction is necessary on all levels within an organization, employers may place a high importance on a candidate's ability to communicate well.

Importance of Communications to Employers

In addition to employees being able to communicate effectively once the job has been acquired, it is also very important in job selection. Thus, it is important to be able to assess the communications ability in the actual job interview. Suppose a number of graduating students all applied for the same entry-level position, assuming all were in the same field (e.g., finance, management, marketing, or human resources) and all held the same level of education; only one may be offered the position. With these factors controlled what other factors might contribute to the successful candidate's achievement? In general, what non-content-related skills do graduates entering the professional workforce need that might contribute to success? If communication skills are important to the candidate, do the communication skills nurtured in the school setting facilitate success in the workplace? Many factors need to be considered when hiring a new graduate. For example, trainability, growth potential, previous experience, maturity, and corporate culture fit might be some factors that employers consider. In addition to these factors, effective communication is also important, but can be challenging to accurately assess. Consider the following scenario:

Imagine that you are a CEO who is considering three employees for a promotion so you invite each of them in turn for an informal chat over lunch. Jane knows her job cold but can't quite make or hold eye contact with you. Kevin is friendly and outgoing, but his table manners are lacking, eating with his mouth open and waving his cutlery. Jonathan, on the other hand, walks into the interview dressed for the job he wants, rather than the job he now has. His table manners don't draw attention to his eating; instead, you find yourself focused on the conversation you are having with him. He smiles, and he holds eye contact—but not for too long.

Considering the three applicants, you realize that while they all have the necessary job skills, Jonathan is clearly the person you feel would represent your company. That decision is determined predominantly from the personal skills revealed during the short and informal dialogue. (Post & Post, 2005, p. 5)

In the above scenario, education and job skill contribute only partially to the overall assessment of the candidate applying for a position. The other considerations might be the person's personal and communication skills: those often overlooked, intangible, and assumed skills that may not be explicitly examined. Learning is often focussed on technical skills or foundational knowledge required for a position with little emphasis for other skills that may contribute to the success of a candidate. Wilhelm, Logan, Smith, & Schultz state that work settings have progressed into highly technological and performance-driven environments requiring employees who can “read, write, speak, think, and interact with others. The nature of work has changed and the nature of these changes will necessitate quality training and education for the current future workforce” (2002, p. 17). But is there something missing in this training and education that could better prepare students for career-related job interviews and subsequent

employee success? This then poses the questions of how communication skills contribute to a candidate's success in the workplace in terms of both obtaining the job and working in the job.

With the 21st century workplace shifting into a more knowledge/information orientation, entry-level workers need more education and skill if they are to succeed in this continuously evolving work world. Although specific traditional “hard” skills will always be necessary, “. . . employers reported a greater need for improvement in behaviour skills among both high school and college prepared entry-level employees” (Wilhelm, et al., 2002, p. 13). The stronger these complementary interpersonal/communication “soft” skills are the better chances the candidate might have of being successful.

Wilhelm, et. al. (2002) assert that these “behavioural skills” —the soft skills— are some of the most important skills a potential employee can possess. Although difficult to define clearly, these skills are wide ranging and invaluable contributors to a person's makeup and success in the workforce. These skills include interpersonal skills, work ethic, attitude, and communication skills. Studies found that both companies and their workers felt these overall behaviour skills were important for workplace success and “that employers are often more concerned about soft skills or attitudes . . . than technical knowledge or competencies” (Sharma, 2009, p. 21).

McMurtrey, Downey, Zeltmann, and Friedman (2008) state that because technology changes quickly, the educational focus tries to teach graduates the most current technology. But by focusing on this learning area alone, crucial soft skills may also need to be included in the students' training. Although technical skills are necessary, McMurtrey et. al also state that soft skills of “personal attributes” (e.g. problem solving, critical thinking, and team work) and “business expertise” (e.g. written and oral communication) are the more important skills an

entry-level worker could possess. Even though the level of job position depends on the importance of the technical and soft skills necessary, the soft skills received prominence in their listing as the top three required skills. With these skills being widely recognized as important in the workplace, and that an entry-level worker should possess them when entering the workforce, the authors suggest that not only should learning institutions focus on technical skills but also on the areas of soft skills to increase chances of graduate success in obtaining employment after graduation.

Within the soft skills, effective communications is the ability to communicate one's ideas through using both tangible and intangible methods. Soft skills, including those relating to communication, are important because they support a better understanding of the perspective of others. Communication skills continue to be in high demand by many employers, and studies concur "professional groups consider communication skills in general to rank among the most important skills for graduates to possess upon their entry into . . . [the work force]" (Gray, 2010, p. 41). However, these skills may be difficult to assess accurately in potential candidates which may possibly contribute to hiring errors and increased staff turnover.

In job postings, employers requesting "communication skills" often use broadly defined phrases such as "must possess strong communication skills", "ability to communicate within a team environment", or "effective oral and writing skills required". Statements like these can produce differing interpretations of what is actually required and the importance of communication skills in decisions.

One of the most challenging aspects facing employers is the recruitment of candidates who would be a good fit to work in their organization. A typical assessment by an employer might include the following progression: After receiving applications, employers may initially

review cover letters and resumes for related qualifications, and if these documents are presented and written to an acceptable level according to those hiring, they then select those who have interview potential, review further those screened and then select the final few who will be called in for an interview.

Then, in preparing for the interview, employers will often put together a panel of interviewers. Regardless of whether the interview is conducted in person or through telecommunications, the employer prepares prior to each interview by further reviewing the resumes, cover letters, and any additional documents provided. Depending on how formal the interview process is, the employer might have constructed a criteria sheet assigning weighted values from which to assess the potential candidate's qualities. But how does an employer know what to look for when assessing whether or not a potential candidate possesses the communication skills needed for an entry-level position in a business environment? The challenge, then, may come from how effective the assessment is at evaluating candidates on their communication skills. Employers may be able to evaluate some of the skills to some degree, but these alone may not be enough to accurately assess candidates.

This process does not always result in selection of the best candidate. The hiring process tries to make the best selection and avoid costly hiring mistakes that could cause the company to repeat the intensive hiring process in searching for a better candidate. How are effective communication skills within candidates assessed, and how can education help prepare graduates for these skills? By better understanding communication factors that are important in the hiring process as well as within the job, graduates can be better prepared for job search and performance in the professional workplace.

Importance of Communications to Instructional Methods in Higher Education

Instruction in post-secondary institutions could possibly facilitate the learning of these skills. One of the units in the second-year business communications course that I teach is job search where students learn how to write effective resumes and cover letters, conduct themselves professionally during interviews, and answer interview questions clearly. How can the development of effective communications instruction be delivered better? To answer this question, we need to have a better understanding of what makes communications effective. How do employers review and assess these skills? Once instructors understand what employers are looking for and how they assess potential employee communication skills, instructors can then better prepare their students.

After being selected, new employees will also need to communicate effectively in the job itself, but this paper concentrates on how communications skills are assessed by employers during a job interview. If employee assessment is imprecise, then it is possible that different communication skills are required for job interviews than for the job itself. However, a better understanding of the discrepancies between the communications skills required for the interview and the job itself is beyond the scope of this paper. Instructors need clear understanding of how candidates can get and keep a job; in other words, how employers assess the candidate potential in the interview and the effective communications skills needed for employee performance on the job. With an improved understanding of these processes, instructors can better prepare their students for the workforce.

From an educator's perspective, teaching the importance of these skills within a post-secondary environment can be challenging because the emphasis has been on technical, theory, and knowledge courses, and effective communication skills are often overlooked and considered

less important. Also, since these soft skills can be tricky to assess, given their abstractness, it can be easier for educators to focus on what is easier to assess: technical, theory, and knowledge. The challenge to teaching and assessing may contribute to why these communication skills get overlooked or bypassed. Students also may have no interest in learning about those soft skills since the need for these may not be clear. In addition to students' lack of interest, instructors might often be working with young adults who have not yet experienced the professional work world and who may be unaware of the role these skills actually play in their potential success. Further, to properly assess these soft skills, non-traditional assessment techniques like observation or demonstration may be needed in addition to more traditional testing methods like written or multiple-choice exams. Also, students can become casual in their approach to this type of content which may contribute to their poor attendance and participation within these types of courses. Ironically, these younger, less experienced, students may have problems getting their first jobs, and may not initially start to recognize that their existing skills in this area may be insufficient when looking for and working in a professional work environment.

Focussing Questions of this Research

This paper focuses specifically on the importance of soft skills related to effective communications in a job-interview setting. It examines references to existing communication skills employers are seeking in entry-level positions in the literature and how these skills are assessed in the setting of a job interview. By first better understanding workforce requirements and expectations, an educator can better develop approaches that may help improve a student's success upon graduation. This research project attempts to find answers to the following questions:

1. How do employers assess potential candidates' communicating skills in a job interview?
2. What methods are used to explicitly identify and assess these communicating skills?

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The Importance of Effective Communication

In the industrial era, graduates could be assured of stable employment in their chosen field (US Department of Commerce, Education, and Labor, 1999). As jobs become more sophisticated in the information and communication age, the level of workers graduating with sufficient skill has not kept up with the degree of sophistication required. Wilhelm, et. al. (2002) identify the greatest skill gap in the 21st century worker as in the area of communications, specifically the behavioral skills. Graduates may have the technical credentials required for their profession; however, it is soft skills (those hidden skills that often determine how a person acts or responds), in particular the communication skills, that may be lacking.

Graduates with similar credentials entering this new and competitive workforce are faced with the need to differentiate themselves from their fellow classmates as the subject-matter expertise they have developed is no longer the only major consideration in determining qualification and suitability. Morley (2007) describes that the skills and aptitudes gained through education determine a qualified worker from an unqualified one. She further describes that “[a]n individual’s employability will be influenced by how employers view and value the credentials, knowledge, skills, attitudes and attributes . . . as well as the skill demands of the labour market” (p. 193). So although education remains important, the shift in what employers look for in graduates includes intangible soft skills, and of those skills employers looked for in candidates, academic knowledge sometimes can come second to soft skills like teamwork/interpersonal and communication skills. During the hiring process, an employer likely reviews a candidate’s academic credentials and follows with interviewing. It is during this process that the employer needs to take into account the non-tangible aspects, like non-verbal cues, of communication;

otherwise, without this information their interpretation of the interaction may be limited. Thus, a better understanding of these communication skills becomes important because if an employer cannot account for the more subtle or hidden communication cues, thus their judgement of the candidate's overall effectiveness in communication may be reduced.

The Impact of Soft Skills on Communication

Given the intangible nature of soft skills, these skills may not be readily or easily recognized. Even if they are recognized, they may not be used effectively for impact if either the sender or receiver is not fully aware of the contribution these intangible skills may have to a message being transmitted. Communications soft skills can give a candidate the upper hand in a job interview. So, what exactly are soft skills? According to Sharma (2009), the term 'soft skills' "is an umbrella term covering various life or survival skills . . ." (p. 20), which are acquired and refined throughout life-long learning. Building these talents may enhance an individual's ability to tackle potential personal and social challenges. Falling within this "umbrella", soft skills include, but are not limited to, effective communication skills, interpersonal skills, time management skills, social graces, decision-making skills, and emotional intelligence (Sharma, 2009; Karan, 2011; Lorenz, 2009). Often these are the skills individuals possess to different degrees and are what Sharma believes "help us polish our outer veneer . . . tackle difficult situations and come out with flying colors . . . and are the test of a man's adversities" (2009, p. 20). The degree of individual's effectiveness of these can determine how successful a person can be in handling difficult or challenging situations. As the terms soft skills and communication can be confusing in this discussion, the term General Soft Skills refers to the overall umbrella of soft skills in which communication soft skills falls. The term Communicative Soft Skills will refer to just those soft skills used in communicating information.

For Communicative Soft Skills for example, the ability to read non-verbal communication cues can be critical to the effectiveness of the communications, as Karan (2011) notes. Although technical and content skills provide a student with foundational knowledge in his/her chosen field along with the ability to perform job-related tasks, Karan (2011) suggests the value of Communicative Soft Skills is “undeniable” in effectively transmitting information. He states that information, content, and data “are . . . virtually useless without the ability to communicate effectively . . .” (p. 72). These Communicative Soft Skills would include recognizing cues from others, providing appropriate cues for better understanding in a two-way interaction. So, if an employer cannot understand the non-verbal communication presented by the receiver, miscommunications are more likely to arise in the interaction. Lorenz (2009) supports this by indicating that employers often seek potential candidates who possess these Communicative Soft Skills, because they can indicate a “good employee and [someone] compatible to work with” (para. 2).

When seeking potential employee candidates, Morley (2007) explores what information is looked for and used in the recruitment process of new graduates for entry-level positions, how General Soft Skills are formed, and how they are evaluated. She concluded that “the two most important factors . . . are team working/interpersonal skills and communication skills” (p. 193). Yet, even though these skills have been thought to be important, her study discusses the vagueness of the term “soft” skills and warns that categorizing skills specifically as “hard” or “soft” can cause misinterpretation and misunderstanding as to what skill is necessary for the required position—an entry-level accounting position’s general soft skills may be different than those of a customer service entry-level position for example.

Take “communication” skills for example; although these skills were ubiquitous throughout all interviews, the interpretation can be left open to subjective evaluation or understanding. Morley (2007) helps further explore the term “soft” skills and identifies that many employers are working within a traditional set of assessment norms that were established in the industrial era. Even though they are working towards hiring well-balanced graduates, the employers’ procedures may still need to be updated to perhaps include a more in-depth method of assessing the effective communicative skills. This remains a challenged area for identification and assessment.

Bernd Schultz (2008) also adds to understanding the needs of General Soft Skills in the workplace and post-secondary education’s role in encouraging the learning of these skills. The problem is that students graduating today may not be successful or competent in their General Soft Skills. Schultz is clear in defining the concern of the changing job market and the need for post-secondary graduates to have some sort of leverage (that being General Soft Skills) to complement their academic skills. Students in post secondary education are in an ideal setting to be influenced and guided effectively with soft skills. Teaching these skills might require change in practice and assessment, perhaps by moving from the more traditional paper-and-pencil assessment to performance-based. This area, however, requires further research and discussion beyond the scope of this paper.

Schultz (2008) also points out that when it comes to getting a concrete definition of “soft” skills, the term can be complex and vague. It depends on the context in which the skill will be used and uses the example of how “knowledge in project management . . . is ‘nice to have’ for an electrical engineer, but it is a ‘must to have’ for a civil engineer” (p. 147). Although Schultz lists a wide range of general soft skills, he does focus on three important skills:

communication, analytical/problem solving, and creativity - all of which he finds to be transferrable in entry-level positions.

Communication Skills Defined

Communication soft skills sit within the domain of General Soft Skills. Communication requires a sender and a receiver in a message transmission and requires two components when communicating a message to someone:

- 1) Verbal communication which includes the words, writing, and speaking, and
- 2) Non-verbal communication which includes the delivery elements, such as gesture, body language, vocal variety, document presentation, and word choice.

Verbal communication consists of the words used in a message transmission. Words, whether expressed orally or written, provide the structural framework for the transmission of the message. The non-verbal communication provides the additional cues used for expression and enhancement, facilitating a more comprehensive message by bringing meaning to the words. Depending on the situation where information is being transmitted hinges on the cues used. In face-to-face interaction for example, many physical visual cues such as eye contact and head nodding may be demonstrated in the interaction. When reading text, emoticons have been developed to provide some of these physical or expressional demonstrations of non-verbal communication. These symbols are in addition to non-verbal cues like word choice and tone the writer chooses when writing the information. An example of this would be the misinterpretation of a text or email based on the tone the sender used could cause the receiver to respond differently than the sender intended with the message. Another situation where non-verbal cues can be evident is in telephone conversations. Even though those involved in the conversation rely on listening, non-verbal cues such as volume, pitch, and intonation help transmit the

meaning of what is being communicated. The type and amount of non-verbal cues used depends on the channel (telephone or text for example) and each situation presented; however, face-to-face conversation likely offers the richest means to communication, because it provides the opportunity to incorporate additional cues to aid communications effectiveness.

The impression and words presented to the receiver are often read through the sender's non-verbal expressions which constitute:

- Voice, including tone, pitch, accent, and dysfluencies (e.g., “um”, “er”)
- Facial expression, such as smiling and making eye contact
- Body language, including posture, fidgeting, crossing your arms, and gesturing. (Becze, 2007, p. 30)

Degroot and Gooty (2009) categorize the above nonverbal cues as:

- Dynamic – body movements such as gesturing and smiling;
- Static – background and upbringing variables and physical attractiveness;
- Paralinguistic – vocal variety and characteristics.

For example, if the verbal and non-verbal messages do not align, it is often the non-verbal that the receiver will consider over the verbal simply because the non-verbal cues are innate, culturally-based, and can subconsciously express the truer meaning of what is being messaged. Because these skills may be taught indirectly or without emphasis or clarity either in or outside the education system, and because they may be considered during a job interview, these skills are often open to interpretation by the interviewer, even when structured answers to specific questions are given (Degroot & Gooty, 2009).

Ambiguities Surrounding Needed Communication Skills

The level of communication skills expressed by employers can often be vague and difficult to define, which may not accurately reflect their needs for communication in their organization. Gray (2010) states that “Studies have often used umbrella terms, leaving the term *communication skill* undifferentiated” (p. 42). Because this term is “undifferentiated”, entry-level job seekers often overlook this skill and may assume they already possess them when applying for first-time positions within a business environment. Krapels and Davis (2003) also support this by stating that when creating a job advertisement, it is assumed that because post-secondary education is required, general communication skills are implied, and only unless specific communication skills are needed for a specific position are they likely to be explicitly emphasized in the job posting.

Beyond the broad definition, what are some challenges that the definition of communication skills creates for the workplace? Stoykov (2007) states that “Communication is one of those human activities that everyone recognizes but few can define satisfactorily” (John Fiske's comparative, para.1). Spitzberg and Cupach’s definition of communication is “the ability to interact appropriately and/or effectively” (as cited in Grant, 2004, p. 414; Stoykov, 2007). Hansen and Hansen (2007) describe communication skills employers refer to most often as “the ability to listen, write, and speak effectively. Successful communication is critical in business” (para. 6). So, if one assumes from these definitions that the communication skills are determined just to be the ability to talk, listen, and write, then virtually everyone possesses these skills. Why then are they consistently advertised as being a requirement for most jobs? Most everyone can talk, listen, and write, but a key component to communicating as Spitzberg and Cupach point out is *competence* (as cited in Grant, 2004).

Here lies the difference between communicating and communicating effectively. Employers are looking for candidates who can express themselves and their ideas as well as *effectively* and *successfully* understand communications from others in order to help the company progress forward and fit in well with the organization's culture. Krapels and Davis (2003) support this by stating the ability to communicate within a team is important "in relation to efficiently and effectively accomplishing company goals" (p. 92). It's not just about one's ability to communicate but the ability to do it well that matters. English, Manton, and Walker, support this by stating communication skills are highly valued "which permit effective interaction and understanding [in] business relationships" (2007, p. 414).

Stoykov's (2007) research indicates that this effectiveness comes from the ability to understand or sense where the other person is coming from and to choose the best communicative approach to get the message across. Thus, "competence is considered to be the ability to choose an appropriate strategy and to apply it to qualified performance" (Stoykov, 2007, To conclude this overview, para. 2). Anyone who can demonstrate the flexibility and effectiveness of his/her communication skills between individuals as well as in different environments could be an important contributor in an organization's overall success. By getting to know the individuals a person communicates with in a business enables one to "help members of the organization achieve their goals, and . . . work towards bonding the group" (Stoykov, 2007, Inter-personal and inter-group, para. 2).

When a company's job posting requests that candidates possess communication skills, it is probably looking beyond the actual physical capabilities of speaking, writing, and listening, and are seeking those who possess additional skills for communicating effectively and competently. According to Briggeman and Norwood (2011) however, "different employers seek

different qualifications” (p. 19). So depending on the position being posted, and depending on what the employer him/herself deems competent, different qualification ability levels will be sought. However, because communication is vital to any organization, the position available depends on the attributes or characteristics the employer is seeking. For example, if the entry level position involved a lot of customer service, then the communication skills relating to handling clients and customers might be strongly considered. If the position deals very little with the public, the communication skills sought may not be as crucial. Stoykov (2007) goes so far as to state communication skills “are even considered much more important in comparison to . . . good education and qualification, leadership skills or the ability to take risks” (Importance of communication, para. 1).

Stoykov (2007) clarifies that communication is an integral component in all aspects of an organization and questions if there is any role within any business that does not require some level of reading, writing, speaking, or listening. It is virtually impossible for an organization to operate without the effective use of these communication skills, as they are required in most aspects of the organization’s daily life likely affecting everything from the lowest to the highest position within the company. The key here is how competently these skills are used.

Hansen and Hansen (2006) rank writing and speaking communication skills within the top three skills for candidates to possess. These communication skills are also ranked as the number one skills and are within the top two surveys conducted by Briggeman and Norwood (2011). Bacon and Anderson (2004) also state “employers ranked written communication skills second, exceeded only by oral communication skills” (p. 443). It is, therefore, important for college students entering the professional workforce for the first time to have effective communication skills (speaking, writing, and listening), if they are to succeed in the interview and in the job.

Sharma (2009) indicates the effectiveness of communication skills is not as important in entry-level positions, but should be demonstrated as potential within the person, because these skills become more important as the candidate moves up within the company. Thus, in order for entry-level candidates to succeed in their career objectives, they need to “understand what attributes employers seek in college graduates, and how they assess candidates’ possession of those attributes” (Briggeman & Norwood, 2011, p. 19) and if they see potential for growth and learning in the applicant.

So, communication skills are vital to any organization, and it is not just the physical ability of talking, listening, and writing, but the ability to do them effectively within an organization in order for one to be successful and contributing. If the ability to communicate effectively is important, then people who demonstrate these skills, in theory, should be better at getting jobs.

Does this mean candidates demonstrating their communicative competence within a job interview will be more successful in that interview? Stoykov (2007) indicates that the skill to communicate effectively involves one’s ability to understand the process of information being sent and received, establish trust with the receiver, and ensure the receiver accepts and understands the information being delivered. In order to do this, Pachev points out in Stoykov’s (2007) article the following necessary components:

Language knowledge -- verbal and nonverbal codes and their possible variants;

The skills for social-communicative interaction -- socio-linguistic rules for socially acceptable verbal activity, organization of discourse, strategies for successful realization of communicative goals, etc;

Socio-cultural knowledge -- knowledge of social structure, values, beliefs, etc.

(To conclude this overview, para. 11).

Grant (2004) supports this theory by indicating an individual must know the when's and how's of getting communication across — “. . . two dimensions of ‘appropriateness’ and ‘effectiveness’ are generally accepted as pivotal in communication research” (p. 414). If one understands that the best way to communicate goes beyond the level of language, they must also consider the non-verbal aspect of communication, all the while demonstrating confidence in the sender's ability to engage. “This suggests both a verbal and nonverbal contextual fluency that goes beyond linguistic competence . . . Confidence to engage is another factor” (Grant, 2004, p. 414). In conclusion, Grant discusses “interpersonal, face-to-face, and writing ability as communication skills regardless of the medium” (Grant, 2004, p. 416).

Other Influences Surrounding Communications

Much discussion throughout the literature reviewed also focused on the employer's perception based on his/her values and background which contribute to the overall nonverbal assessment of the candidate's communication skills. Gray (2004) believes the cultural background of an individual influences whether his/her communication skills are deemed competent and effective or not. It can determine how communications are judged, especially when there are cultural differences between the employee and employer. Guffey and Almonte (2007) define the term “ethnocentrism” as a possible reason for people to judge others by one's values. Those whose values differ are expected to respond and behave the way the sender would for example, and when that does not happen, misunderstandings and misinterpretations occur. In a job interview, for example, if the candidate is from a lower-context culture where directness and forwardness are important, managers (coming from the same cultural background) may view

these as important characteristics the candidate possesses. If the candidate is more comfortable in a high-context environment where indirectness and reservedness is practiced and is not as direct in his/her communication, the employer (if coming from a low-context culture) may view this as not being a strong communication quality. Comparing two highly industrialized countries would seem appropriate. However, when interviewing someone from Japan, direct communication may be interpreted by the receiver as inappropriate, and the interviewer may interpret the candidate as not communicating effectively. On the other hand, comparison of seemingly similar cultures in Canada and the U.S. shows how North American culture is more direct. Gray's research (which is beyond the scope of this paper) indicates that "Criteria for communicative competence may . . . vary considerably from culture to culture" (2004, p. 414).

Wellenstein (2009) furthers this discussion by concluding that not only could the employer's cultural background influence the candidate's communicative abilities, but his/her values and beliefs could also affect whether or not he/she believes the candidate has strong skills. Wellenstein believes the personality and language level a candidate uses can reflect his/her core values and may be statements about the individual's "character, integrity, and self-perception of . . . [self-]worth" (p. 179). Therefore, when a candidate and employer are conversing, the employer might see and hear what the candidate is saying through his/her own "personal values filter" (p. 180). The employer will assess the candidate based on these values and what he/she values as competent or communicatively capable. If it is a panel interview, another employer listening to the same answer given by the candidate may assess a completely different level of competence from that candidate. Communications can play an influential role in an employee's competency leading to greater confidence in their hiring abilities and greater reliance in their abilities to read signals (Briggeman & Norwood, 2011).

Interestingly, Degroot and Grooty (2009) discuss that even though the “big five” visual cues (“physical attractiveness, smiling, gaze, hand movement, and body orientation”) have “powerful positive effects on interview performance” (p. 181), the characteristics that make up the voice provide indicators into a candidate’s personality. Degroot and Grooty argue these vocal characteristics are examples of “prototype attributes” (p. 182). For example, one’s vocal pitch indicates the level of authority or leadership the candidate may have: the lower the pitch, the more authoritative sounding the voice indicating good managerial potential. The pitch range can indicate level of dynamics in an individual: the more variety within the range, the more charismatic the candidate may be viewed. Overall, vocal attractiveness may influence the interviewers greatly in combination with the visual non-verbal cues.

When Communication Skills Are Considered

Bladel (1993) points out that before the interview the employer is already assessing a candidate’s communication skills by reviewing the necessary documents provided by the candidate. Additionally, Wellenstein suggests that “When others look at your letter or resume, they’ll make an instant judgment about you” (2009, p. 187). Half (1993) also suggests if an employer needs to screen out whether the potential candidate has effective written communication skills, a preliminary review of the cover letter and resume with consideration for clarity, errors, conciseness, and organization reveals potential.

By using criteria assessment sheets, employers can evaluate whether candidates have certain qualities, but even the candidate who looks “perfect on paper” may not be as perfect at interviewing. When in the actual interview, the interviewer “relies heavily on his observation of the candidate's nonverbal behavior” (Bladel, 1993, p. 54) subconsciously discerning the applicant’s “physical appearance and artifacts, chronemics [use of time in nonverbal

communication], environment and proxemics [use of space], haptics [use of touch], kinesics [use of body movement and gesture], and paralanguage [use of vocal variety]" (p. 55). All of these components are registered by the employer—whether conscious or not—and are used to form the first impression of the candidate's ability to communicate to the competency level the employer is seeking. From this non-verbal registry, Bladel points out that even though interviews run about 30 minutes, most employers have already formed an opinion within the first five minutes on whether the candidate has potential to work there or not. The remaining time during the interview is used to support the opinions created in the first few minutes of the interview.

With communication skills being identified previously as the physical act of talking, writing, and listening, literature also points out that it is more about the competence and effectiveness of one's communication abilities that is important (c.f., Stoykov, 2007; Grant, 2004; Hansen & Hansen, 2007; Krapels & Davies, 2003). Existing literature reviews identify that although reasonable assessments on competence or effectiveness can be primarily assessed through tangible measures, intangible or nonverbal measures may be considered for additional assessment. Briggeman and Norwood (2011) state there is an insignificant amount of information available on how employers can conclude the level to which college graduates possess the required communication skills, "unobservable attributes must be inferred, [therefore], based on indirect measures correlated with these attributes" (p. 20). Yet, as existing literature affirms, these communication skills consistently rank high among employers as abilities candidates must hold (Briggeman & Norwood, 2011; Communication Skills, n.d.; Stoykov, 2007; Sharma, 2009; & Gray, 2004).

Although interviews may be conducted over the telephone, or through other means, unspoken communication is preferable when assessing candidates in a face-to-face interview,

since the use of the unspoken language of nonverbal behavior, provides important information about communications. “If oral expressions were the only criterion for selection, the interview might as well be conducted over the telephone” (Bladel, 1993, p. 62), though non-verbal oral expression can also be considered with interviews but is likely less rich than face-to-face.

Employers are willing to train new employees on technical aspects of a job; however, they are often not willing to teach them how to write well, speak appropriately, or listen effectively, though these skills likely are needed in order to be successful within the organization. The candidates should possess competency in these areas before applying for the position and must be willing to continuously learn to develop and perfect these skills as they progress. So even though a candidate may be versed in the basic communication skills of writing, speaking, and listening, these are necessary but not sufficient for effective communication. In order to demonstrate effective communication skills, Guffey and Almonte (2007) state that the sender needs to place focus on the message being sent and how the receiver will accept the message. This means that the sender needs to understand how non-verbal skills are used when delivering the message.

These cues may include attentive listening signals such as eye contact and awareness of receiver’s receptive state. Effective communication also includes an understanding of the choice of most appropriate words needed in order for the message to be received effectively. If these skills of effectiveness are overlooked, then ineffective communication often arises in the form of barriers inhibiting the sender’s attempt to get the message across clearly to the receiver. Guffey and Almonte (2007) indicate these barriers may include obstacles such as background noise and/or physical distractions like interruptions. Psychological barriers may include the receiver’s current state of mind and language obstacles. Also, the possibility of the receiver faking

attention or demonstrating poor listening skills can contribute to the ineffectiveness of communication. The more refined the communicator's skills are at understanding the receiver and how the message needs to be adjusted to increase understanding, the more these skills can be addressed before sending the message. In addition to the effectiveness of communicative soft skills, other general soft skills such as interpersonal skills, emotional intelligence, and attitudes are likely required to contribute to the competencies in these areas.

Briggeman and Norwood's (2011) assert technical inabilities can be overlooked to a degree because this ability can be learned on the job, but the talent to communicate well should not be overlooked because every employee ultimately represents the company (Communication Skills, n.d.). Briggeman and Norwood also argue that grades, accomplishments, and effective interview skills do not necessarily present a good candidate but could instead simply demonstrate good administrative and preparation skills. So, even though the candidate's credentials present well on paper, communications can contribute to determining if the candidate is a good fit for the company (Half, 1993). This is supported by Drake, Kaplan, and Stone "show[ing] that impressions formed of the applicant during the interview carried the most weight in evaluations" (as cited in Ugbah & Evuleocha, 1992, p. 128).

Communication Skills Employers Seek

So what do employers look for during an interview to determine the level of communication skills possessed by the candidate? Krannich and Krannich (2007) believe that nonverbal communication makes up 80% of what is being communicated to another individual, and that "[p]eople tend to put greater weight on the nonverbal [messages]" (Krannich & Krannich, 2004, p. 27), because verbal messages are easier to conceal and regulate than nonverbal messages. Studies conducted by Ugbah and Evuleocha (1992) also indicate that "an

applicant's verbal and nonverbal behaviors influence a recruiter's hiring decision” (p. 128) even if the employer is unaware he/she is assessing those skills. It is usually easy to assess the effectiveness of someone’s writing skills simply by reviewing the provided documents prior to an interview, but it is not so easy to assess someone’s overall speaking and listening skills by observing nonverbal expression. As nonverbal expression can be very subtle and difficult to detect, some employers may not be aware they are observing how a candidate is answering a question but may get a feeling or sense of the candidate’s quality. The challenge with this may be in what an employer is looking for, including the type of job the candidate interviews for and whether or not the employer needs to assess these skills directly or indirectly.

A keen eye for the nonverbal skills, therefore, allows a sender to assess whether or not the receiver understands the message by observing the receiver’s nonverbal cues. So not only is the ability to demonstrate effective speaking and listening skills important, so is the understanding the nonverbal cues and how they are used in context. Degroot and Gooty (2009) discuss the interchangeability and flexibility of non-verbal communication like gesturing and smiling but not the voice. One’s voice remains less flexible. “People cannot ‘fake’ voice characteristics very much and certainly not for very long” (p. 181).

The interviewer’s job title also may influence what he/she deems valuable in a potential candidate, and will look for cues and information that is in line with his or her job title’s characteristic model. “. . . [W]here this information matches the stereotype s/he will favorably rate the interviewee (Lord and Maher, 1993); wherever this match does not occur, the interviewer experiences cognitive dissonance (Kunda, 1990; Keller and Block, 1999)” (as cited in Degroot & Gooty, 2009, p. 181). In general, non-verbal cues are important when communicating because they can help make communicating clearer and the communication may

be successful even without either sender or receiver being fully aware of the non-verbal cues being displayed. Guffey and Almonte (2007) state that it is when the verbal and non-verbal cues are not in synch that uncertainty in message transfer occurs.

Nunan writes in *Developing Speaking Skills Module for Engineering Students*, “success is measured in terms of the ability to carry out a conversation in the (target) language” (as cited in Radzuan, et. al, 2008, p. 62). A candidate can demonstrate his verbal competencies through the interview by listening to the questions being asked, seeking clarification, and answering coherently without rambling or confusing the listener with vague answers (Half, 1993). Wellenstein (2009) states “Four key ways to tell if you’re successfully communicating verbally with another person are . . . Attentiveness, Interest, Understanding, Memory” (p. 180). If one can demonstrate listening and understanding of what exactly the interviewer is asking, provide answers to the actual questions asked, and engage the employer, this can provide evidence of the candidate’s effective verbal (and non-verbal) communication.

Ugbah and Evuleocha (1992) argue that written skills may be a clearer demonstration of overall communication skills than speaking skills, because during an interview, the potential candidate may be able speak coherently and well, but often “the individual knows how to play the role and may lack the actual skills required for the job” (p. 129). Therefore, if the potential candidate was given a writing test during the interview, as is a common practice, the candidate might fail. Even with this argument, however, Briggeman and Norwood (2011) concluded that even over and above the other forms of assessment, “. . . the personal interview. . . [was still] the most useful signal” (p. 25) of a candidate’s demonstration of verbal skill competence. Even though these two sets of authors differ in their opinions, all candidates will most likely have to

attend a job interview, while only if the position interviewing for required a lot of writing would some may be required to take a written test.

Up to this point in the review, identification of effective and competent communication skills and how they are assessed within an interview have been examined. Written communication skills are assessed through documents like resumes and cover letters, while listening and speaking skills are identified through conversation with potential candidates during the interview. As the written skills can be identified tangibly, effective listening and oral skills are mostly left up to the employer's intuition and non-verbal assessment abilities. But even these assessment abilities differ for each employer reviewing the existing documentation and conversation with the potential candidate.

Communication Skills Needed

The types of communication skills required for a new graduate entering the business world through an entry-level position are writing, speaking, and listening. It is, however, not just the ability to possess these skills that all literature deduced to be the requirements, but more importantly the ability to do these skills well and competently to conduct the work for which the employee was hired. Even while it is important to be able to use writing, speaking, and listening skills effectively, it is important for the candidate to understand which method would be the most appropriate for delivering information. He/she also needs to be able to understand the needs of the employer and the skill level required, as well as to determine what the employer is looking for within each candidate. So, it goes much further than simply identifying the physical skills of communicating, but to understanding the level of competency and what the employer is seeking in terms of level required for both the position being applied for and fitting into the organization's culture.

In terms of how these communication skills are assessed during an interview poses some debate around the intangible skill assessment but also included the areas of culture, values, and confidence on the employer's part in terms of effectively assessing an individual's potential for a position. If the candidate is able to orally express him/herself well, and if the employer's confidence in assessing character through past interviewing experience and recognition of low and high cultures differences, then the potential is enhanced for determining if the candidate is a good fit. It is also important that the employer effectively assessed the written documentation that was provided. If the candidate succeeds in both these arenas, then he/she may have greater potential to succeed.

Conclusion

Understanding communicative soft skill competence, though usually quite important, can be one of the most challenging qualities to identify in an individual when it comes to assessing the ability to communicate well for an entry-level position in the business world. It has been well-documented that general soft skills are necessary for and are indicators of performance and advancement in the workplace. In fact, the level of soft skill competence in employees can be directly related to how employers perceive an employee's job performance (Kinnick & Parton, 2005). Employers then need to be able to identify these skills in potential candidates before they actually get hired. Although communication skills play a large role in combination with other soft skills in the workplace, these skills are quite important in determining a candidate's success in a job interview. If the candidate cannot demonstrate these skills during the job interview, the chances of successfully hiring a good employee are reduced. Sources cited in Kinnick and Parton (2005) state "Oral communication is consistently identified both as the most important competency in evaluating entry-level job candidates (Maes et al., 1997) and as the most critical

attribute for managerial success (Seymour, 1989)” (as cited, p. 431). So general soft skills which include communication, are generally needed for a business-related position, but it is the ability to demonstrate these general soft skills through effective communication that is required more in the job interview.

The existing literature reviewed was limited in describing what constituted the ability to effectively communicate or in describing the complexity of the process. The literature did identify some common similarities of different communication skills around listening, speaking, and writing and their effectiveness importance. This review, therefore, attempted to find out how employers involved in the hiring process defined and identified the ability to effectively communicate in the candidates they interview for entry-level positions within their organization.

Since this identification can be challenging, more research is needed in order to better understand what it all encompasses. How do prospective employers measure competencies and skills, and how do these methods evaluate the ability to communicate well? Do “gut feelings” override evaluation-tool results assessing the communication skills in potential candidates? If so, what factors, such as the individual’s background, perceptions, values, and or experiences might affect their judgment. As previously stated, the term “soft skills” is a particularly broad term with many different sub-skills falling under its overall term. For the purposes of this study, however, the communication skills located within the general soft skill area in review are defined as listening, speaking, and writing with the inclusion of non-verbal communication skills. .

With the ultimate challenge of this project being what post-secondary communications instructors can teach in order to help their students improve their success at acquiring entry-level positions within their chosen field, it is important to first understand what exactly the communication skills are that these graduates need, and what the employers are seeking; and

how these skills are identified and assessed during the interview process. Once these needs have been identified by employers, possible recommendations can then be made as to how these required skills can be approached and taught within the business communication courses as well as perhaps how other courses outside the business communications area could benefit from these findings. This research will try to address these issues by learning about employers' experiences when hiring business diploma or degree graduates for entry-level positions within their business.

Chapter 3: Methodology

To better understand how communication skills are assessed, the purpose of this exploratory research is to try to identify how employers assess communication skills within potential candidates for entry-level positions within their organization so that content instruction can be improved in better preparing students for the future. This chapter describes the research method used for this study, explains the sample group used, describes the procedure used in designing the data collecting tools, and defines the method used in data analysis.

Conceptual Design/Research Planning

How does one analyze communication skills when aspects of these skills are sometimes intangible and can be challenging to interpret? Understanding whether and how these skills are assessed could play a role in how a candidate is perceived based on the skills demonstrated during an interview.

Approach

The type of methodological approach to use for this research required consideration of what kind of data was best suited to answer the research questions. Because of this project's exploratory nature, it was better suited to collect detailed information from a few individuals engaged in the process, rather than collecting limited data from many. Understanding a person's experiences is important, and trying to recognize the participant's perspective is subjective as different participants interpret their understanding differently. By working with human relations and experiences, this type of data seemed well suited for collecting the information that would be more interpretive or qualitative (Santiago, 2009, September 1).

Qualitative data collection, for the purposes of this research project, is better suited to an open-ended approach, and is often better suited to examine subjectivity and “long descriptions [of the data] written by the researcher” (Santiago, 2009, September 1). This qualitative approach provided a better approach to understanding this type of data through methods “such as interviews, documents, and participant observation data to understand and explain social phenomena” (Meyers, 1997, Introduction, para. 1). As Krivokapic-Skoko and O’Neill (2011) state “qualitative research can valuably extend the logic of quantitative explanation and give voice to different perspectives” (p. 291). Given the exploratory nature of this researcher’s topic, it was desirable to attempt to gain a deeper understanding of individual backgrounds and experiences. Since participants provide a deeper response to the topics being examined, only a small sample is needed. Although this approach limits the number of participants required, it allowed the researcher to conduct a more exploratory study.

Orlikowski & Baroudi (1991) state “Interpretive studies assume that people create and associate their own subjective and inter-subjective meanings as they interact with the world around them” (p. 5). While the basic act of listening, speaking, and writing competence can be, to some degree, identified with physical assessment tools through an organization’s interview process, these tools are seldom seen as sufficient by themselves for assessing potential employees’ effectiveness in these competencies. To better understand how communications skills are being assessed in employee selection, qualitative methods are well suited in understanding both the what and why of participants’ approaches.

Interviews

To gather information from the participating employers, direct interviews were planned, since the one-on-one discussions would help answer questions around relevant topics, as well as

clear up areas of confusion. Wahyuni (2012) states “[t]he interview method is most often selected as the main method for collecting empirical data of the relevant practices” (p. 74). It is also the qualitative method best suited to use for the type of information being collected, thus retrieving information from the participants in this manner would deem most appropriate. According to Blankenship, Crossley, Heidingsfield, Herzog, and Kornhauser, the “[f]ormalized personal interview” is “[a] series of short-answer questions . . . asked personally, in a standardized way, of the respondent” (1949, p. 407). Using a smaller sample group allows the researcher to focus on a more exploratory approach by drawing richer information from the participants’ experiences.

Semi-structured Interviews: Because the researcher of this study considered a specific area (that being communication skills in a job interview setting focusing on speaking, listening, and writing), she also wanted to hear the points-of-view and perspectives from the study participants. To do this, a semi-structured interview approach was taken. In this method, an interview is conducted providing open-ended questions, but the questions are not so structured that they limit the participants’ answers and are not so unstructured that they don’t provide guidelines. This allowed the researcher to have structured questions that provide the option to probe the participant for clarification or further information. According to Santiago (2009, September 24) the semi-structured approach is best used when qualitative research is being conducted. It is also used best for obtaining deeper meanings and information through developing participant rapport and trust allowing them to speak freely within the realm of the question. So even though the researcher is looking for information relating to specific communication skills, the semi-structured approach provided the needed structure in the

questions and interview setting while providing freedom for participants to contribute their own perspectives on what they themselves deem necessary requirements in communications skills.

Individuals perceive information differently, indicating no objective right or wrong view. An interpretive approach using “[q]ualitative research methods [is] designed to help researchers understand people and the social and cultural contexts within which they live” (Meyers, 1997, “Overview of Qualitative Research”, para. 2). This approach allowed the researcher to gain information in a direct face-to-face style, thus understanding and deducing responses participants provided. By using this method, the researcher tried to gain an understanding of those who interview candidates for entry-level positions within their companies and their own assessment abilities in communication skill requirements.

Interview Questions

The interview questions used in this research were created to guide the participants from general questions about their demographic background and organizational interviewing procedures through to what they personally looked for when judging potential candidates. Blankenship et al. (1949) believed that the way the questions are sequenced within the questionnaire decides whether or not a participant is comfortable replying to a particular question. By constructing the interview questions this way, participants could provide answers to the general, easier-to-answer questions initially, and then feel more comfortable delving further into what they personally required in a candidate’s communication competencies. Another reason for choosing this approach was it allowed the participant to express his or her opinion before learning of the researcher’s perspective. Once the participant suspects from where the researcher is coming, it is likely that subsequent responses will reflect that perspective, even when it differs from his or her own.

Wahyuni (2012) states that interview questions should be made up of three types of questions: open-ended main questions, follow-up questions, and probing questions. This type of sequence allows the interviewer to ask the main question receiving the participant's answer while following up to encourage a more rounded answer through possible examples or clarifications. If the researcher needed more information, then probing was used to keep the conversation on track, clarify a point, and maintain focus on the researcher's objectives. To encourage the maximum amount of information received, questions included wording that stimulated follow-up and probing. This allowed the participants to feel comfortable in expressing their additional perspectives in a way that did not restrict them to simply answering the questions with brief answers. Additional information, outside of the specified communications area, contributed by the participants could also be explored with this type of question structure.

In developing the questions for the interview, a combination of quantitative (close-ended) and qualitative questions (open-ended questions) were used. The quantitative questions collected yes-or-no data on relatively common communication skills that could be easily identified as whether they were present, considered, or valued on a more general scale. These questions required no explanation or discussion from the participant and did not need much interpretation. The open-ended questions provided perspective and more subjective answers allowing the participants to “. . . pass on their knowledge . . . through the conversations held during the interview process” (Wayhuni, 2012, p. 73).

Structurally, the interview questions were broken into two sections: “Background Information” and “Communication Skills Used in an Entry-Level Position”. The background information section had general questions to obtain a demographical background of the

participants and included questions on education, gender, age, job title, type of business worked in, length of time at current organization, and experience level with the interview processes.

These can be found in Appendix C: Communication Skills Assessment Question and Response Form.

The latter part of this background section included more specific questions relating to the organization's overall hiring process and procedure. It questioned how the organization posts "communication skills" within job advertisements as well as the organization's general procedures used for hiring entry-level candidates. The last question in this section asked additional procedures the participant uses and whether they were similar or different than those of the organization's process.

The "Communication Skills Used in an Entry-Level Position" section used more open-ended questions to explore the participants' responses to what communication skills (specifically) and any other skills they looked for in potential candidates. The latter part of this section included questions on how the participants assessed if and how the candidates possessed and demonstrated the skills they were seeking. This section included a mixture of open-ended questions as well as yes/no questions to allow for clearly defined assessment criteria as well as the participants' interpretations. Please see Appendix C for a copy of the question and response sheet created and used for this research.

Methodological Context

Research methods have variously been classified as objective versus subjective . . . , as being concerned with the discovery of general laws (nomothetic) versus being concerned with the uniqueness of each particular situation (idiographic), as

aimed at prediction and control versus aimed at explanation and understanding, . . .
.. (Meyers, 1997, Overview of Qualitative Research, para. 6)

Meyers indicates that within every standard set of procedures, there may be different interpretations or experiences connected to those concrete procedures. As the ultimate quest for this research is to find out what the key aspects of how employers determine communication skill competencies within potential candidates are, this research has chosen the interpretive perspective of believing that “reality is constructed by social actors and people’s perceptions of it” (Wahyuni, 2012, p. 71). Everyone experiencing situations has constructed his/her own reality based on experience, perception, and interpretation. So the employer interviewing candidates for entry-level positions may have constructed his/her own criteria of what he/she deems valuable in demonstrating competency within the organization’s systematic hiring process. Although the organization’s procedures have been put in place to help identify potential candidates, it is the “backgrounds, assumptions, and experiences” (Wahyuh, 2012, p. 71) the interviewer has developed through his/her sense that is often used in identifying communication competencies within potential candidates.

This research also looked ontologically at individuals’ assessment procedures attempting to understand the underlying processes people have that contribute to their desire to hire a specific person during an interview. This is often the moment where an employer might indicate that his or her opinion is subjective through expressions like, “sometimes you just know”, “I got a feeling”, or “my gut is telling me . . .”

Interpretivists “recognise that individuals with their own varied backgrounds, assumptions and experiences contribute to the on-going construction of reality existing in their

broader social context through social interaction” (Hennink, Hutter, and Bailey, 2011 as cited in Wahyuni, 2012, p. 71). So in considering both the ontological and epistemological points of view, this research attempted to take an interpretive look at how existing interview processes are taking place within organizations while trying to identify what intangible abilities (such as non-verbal communication) are used to assess the communication-skill competencies in entry-level employees. “Because these human perspectives and experiences are subjective, social reality may change and can have multiple perspectives” (Hennink, Hutter, and Bailey, 2011, as cited in Wahyuni, 2012, p. 71).

Participants Chosen. “Everything else being equal, it can be said that as the size of the sample becomes smaller, the qualitative interview becomes more valuable” (Blankenship et al., 1949, p. 408), and because this research seeks a deeper understanding of how communication is viewed and interpreted, qualitative research is suited to provide these answers through interviews. Since the goal of the research is to get a more in-depth and thorough understanding of the participants, a small purposeful sample of four participants was used. This target group included managers, supervisors, and employees involved in the hiring process of new graduates for entry-level business positions. Participants were chosen from various position levels in order to obtain data from different management ranks to allow for different perspectives regarding communication skills in new employees. In addition, the researcher was looking for a balanced representation of genders, ages, educational backgrounds, and business-environment representations.

The variety of employment backgrounds was chosen to examine how the level of experience or education might differ amongst the individuals to see if their organizations had similar procedures for identifying competent communication skills within potential candidates.

The research attempted to examine the consistency amongst organizations as to how they go about recruiting and hiring entry-level employees. In addition to following a specific interviewing process, participants were also asked what characteristics they personally looked for in potential candidates.

Recruitment Procedures

Initial participant volunteers came from the researcher's own connections within the business world. To solicit additional participants, the researcher approached individuals working in organizations by going to businesses and explaining to the front desk assistant what she was researching. She would then ask the assistant if a manager was available, and if a manager was not available, the assistant provided contact information of those who would potentially be willing to participate in the study. Upon obtaining the contact information, the researcher then would contact the potential participants. A copy of the telephone script demonstrating the dialog used in this cold-call solicitation has been attached in Appendix A: Telephone/Introduction Script.

Data Collection

Upon receiving ethics approval from both the home institution and the institution from which I am conducting my MA Project, the U of A, data collection started through first soliciting potential participants. Upon the participants' verbal agreement to participate, an information and consent form was presented to them for their signature. This consent form described the research being taken, appreciation for their participation, and the insurance of confidence to their anonymity in the project. A copy of the information and consent form used has been attached as Appendix B: Information Letter and Consent Form.

Interviews took place either in public restaurants or at the participants' office. In the one case where it was not feasible for the researcher and participant to meet in person, a telephone interview was conducted with the consent form being sent digitally and returned via email with the participant's signature. After each interview, the researcher wrote a brief summary, date and time, and an overall analysis of the interview.

Proposed Data Analysis

Before data assessment begins, Wahyun (2012) suggests the data collected be stripped of any connection to the participants. Descriptive statistics was planned to be used for the analysis of the quantitative data to examine what employers view as important during the job interview with respect to listening, speaking and writing. For the qualitative data, the transcripts of the participants' responses to the interview questions were to be analyzed for comparisons, themes, and differences. This comparison was done through first categorizing the retrieved information using colors to code the different sections then the statements were color coded according to the themes previously coded.

Coding System Used. In order to analyze the data, tables were created to sort and organize information collected according to participants, questions, and consistent themes relating to the original research questions. Overall, four participants participated in this research.

Findings Analysis. Each question was analyzed for themes. All coded information received during the interviews was then extracted and separated into the individual coded sections to identify common information. These coded and categorized tables can all be found in the Appendix D.

Chapter 4: Research Findings

It was the intention of this research to identify what employers felt were important Communicative Skills candidates should possess by asking, 1) how communication characteristics needed were identified in a job interview setting, and 2) how employers assessed these communicating skills during the job interview. Information collected for this research has been coded and categorized based on the recurring themes running throughout the interviews and discussed with connection to the research questions. Each interview question was then summarized by the major topics from the interview questions as presented.

Description of Participants

Both genders were equally represented. Three of the four participants were in their 30's and 40's while one participant was under 30. All participants possessed the same level of education: post-secondary degree. Their job titles ranged from roles held in some form of leadership, management, or generalist covering finance, sales, management and human resources. The position levels held by these participants ranged from leadership which included management and upper management to support as representatives.

In terms of experience working at their current positions, as well as participating in hiring processes and interviews, two of the four participants had over ten years' experience while the others had less than three years. During the years of experience, the number of graduates hired within their experience indicated that two had hired less than ten graduates, while one had hired between six and ten and the other attended over 25. Although all participants stated they participated in the interview process by covering a variety of roles within that process, they all indicated they played key roles like lead interviewer (3) and support roles which included resume sorting, candidate selection and contact, interview preparation and attendance (1). Based on the

descriptive demographics information, the participants presented a wide range of experience with all being involved in every aspect of the interview process regardless of whether they were new to the company or had been there for a long time. To review this information including the participants' responses, please see Appendix D: Coding Tables Used.

Common Communications Strategy

Regarding the first question of how communication characteristics required from business graduates in entry-level positions were identified in a job-interview setting, speaking skills was the most discussed skill required in the participants' answers. As one participant stated "you can't train them in communicated speaking"; consistent comments referring to a candidate's ability to answer questions effectively were most mentioned. Listening skills were mentioned more indirectly by revealing them through the job interview candidate's speaking skills with common statements referring to the general need to "listen". Writing skills, although not so directly mentioned, were often referred to where candidates would use their writing skills within a position as opposed to directly stating specifically that writing skills were needed. In addition to the communication skills sought, that were the structured focus of this study, the research participants were also interested in assessing general soft skills such as personability, problem solving, critical analysis/ thinking, and leadership potential.

In answering the second question of how employers assess potential candidates' Communicative Skills in a job interview and what methods they used to explicitly identify and assess these skills, participants assessed potential candidates through similar procedures. All followed a standard selection process progression of reviewing candidate application documents to select the most appropriate applicants for interviews. In addition to specific criteria, each participant looked for, all mentioned the importance of a candidate's fit within the organization's

culture. They stressed the importance of a good fit with the company through questions they would ask to themselves like “Can I see this person fitting into corporate culture of this company?”

Interview Questions Summaries

The interview questions were separated into two parts, thus, the findings are presented according to the questions within those parts. Please see Appendix C for a copy of the interview questions used in this research.

Part I: Background information - general interview process. When it came to how the communication skills were worded in a job posting, all participants indicated writing and speaking skills were listed either directly through statements like “excellent communication - written and oral skills” or indirectly through statements like “communication abilities”. Other skills like “good interpersonal skills”, “customer service skills”, and “problem solving skills”, though not specifically asked about in the interview, were also listed. Participants stated, however, these skills were added depending on the position posted. In terms of how communication skills needed was worded in the job advertisement, standard general terms such as “excellent”, “effective”, and “good” were used, as well as the all-encompassing word “communication”. Two of the four participants provided other skills that they had categorized under “Communication” which included “problem solving skills”, “ability to influence”, “accountability”, and “customer service skills”. One participant indicated his/her organization was obliged to use specific wording within the job postings because of union specifications.

All participants stated some sort of multi-step process their organization goes through when determining potential candidates to interview, indicating the complexity around the process of finding a successful candidate. Once resumes were sorted, all participants said they searched

the resumes for keywords with respect to the job posting. One participant indicated their organization mined existing online databases for potential candidates scanning thousands of resumes for key words relating to their field. They then selected potential candidates, called them, and assessed their speaking abilities over the telephone before considering an invitation to an interview. The other three participants stated their organizations used a more standard method starting with scanning incoming resumes solicited by a job posting. Whether this scan was done manually or through software, resumes were sorted, short-listed, and then forwarded to those involved in the interview process.

Once the participants received the short-listed resumes, the participants themselves pondered particular criteria they use to consider potential candidates, while maintaining the boundaries of the organization's specifications. Two participants expressed their specifications around cover letters, whether they were to be short or well written and structured, to be clear indicators of a candidate's potential in communication abilities. In addition to the two considering the written documents, two participants also considered how a candidate presented him/herself on the initial phone call, with one participant stating the phone call, "told me everything I needed to know in the phone conversation about the candidate's potential."

Although all participants followed their organization's standard procedures for identifying potential candidates, they also contributed their own specific requirements based on what they considered clear communicative ability indicators. Statements like "Emphasis on image – confidence and the ability to carry themselves" or "key wording within the resume" were presented by the participants to clarify this.

Part II: Communication skills used in entry level positions - Communication skills used in job. When asked what type of positions the participants' organizations hired for, all

indicated some sort of “Assistant” role to financial advisors and consultants, human resource managers, or accounting departments. In addition to “assistant” roles, participants stated positions included clerical and reception.

While the word “listening” came up in most participants’ responses, all participants mentioned the potential employee’s necessity to understand the client/customer needs and the ability to respond accordingly to those needs. As one participant indicated the skills depend on the position, but customer service skills which can mean the ability to listen and interact with customers, were necessary because “we are always working with people” in some form or another. Skills other than the communication skills centered in the interview questions of listening, speaking, and writing, also mentioned by participants included General Soft Skills of critical thinking, problem solving, time management, and prioritization. One of the participants indicated the importance of a candidate’s ability to maintain open communication with coworkers or managers in the ability to ask questions or for help when needed in order to complete a job-related task in an entry-level position. Another participant expressed frustration on candidates’ writing skills by stating, “There is, overall, a struggle with finding graduates not having the written skills”. Yes, this skill did not appear to be as crucial as the speaking skills.

In terms of the specific tasks entry-level employees would need to use their writing, listening, and speaking skills for, all participants mentioned “communicating” with either staff or clients, but the word “communicating” was not defined in the specific terms of writing, listening, and speaking skills. All participants stated entry-level employees would use writing skills in forms like emails, memos, meeting minutes, and bios with one participant specifically stating that written communication was not as stressed as verbal in their entry-level positions.

Assessing communication skills during the interview communication. All participants indicated they used both assessment tools and overall impressions to measure a candidate's Communicative Skill level and ability and were quite satisfied with how the assessment procedure worked overall. One participant indicated that the assessment form provided specific requirements that could be tangibly checked to see whether the candidate answered the employer's interview question satisfactorily or not, but it was the candidate's impression on the interviewer that indicated if the skills were demonstrated competently or not. In addition to using the standard rating assessment sheet, one participant would try to envision the candidate fitting in with the organization's culture to determine whether or not the candidate would be a good fit for their organization. All participants focused on how the candidate answered the questions and presented information to determine the candidate's communication ability. Two of the participants indicated they provided situational questions specifically to assess how the candidate structured and answered the question.

A candidate's ability to communicate well during the interview was very influential to all participants, and this ability influenced their decision as to whether or not to hire the candidate. One participant expressed that candidates need to "sell yourself; need to communicate why you are the best fit for the job".

First impressions. The next set of interview questions the participants were asked related to how a candidate's first impression influenced the participant's decision on the candidate's communicative competencies. Two participants indicated a candidate's first impression was very important when considering him/her for hiring, while the other two indicated different factors were more important. One participant indicated that although the organization placed

high importance on a candidate's overall first impression, he/she considered mitigating factors in his/her assessment.

While participants considered eye contact, overall confidence, preparation, question answering ability, and prior accomplishments to be considered when assessing candidates during an interview, one considered conscious non-verbal expression, two considered verbal expression, and most considered question clarification and personal appearance when deciding on a candidate for an entry-level position.

In addition to the non-verbal communicative expressions considered of a potential candidate, all the participants considered resumes and cover letters when assessing written communication skills, but none considered portfolios or post-secondary grades, because these were not applicable measures for hiring at an entry level.

Additional comments/contributions. At the end of the research interviews, participants were asked if there was anything they would like to add to the interview itself. The majority of participants summarized key information relating to the positions they hired for, how the candidates were assessed and what they themselves personally looked for within each candidate they interviewed for a position. One participant mentioned that even though there are rating systems in place, sometimes “you just know” and that “sometimes it’s more about the fit” than it is about the qualifications. As one participant stated, the “difficulty is more with people who don’t fit the organization’s culture and not how to do the job.”

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusions

It was hoped that this study could help identify the communication skills most commonly needed and used by new graduates for entry-level positions within a business setting. This study attempted to discover how employers assess and recognize the communication skills necessary for a candidate to be deemed effective in possessing those potentially required for a job with their organization.

The overall findings of the study suggest that among the three skills specifically reviewed (speaking, listening, and writing) the most frequently mentioned skill during the research interviews appeared to be the ability to speak well. In terms of the assessment process, the participants indicated similar steps in identifying potential candidates for interviews which involved reviewing resumes, short listing, and calling candidates for interviews. Although all participants mentioned using assessment sheets during the interviews to identify skill competency, they also contributed their own values and views to what constituted a potential candidate.

Common Communication Skills Required

Of all the characteristics noted during the participant interviews, the most important characteristic that appeared regularly amongst the participants was a candidate's ability to speak effectively enough so the employer could clearly understand what was being spoken both in an interview and job setting. As defined, communication skills are those behaviours that enable a person to "convey information so that it is received and understood" ("Definition of", n.d., para.4). The study's respondents noted in their research interview, that writing skills were not the most discussed (although still important for actually working on the job, once candidate was

hired). Instead, speaking skills were mentioned most frequently, which differs with the emphasis found in the research reviewed when discussing communicative skills.

With competent speaking skills appearing to be the most common skill related to the proficiency participants in this research study most required, participants also mentioned the ability to listen and write effectively. But as Sharma (2009) states, employers can be more interested in candidates possessing general soft skills (which includes communication skills) or attitudes for the actual job than the technological skills they possess. Consistent with Sharma's (2009) findings, a participant stated that entry-level candidates can be taught how to work within a business's environment, but most employers expect entry-level workers to be able to ask questions or communicate their ideas and needs appropriately. This participant's statement is consistent with what this literature states about communication competencies in which employers are willing to train in the technical areas needed, but don't anticipate having to train new candidates how to write, speak, or listen competently.

As Robles (2012) states, employers do not see the same return on investment in training employees in soft skills as they see when they train them in the hard/technical skills. Georges (1996) and Redford (2007) state "Measuring the impact of soft skills training on the return on investment (ROI) versus the impact of hard skills training is a challenge" (as cited in Robles, 2012, p. 459). Therefore, according to this literature, employers expect employees to already possess these soft skills when working for their organization.

One participant noted that employers and employees are always working with people; this might suggest there is consistent need to effectively communicate between all sorts of people whether they are clients, customers, or coworkers. Consistent with this participant's statement, Krapels and Davis (2003) also believe that communication is important as employees

communicate with coworkers at different levels within the organization. These statements support the need for effective/competent abilities in one's talent to communicate on the job and their importance in being identifiable in a job interview. Further, Bacon and Anderson (2004) support speaking skills as ranking the highest skill to possess, with writing being next important, when employers are attempting to assess communication skills during a job interview.

Half (1993) and Wellenstein (2009), both indicate that one's ability to listen and answer questions effectively is a critical asset that any entry-level employee should possess once on the job, but this capability is also critical when expressing qualifications during the job interview. This skill was consistently mentioned by participants throughout the interview with statements like, "Depending on how a candidate answers question indicates competency of skills".

With the focus for this research centering on the competency levels of speaking, writing, and listening demonstrated during a job interview, other skills in addition to listening and writing were mentioned often. This could indicate that: 1) The term "communication skills" encompasses a wide variety of skills like intangible non-verbal skills in addition to the physical act of speaking, writing and listening, and 2) Communicative skills work in conjunction with some General Soft Skills often blending the two together. These General Soft Skills would include abilities required on both sides of the communication process (sender and receiver end) including the verbal and non-verbal skills necessary for message delivery and reception. Possessing a variety of communication skills, both the verbal and non-verbal, to demonstrate the effectiveness in using these skills indicate one's readiness and adaptability within a work setting is important.

Assessing Communication Skills in a Job Interview

Participants stated similar procedures when assessing potential candidates' communication skills in a job interview. They stated they followed a criteria sheet, used assessment forms, and deliberated with fellow interview panel members. One aspect that stood out relating to Bladel's (1993), Wellenstein's (2009), and Half's (1993) research was that candidates are assessed on their communication competence even before they reach the interview. Thus, these authors discuss the consideration of written documents prior to an interview; all participants rated reviewing the resume and cover letter as very essential when considering candidates for interviews. Of course, reviewing the cover letter and resume is a significant step in identifying potential candidates, as one participant stated the "Cover letter is important, and make sure the resume is for the position applied for and not a general resume"; however, the cover letter and resume play an additional role according to another participant: "I look at the structure of the resume to see if it's organized or short and all over the place; cover letter – sentence structure, spelling". Reviewing the structure, grammar, and overall presentation of the resume and cover letter may indicate a potential candidate's communicative competencies.

Reviewing these documents may also demonstrate a candidate's communication abilities by revealing the applicant's comprehension of the job-posting's requirements and clearly expressing those requirements in their cover letter and resume instead of simply stating general communication qualities. As Kermode (2013) states, in reviewing these initial documents, an employer can "immediately assess your writing skills . . . your ability to read carefully and accurately and . . . how well you expand on and illustrate specific points" (On Paper and in Person, para. 2). Assessing these initial documents begins the assessment of a candidate's communicating skills potential.

Methods Used to Identify and Assess Communication Skills

In addition to following standard procedures and using pre-formed assessment criteria to identify and assess communication skills, participants indicated specific items they each used for assessing competencies. Briggeman and Norwood (2011) point out that the interview meeting was the most useful tool in assessing a candidate's overall potential in demonstrating the communication skills required. Both Gray (2004) and Wellenstein (2009) indicated that each interviewer's perception, values, and background play an important role in explicitly identifying and assessing candidate's communication abilities.

This was supported in the participant interviews by showing a variety of characteristics they considered when assessing a candidate's abilities to communicate effectively. Accent thickness, for example, was considered as a possible barrier in communicating with clients and coworkers. Candidates who demonstrated characteristics outside the standard norm were often considered by another participant. Although the participant was required to follow strict guidelines delegated by the organization's union, he/she "will advocate for the ones [candidates] outside the criteria - those offering different skill sets which stops people from being close-minded".

These statements seem to support Gray (2004) and Wellenstein (2009) regarding each individual's background playing a part in criteria employers look for when assessing communication abilities. As one participant commented, even though assessment sheets are used to rate if a candidate actually answered the question, it was the impression the candidate gave that impacted indication of the competency the employer was looking for. Although the participants had their own explicit criteria they looked for, all in some form or another could only summarize their identification by stating "sometimes you just know" supplementing

Briggeman and Norwood's (2011) statement "The greater confidence employers have in their hiring abilities, the greater reliance they will place on all signals, regardless of the attribute of interest" (p. 27). By using a combination of the organization's standard assessment process along with the interviewer's own criteria, experience and values, the participants believe that by adding their own experience and expertise, they may be improving their odds of selecting the appropriate candidate for the position.

An important skill desired in entry-level business candidates employers seek most is the ability to speak effectively. Listening and writing skills were also considered but followed the requirement of being able to express one's ideas verbally to the employer during the job interview. Writing skills assessed within an interview can be demonstrated through writing exercises given to the candidate as part of the job interview as was noted by one of the participants.

Gaps/Limitations in Literature and Research

Although this study focused on the skill efficiency of speaking, writing, and listening as potentially the most required skills entry-level candidates needed in order to express their competencies during a job interview, most of the literature reviewed did not specifically focus on the role nonverbal communication skills played in how effective communication is at sending a message. These skills were discussed more secondary or tertiary because the focus of this research tended to be more on the ability to speak, listen and write. This could be because it is easier to study the more basic behaviours like the physical acts of speaking, listening, and writing, than it is the subtler ones like non-verbal cues. In order to better understand the role non-verbal communication plays in effective communication, further research could be conducted.

The literature also seemed to focus on the need for candidates to be competent in communication skills without focusing on how that could be assessed. Again, it is important to assess the competency level needed in the communication skills required for the entry-level position because some skills are required more than others within a job setting. A person entering data all day may not need the same ability to speak as someone interacting with the public on a daily basis, for example. During the participant interviews, when asked to clarify communication skills, respondents mentioned that it depended on the position.

In addition to the inability to accurately assess competency, a challenge many articles emphasized is how to prepare for a job interview; how employers can assess prospective employees on effective communication skills proved a topic that was seldom explicitly researched. Many publications about teaching and identifying communication skills are available, but few discussed assessment of communication skills within a job interview. Briggeman and Norwood (2011) state that job search consultants indicate effective communication skills are in demand by employers, yet they do not appear to discuss how employers assess the level of effectiveness needed to communicate appropriately. In this literature there was more focus on providing advice to the applicant/candidate, rather than providing insight into the more subtle aspects of communications. Effective communication skills, which include intangible skills difficult to identify, can strongly assist in one's ability to do a job successfully. It is one set of skills that is often overlooked, as Radzuan, et. al. (2008) indicate. This study attempted, therefore, to better understand some of the factors employers look for when interviewing for positions within their organization and how they assess those factors in potential candidates.

Although the literature discussed the impact of cultural background, individual influence on communication skills, and one's ability to assess them in others, this was not a focus of the interview questions. Questions relating to a participant's cultural contextual level might be important and may have provided more in-depth information on how communication skills could be better assessed through non-verbal cues, personal values, beliefs, and cultural experiences. Additional research, however, may be required to explore this possibility further. Eye contact, for example, can be viewed differently in different cultures; some see direct eye contact as necessary when communicating whereas another culture may view indirect eye contact as important when communicating. Depending on the cultural background of both the employer doing the interviewing and the candidate being interviewed, this may influence the perception of communication effectiveness between the employer and candidate. Therefore, future research could specifically examine participants from different cultural backgrounds and viewpoints.

Another limitation to this study was that the interviews themselves took place without the researcher conducting a pilot. The pilot might have identified adjustments to the interview questions used. However, the problems identified when conducting the interviews seemed to be minor, and may not have had a significant impact on the data collected. The researcher ensured participants received the same interview questions so as to help ensure consistency. Given what was learned from conducting this study, the researcher suggests, if this research were to be conducted again, the following questions might provide additional useful information for understanding the study's research topics and is worth considering:

1. How during the job interview, do you informally determine the candidate's ability to communicate effectively?

2. How much influence is placed on non-verbal cues when assessing a candidate's communicative effectiveness?
3. How do cultural background and/or state of mind influence your judgement on a candidate?
4. What level of communication skills should candidates possess when applying for a position within an organization?
5. How do you think applicants could better prepare themselves to communicate effectively for the job interview and the actual job?
6. Do you think workshops or employee improvement courses on General Soft Skills or Communicative Skills offered at your organization would be beneficial for learning how to improve communication for both employers and employees? Why or why not?
7. How soon into an interview is an employer able to tell an applicant's potential around being able to communicate effectively?
8. Do you think different communication skills are needed in the job interview than in the actual job?
9. If so, which ones are needed for the job interview, and which ones are needed for the actual job?

Importance and Considerations

It is hoped that this research could potentially add to the understanding of the effective communication skills of listening, speaking, and writing, especially in relation to how these skills are assessed within a job interview. It is also hoped that this project could potentially assist others involved in the interview process, including those instructing students in business

communication and job search skills, and other researchers investigating communication skills, job interviews, and/or skill assessment strategies.

Contributions to Research

A goal of this researcher was to identify the communication skills and abilities business graduates would need as candidates for entry-level job positions within a business setting.

Insight was gained in this area by obtaining answers to this study's research questions:

1) How do employers assess potential candidates' communication skills in a job interview? The overall findings to this question suggest that among the three skills (speaking, listening, and writing) speaking might be the most important skill needed for assessing communications during job interviews. As this seemed to be the general consensus, many variables were included in the summation of this answer. The words "speaking" were not really specifically spoken and much of the answers required some clarification probing and interpretation deducing that speaking was the most discussed. While this question related specifically to communication skills in question, participants combined communication skills with general soft skills as well perhaps understanding the two types of skills to be the same. The question of how soft skills are assessed is still left unanswered, however. In addition to the soft skills, other areas the researcher would have liked to have considered as well are how important culture, values, and beliefs play in an employee's influence along with the candidate's influence on how these communication skills would be assessed.

2) What methods are used to explicitly identify and assess these communication skills? The participants indicated similar steps in identifying potential candidates for interviews which included reviewing resumes, short listing, and contacting candidates for interviews and conducting the interviews. Participants also indicated that they contributed their own values and

views to what constituted a potential candidate. There is no guarantee if the participants followed the standard procedures in identifying potential candidates for interviews that these individuals are exactly what they say they are on paper. Take initial telephone conversations for example, the candidate may have a stellar resume but demonstrate terrible telephone skills. Using the existing methods provides the participants with some way to assess candidates; however, it still does not explicitly get at the effectiveness of the communications by considering all aspects like how non-verbal cues contribute for example. Therefore, the methods used thus far, don't seem to assess some aspects of effective communications that have been discussed in this paper, and to get a better assessment of the effectiveness, additional assessment tools would likely be useful in the future.

What was learned from this study is that even by using standard assessment tools and the employers' own values and perceptions, identifying a candidate's ability to communicate effectively is more complicated than it sounds. Some individuals have a sense they can identify a candidate's communicative skills, and although assessment sheets are used, these can only capture concrete structured information like whether or not an answer was physically given. There could be a number of candidates who correctly answer an interview question providing the information the employer wants to hear; however, there may be something more which comes through non-verbal and general soft skills that could either connect or disconnect with the interviewer that may influence whether the candidate had potential or not. A candidate might shine in answering a strategic behavior question, for example, by providing the proper structure of presenting the situation, describing the action, and then discussing the result all while speaking with an angry tone and avoiding eye contact with the employer. Which should the employer consider - the expertly constructed answer, or the fact that the candidate did not look

the employer in the eye while speaking in a negative tone? Studying in the realm of communication and soft skills can be challenging because there are many different variables to consider preventing such a straight forward answer. Questions on the research interview sheet were limited by only requesting information about the communication skills and not considering the non-verbal skills to a level that would provide more in-depth information. To get a more thorough understanding of cultural influence, additional methods and approaches may be needed in future research as well. Also, because these innate skills and are developed through one's life, even if these skills could be better taught may not provide any improvement on these skills being identified.

The research conducted on communication-skill competencies is consistent with what current industry and literature states about the necessity for potential employees to possess proficiencies in speaking, listening, and writing. Research also indicates that these skills are recurring abilities that take time to develop; one cannot simply, all of a sudden, possess effective communication skills. Yet, these continue to be skills employers look for in candidates. The basic communication skill set is not all that is required by employers, and other skills are often also used in assessing the candidate's competencies. Despite the limitations of this study, the findings could possibly provide some further insight into assessing communication abilities within a job interview.

The researcher initially assumed this study would show the isolated components of just speaking, listening, and writing skills and how they are assessed in a job interview setting. However, other aspects of communication abilities, such as the non-verbal cues used in listening or the barriers inhibiting message deliverance, appear to be equally important in the effective transfer of information. This broader interpretation of communication skills could continue to be

an area for study through examining a mixture of both tangible and intangible characteristics. Further study is needed to better understand how information is sent and received effectively.

Further Study

[W]hen asked about the quality of new entrants entering the workforce today, 62% said that the new entrants do not possess the necessary soft skills to succeed at the workplace. And an overwhelming majority, that is 90% respondents, agreed that there were gaps between the industry requirements and the products churned out by the colleges and universities of today.

(Sharma, 2009, p. 25)

The above statement could partly apply to the hidden Communicative Skills in combination with General Soft Skills necessary for the workplace. It could suggest an area for the post-secondary institutions to possibly expand on for preparing graduates in further refining their communication skills as an area for future research.

As the workplace changes so that face-to-face interaction may become more limited, this could change the nature of how communication (including non-verbal) takes place. However, face-to-face interaction will likely remain an important skill, and although different communication methods will continue to change, understanding the intangible aspects relating to communications will remain an important focus.

Conclusion

To identify an applicant's potential in getting hired for a position within an organization can be challenging. Some of the skills a person uses on the job can be demonstrated within a job interview. The effectiveness of how a candidate speaks to convey meaning is important for employers to be able to evaluate the candidate's communication skills. It is hoped that research

in this area can contribute to improve student preparation in business communications courses to effectively communication in the work environment and in the job interview.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Telephone/Introduction Script

Good morning/afternoon/evening _____. My name is _____, and I am a student in the Master of Arts in Communication and Technology program at the University of Alberta. I am working on my final research project relating to how employers assess potential candidates for entry level positions within their organization. I'm researching the identification of writing, listening, and oral communication competencies of the candidate during an interview. I am looking for approximately 5 to 7 employers who have participated in job interviews and would be interested in participating. Would you be interested in participating in this interview? Yes/No

If yes: Could we set up a time that would work for you for me to come and ask you these questions? It will take about 30 – 40 minutes of your time.

If no: Could you recommend someone who you may think might be interested in participating?

Appendix B: Information Letter and Consent Form

Study Title:

EXT 508 - MACT Capping Project
Assessing College Graduate Communication Skills in Job Interview

Research Investigator

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Background

Per our conversation, you are being invited to participate in the study of assessing college graduate communication skills in a job interview. The results of this study will be used in support of my final project in the Master of Arts in Communication and Technology's (MACT) program.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to identify clear soft skills, particularly those focusing on communication skills, employers require in new business grads. The research will attempt to answer the question "How do employers assess the level of effective communication skills a college graduate has in a job interview?"

Study Procedures

This research will require no more than 1 hour of your time. During this time, you will be interviewed about your experiences as an employer involved in the job interview process. The interviews will be conducted wherever you prefer (e.g. in your office, coffee shop) and may be tape-recorded with your permission.

Benefits

By participating in this research, there will not be any direct benefits to you; however, you may benefit others with your contribution by helping people to better understand what the core communication skills are and how they are assessed in the job interview. Also, I hope the results from this overall investigation could potentially assist people in three areas: 1) Instructors and facilitators teaching business communication and job search skills to business students, 2) Employers involved in the hiring process of recent business graduates, and 3) Potential

researchers investigating communication skills, job interview processes, and skill assessment strategies.

Risk

There are no anticipated risks or discomforts related to this research outside of those aspects of your everyday life. If I learn of anything during the research that may affect your willingness to continue being in the study, I will inform you right away.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study up to 7 days after the interview has taken place. If you choose to withdraw, please contact me by phone or email, and all information from you will be destroyed.

Confidentiality & Anonymity

The results from this study will be collected and used for my MACT capping project. Even though some identifying data such as your name, age range, job title are collected, all data for this project will be viewed only by me, the researcher, and possibly my supervisor. At no time will your name be used or any identifying information revealed. It will be kept confidential in a secure place for a minimum of 5 years following the completion of the research project. At such time, I will destroy all data in a way that ensures privacy and confidentiality.

If you wish to receive a copy of the results from this study, you may contact me at the telephone number given below.

Further Information

If you have any further questions regarding this study, please contact me, Gerta Grieve, at (780) 238-8218 or gertamael@yahoo.ca

The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines by a Research Ethics Board at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Research Ethics Office at (780) 492-2615.

I have read (or have been read) the above information regarding this research study on Assessing College Graduate Communication Skills in Job Interview and consent to participate in this study.

_____ (Printed Name)

_____ (Signature)

_____ (Date)

Appendix C: Communication Skills Assessment

Thank you for participating in this interview. The purpose of this questionnaire is to identify how employers assess the communication skills (writing, speaking, and listening) in new grads for entry-level positions within a business environment.

Target population for this survey will be managers and supervisors involved in the hiring process of new graduates for entry-level business positions. These employers will be from areas in sales, administration, finance, accounting, and management, will be both male and female, within a variety of age ranges, and a variety of educational backgrounds.

Background Information

1. Gender Male Female
2. Employer Age Range 30 or under 31–40 41–50 Over 50
3. Level of Education (Check the highest level of education that applies)
 - High School Post-Secondary Post-Graduate
4. What is your current job title?
5. What field of business do you work in?
 - Human Resources Finance Sales Management Other
 If Other:
6. How long have you been working at your current organization?
7. How many college graduates have you hired for entry-level positions within your organization within the last two years?
 - 0-9 10-19 20 - Over
8. How many entry-level position interviews have you participated in over the past five years?
 - 0-5 6-10 11-15 16-25 Over 25
9. What is your typical role in the interview process?
10. When constructing a job posting for an entry-level position within your organization, do you include explicitly include communications in the job posting, and, if so, how is it typically worded?
11. What is the general procedure your organization uses to identify a potential candidate to interview for an entry-level position within your organization?

12. What is the general procedure you use to identify a potential candidate for an entry-level position within your organization? Is this different from the organization’s procedure? If so, how?

Communication Skills Used In Entry-Level Position

13. What typical communication skills would be most important for a potential candidate to use in an entry-level position within your organization? Ex: listening skills, writing skills

14. What position(s) does your organization typically hire an entry-level employee for?

15. What are the specific tasks entry-level employees perform where writing, listening, and speaking skills are particularly important?

16. When deciding whether or not to hire an individual, how influential do you feel communication skills are during an interview?

- Very influential Influential Somewhat influential Not at all influential

Other: Explain _____

17. How are these skills measured?

- Assessment Sheet Overall Impression Both

Other: Explain _____

18. Aside from the general assessment of writing, speaking, and listening skills, is there anything specific (either explicitly or implicitly) you look for in a potential candidate demonstrating these skills?

19. How do you assess the level of competency in communication skills within a potential candidate during an interview?

20. How well do you think you and your organization’s current assessment procedures work in determining the candidate’s communicative abilities once he/she is hired?

- Very well Well Somewhat Not very well

21. How important do you rate first impressions of a candidate in determining their writing, listening, and speaking communication abilities?

- Very important Important Somewhat important Not at all important

22. Which of the following characteristics do you consider when assessing potential candidates on their speaking and listening abilities during an interview?

	Somewhat Considered	Not Considered
Eye contact		
Overall Confidence		
Demonstration of Preparation		
Nonverbal expression including but not limited to Facial expressions, gestures, posture		
Verbal expression including but not limited to speech rate, volume, pitch, articulation, fluency		
Answered question attentively; clarify of response		
Request for question clarification		
Personal Appearance		
Prior accomplishments such as school activities and extra-curricular		

23. To what extent are the following documents from a potential candidate used in assessing his/her level of written communication abilities:

	Very Useful	Useful	Somewhat	Not Applicable
Resume and Cover Letter presentation				
Portfolio Work (if applicable)				
Post-secondary grades				

24. Is there anything else you would like to contribute that was not covered in this questionnaire?

Appendix D: Coding Tables Used

Response Coding Table

Code	Code Description
LC	Communication - Listening
SC	Communication - Speaking
WC	Communication - Writing
OC	Communication - Other
PA	Participant Assessment methods/criteria
OA	Company Assessment method/criteria

Category Code	Participant Responses
LC Communication - Listening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effective listening; • Listening skills – listen to questions asked • thinking first then talking later • ability to listen • Listening • Those who can actually answer the question asked. • listen and identify the needs • Listening skills to client’s needs • they are demonstrating good listening skills • understand what person is asking for: understand what is to be done • listen for key points

Category Code SC Communication - Speaking	Participant Responses <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • effective verbal; verbal • oral skills • telephone interview – if speaking ability is good we call them in for interview • you can't train them in communicated speaking • answer to interview questions • Calmly articulate an answer directly dealing with question • Ability to ask questions; ask questions; ask for help when need it • Those who can actually answer the question asked. • responding accordingly • speaking, articulation • ability to educate and explain and talk at the person's level • uses more verbal skills than written. Written is not as stressed as verbal • Can he/she describe his/her background articulately and concisely • Speaking is important • language is a challenge - language barriers • not necessary given an answer they think you want to hear • Depending on how candidate answers question indicates competency of skills • handle the questions in concise manner • How well they explain what they would do, or did • language – accent thickness can be low tolerance in this industry • On phone no hesitation; initial phone conversation “is either a deal maker or deal breaker; call the person <p>21</p>
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Category Code WC – Communication - Written	Participant Responses <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • effective written communication skills; Excellent communication written • prepare letters and documents • forms to fill out; forms and workbooks candidate needed to fill out • There is overall a struggle with finding graduates not having the written skills • Writing • Writing emails – letter construction is usually left for upper management • writing –including introduction, bios letters, intro summary letters; • ability to take notes; note taking skills; write quickly • send emails effectively – make sure the information is clear <p>9</p>
---	--

Category Code Participant Responses

OC –

Communication

- Other

- good interpersonal skills; Personable
- problem solving skill set; problem solving
- ability to influence; leader within team setting
- accountability
- Emphasis on image –; ability to carry themselves; first impressions are very important; Org around 1st impressions
- Critical thinking, , time management, ability to prioritize
- can-do' attitude
- Critical analysis
- Presentation
- you need to be confident; confidence;
- Honesty in answering question
- Ability to make decisions
- element of calmness, not get flustered; manage stress
- Team player; must be able to work with others;
- team building experience
- customer service
- customer service experience
- Effective communication within team environment
- working in teams

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Category Code	Participant Responses
OA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has list of questions
Company	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Software sorts and organizes incoming resumes
Assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distributes to department
Methods/Criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Criteria – must have experience as per job description as indicated on resume. • Resume goes into interest category • Compare resumes with other potentials • Specific skill set required • Write posting with detailed job descriptions asking for minimum qualifications • Receive hundreds of resumes • Go through all of them and weigh the skills listed on resumes • Put them through criteria. Create a long short list • Team meets to discuss; come to a consensus of who should be interviewed • Go online – mine resume databases – scan thousands looking for key words like finance, sales, CFP, communication. Choose those to contact • There is a 4-6 stage process; Regimented process; quite a convoluted process • We look for “well rounded customer service skills”; look people soft skills • Situational questions – behavioral questions; S.A.R. behavioral questions and structured interview • For the writing component we provide a scenario and they are • Communication is a weighted rating • Assessment sheets for every interview; interview package • The Hiring is based on a rating system; Mostly hirings are done through rating system • Use assessment sheet to rate if they actually communicated/answered the question, but impressions also make an impact • There are three on the panel • Divvy up questions amongst the three • They have to have some level of qualification • Graded on the written exercise • Look at Education • Then go on to experience

Category Code	Participant Responses
<p>PA – Participant Assessment Methods/Criteria</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strive to hire local – look at location of residence on resume. Experience behind job description • interesting resume and will advocate for the ones outside the criteria” those offering different skills set which stops people from being close-minded • I look for accomplishments. What you’ve done. Don’t like long lengthy cover letters – prefer short and to the point • Gut feeling; gut instinct has worked as I have hired this way “sometimes you just know • Can I see this person fitting into corporate culture of this company? • fit good for us and good fit for potential candidate • in best interest of company employed with • When I hear their specific objectives. • Take notes, combine w/impression nonverbal all collecting discuss candidates • Participant flexible w/resume errors • Written – email/cov let somewhat; visual • Sometimes the fit is more important than the qualifications; sometimes it’s more about the fit than the ability to do the job • because I work in finance, I look for budget experience to be able to enter information into system • Ensure keys points covered in posting; Key wording within resume; make sure resume is for position applied for • Cover letters important • Actual answer the question; listen and interpret answers. • Answer question, listen for key points, do they go off topic – how do they act? • Cover letter – sentence structure spelling • structure of the resume • Eye contact (3/4 participants) • Overall Confidence (3/4 participants) • Demonstration of Preparation (4/4 participants) –30 Seconds • Nonverbal expression (P3) (P1, P3) • Personal Appearance (P1, P3, P4) (P2) • Verbal expression (P3, P4) Somewhat (P1, P2) • Answered question attentively; clarify of response (P1,P2, P3, P4) • Request for question clarification (P1, P2, P4)

PART I: BACKGROUND INFORMATION**Demographics of Participants (Questions 1-9)**

Questions	Calculations
Gender	2 = M 2 = F
Age	1 = 30-Under 2 = 31-40 1 = 41-50
Education	4 = Post-Secondary Degree
Job Title	1 = Lead Project Scheduler 1 = Manager, Policy Standards 1 = Sr. Exec Fin. Consultant 1 = HR Representative
Business Field	2 = Management 1 = Sales/Finance 1 = Human Resources
Length of time working at current organization	1 = 3 months 1 = 2.5 years 1 = 10 years 1 = 11 years
# Graduates Hired	3 = 0-9 1 = 10-19
# Interviews Attended	2 = 0-5 1 = 11-15 1 = Over 25
Typical role	1 = Interviewer 1 = Lead Sr. Interviewer 1 = From Intro - Offer 1 = Management Support

General Interview Process (Questions 10-12)

Q Response

- 10 Yes, worded “communication abilities”, “effective verbal and listening communication skills”, “effective written communication skills”, “good interpersonal skills”, there is also a problem solving skill set put in the postings
- 10 Yes, “Excellent communication written and oral skills”; ability to influence; leader within team setting - this is more for senior positions
- 10 20 – 30% is related to communication – accountability; communicate with clients, ability to communicate; prepare letters and documents; NOTE: we can teach them the other stuff but they need to be able to communicate
- 10 Effective communication within team environment
Depends on the position always look for customer service because always working with people, “customer service experience”, “team building experience”
- 11 Has list of questions, whenever a position is posted, software sorts and organizes incoming resumes and distributes to department with posting. Criteria – must have experience as per job description as indicated on resume. Resume goes into interest category – then compare resumes with other potentials with same experience – specific skill set required
- 11 Write posting with detailed job descriptions asking for minimum qualifications (because of union policies). Hiring at union level must have minimum grade 12 but always state “. . . is preferred”. Receive hundreds of resumes, we go through all of them and weigh the skills listed on resumes with those dependent on the job posting. Look at all applicants, put them through criteria. Create a long short list which is sent to the interview team where each person on the team chooses their top 4. Then the team meets to discuss the merits of each applicant come to a consensus of who should be interviewed.
- 11 Go online – mine resume databases – scan thousands looking for key words like finance, sales, CFP, communication. Choose those to contact, telephone interview – if speaking ability is good we call them in for interview
There is a 4-6 stage process
Regimented process – recruiting process from start to finish includes many forms to fill out, goals to achieve, POP test (Personal Op something test). Participants must go through many documents and processes before being hired. Can be intimidating for entry levels, but keeps those who are serious interested.
Participant brought out a large interview process folder which included many forms and workbooks candidate needed to fill out. Along with these, they then are going through interviews as well. – quite a convoluted process
- 11 No real recruitment system – we print all and compare all applications to the job posting and what is looked for. First look at Education once candidate has that then go on to experience and look people soft skills, communication skills, working in teams; because I work in finance, I look for budget experience to be able to enter information into system
- 12 Strive to hire local – look at location of residence on resume. Experience behind job description. Avoid out of province, city, country.
- 12 Because we are under union, we must follow their procedures and specific steps. For

participant: sometimes I “come across interesting resume and will advocate for the ones outside the criteria” those offering different skills set which stops people from being close-minded.

- 12 **Emphasis on image – confidence; ability to carry themselves.** You can train people in technical, but you can’t train them in communicated speaking. I look for accomplishments. What you’ve done. Don’t like long lengthy cover letters – prefer short and to the point.
- 12 **Ensure keys points covered in posting**
Key wording within resume
Cover letters important and make sure resume is for position applied for and not a general resume
I look at the **structure of the resume** to see if it’s organized or short and all over the place

PART II: COMMUNICATION SKILLS USED IN ENTRY-LEVEL POSITION**Communication Skills Used in Job (Questions 13 – 15)**

- | Q# | Response |
|----|---|
| 13 | Listening skills – listen to questions asked to answer to interview questions. Calmly articulate an answer directly dealing with question. Ability to ask questions, thinking first then talking later. Critical thinking, problem solving, time management, ability to prioritize |
| 13 | We look for “well rounded customer service skills” which includes the ability to listen, understand what person is asking for and responding accordingly; personable with ‘can-do’ attitude. There is overall a struggle with finding graduates not having the written skills |
| 13 | Listening, writing, “everything”, - speaking, articulation – listen and identify the needs of others confirm what they are looking for. The ability to educate and explain and talk at the person’s level to ensure understanding. Critical analysis |
| 13 | Open communication channel – ability to take notes, ask questions, understand what is to be done and ask for help when need it. Never guess always ask first. Work as a team, if need help to ask. |
| 14 | Assistants: Accounts receivable, Accounts payable, Scheduling
Project Assistants – 1) all doer – 3) specific task oriented
Site Secretary |
| 14 | Clerical positions: finance assistance, HR assistance, Reception, assistant to Chair |
| 14 | Finance consultant; Assistant financial consultant – mostly hire more mature grades who have done their second career. The younger grads don’t necessarily have the maturity or life experience yet |
| 14 | HR Rep
Accounting Tech – we call them that here they deal with basic Accounts Receivable and Payables
Lots of admin positions
Mostly assistants to managers |
| 15 | Communicating with project managers, sub contractors, other departments within organization, clients
Stakeholders
Clients, upper management – limited – more on a hierarchical level |
| 15 | They are “the first person of contact” – first impressions are very important
There is an awareness of how jr a person is perceived
Writing emails – letter construction is usually left for upper management |
| 15 | Sales – client acquisition. Presentation – writing –including introduction, bios letters, intro summary letters. Advisor uses more verbal skills than written. Written is not as stressed as verbal. Listening skills to client’s needs and interpret them |
| 15 | Depends on the position – customer service they need to be able to send emails effectively – make sure the information is clear. We have a three email policy if you can’t solve the problem in three emails, then call the person. Admin staff need note taking skills as they need to take notes during meetings listen for key points and write quickly. |

Assessing Communication Skills During Interview (Questions 16 – 20)

- | Q# | Response |
|-----------|--|
| 18 | Gut feeling – how look at whole being ask “Can I see this person fitting into corporate culture of this company?” Is the “fit good for us and good fit for potential candidate” |
| 18 | Can he/she describe his/her background articulately and concisely? What they will bring to the position. Is he/she able to communicate what he/she is thinking instead of rambling which we get a lot of. Those who can actually answer the question asked. |
| 18 | Speaking is important – you need to be confident. If you are hesitant, you don’t make it in the business. New language is a challenge - language barriers – although they have employees who speak mandarin |
| 18 | Actual answer the question; listen and interpret answers.
Cover letter – sentence structure spelling things like that |
| 19 | Honesty in answering question – not necessary given an answer they think you want to hear. Ability to make decisions in best interest of company employed with. Situational questions – behavioral questions. What would you do . . . client directly calls scheduler regarding changes. Depending on how candidate answers question indicates competency of skills |
| 19 | If they can handle the questions in concise manner. For the writing component we provide a scenario and they are graded on the written exercise. |
| 19 | S.A.R. behavioral questions and structured interview. How well they explain what they would do, or did. How the role compliments their background, how do you see yourself and past experience in role? When I hear their specific objectives. |
| 19 | Answer question, listen for key points, do they go off topic – how do they act? |

Q16 Influence	Q17 Skills Measured	Q20 Assessment Procedure	Comments
Very	Both	Well	Q16 – Scale 1-10; element of calmness, not get flustered ; language – accent thickness can be low tolerance in this industry Q17 – Take notes, combine w/impression nonverbal all collecting discuss candidates
Very	Both	Well	Q20 – If can't detect a good lie then what's its point/purpose? How well do people lie? People lie well then all assessment procedures are "moot"
Very	Both	Well	Q17 – Communication is a weighted rating
Very	Both	Well	Q17 – Assessment sheets for every interview; interview package; 1st impression
Very	Both	Well	Q16 - Sell yourself need to communicate why you are the best fit for the job Q17 - Use assessment sheet to rate if they actually communicated/answered the question , but impressions also make an impact Q20 – There's always room for improvement NOTE: Q17 makes an interested affirmation that assessments can physically checked to see if the question was answered, but it is the impression that indicates if it is done well or not.

First Impressions (Questions 21 – 23)

Q21 1 st Impression Importance	Comments
Very	On phone no hesitation; initial phone conversation "is either a deal maker or deal breaker"; no-show girl – told me everything I needed to know in the phone conversation about candidate potential
Important	Org around 1st impressions ; participant is more flexible; Participant flexible w/resume errors
Very Important	Written – email/cov let somewhat ; visual/verbal

Q22	Considered	Somewhat	Comments
Eye contact	3/4	1/4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> entry-level; younger sometimes
Overall Confidence	3/4	1/4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> consider confidence in skill set than presence “Huge” 30 Seconds
Demonstration of Preparation	4/4		
Nonverbal expression including but not limited to Facial expressions, gestures, posture	1/4	3/4	
Verbal expression including but not limited to speech rate, volume, pitch, articulation, fluency	2/4	2/4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nervous; crack voice; but eager and want to please
Answered question attentively; clarify of response	4/4		
Request for question clarification	4/4	1/4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have the “moxi” to ask for clarification don’t see enough
Personal Appearance	3/4	1/4	
Prior accomplishments such as school activities and extra-curricular	4/4		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How proud are they of past accomplishments; How did this experience enhance your well being?

Q23	Res/Cov	Portfolio	PS Grades
	Very	N/A	N/A

Additional comments/contributions (Question 24)**Q# Response**

- 24 **Team player** – important – **must be able to work with others, manage stress,**
There are three on the panel all have same questions and **divvy up questions amongst the three**
Career goal important in candidate's potential
If I were to hire this person **they are demonstrating good listening skills**
- 24 **Sometimes the fit is more important than the qualifications** – **they have to have some level of qualification,** but **sometimes it's more about the fit than the ability to do the job.**
“difficulty is more with people who don't fit the organization's culture and not how to do the job”
- 24 This **business is advice and sales oriented therefore communication is important**
We attend etiquette classes so that we are presentable.
The Hiring is based on a rating system; gut instinct has worked as I have hired this way
“sometimes you just know” but **mostly hirings are done through rating system.**
- 24 References are important. Candidates need to bring references and the references need to know they are being used as a reference.