Teaching E-Business Communications to Executive Masters of Business Administration (MBA) and Human Resource Management (HRM) Learners and Professionals

Bob Barrett
School of Business
American Public University
Charles Town, USA
docjob00@msn.com

***Abstract*—Communication problems in today's business world constitute the cause for chaos, conflicts, and sometimes corruption on the behalf of employees and leaders when there is a lack in certain skills sets, ethical and logical reasoning, and overall understanding of the role and function of modern-day communications. Consequently, many communication problems can be prevented with proper standards and procedures. Many executive Masters of Business Administration (EMBA) and Human Resource Management (HRM) programs are now including business communications or components thereof communications and their program offerings. This paper will look at how technology has impacted communications in today's workplace, as well as how the skill sets of leaders, managers, and employees do affect the communication process. Therefore, a special emphasis will be placed on use of technology, use of electronic communications, and overall training of human capital in today's organizations. Finally, this paper will address how one university has approached the teaching of business communications with an emphasis on electronic communications in the workplace.**

***Index Terms*—e-Business, Workplace Communications, Electronic Communications, Human Capital.**

I. INTRODUCTION

The way that many stakeholders, both internal and next external, communicate with each other through the formal process of communications. However sometimes the medication process is not a two-way street, but rather, it is one way due to the lack of active listening and participation by both or all parties. Whether the communication breakdown is due to the sender or the receiver, is still a problem that must be addressed by both parties in order to facilitate proper communication exchange. Due to the onset of technological improvements and enhancements in the workplace, many personnel, which shall be known as human capital throughout this paper, need to keep up-to-date with the latest trends and the communication process and with technology. Harris (2000) stated that the "new workplace requires a new type of employee, one who is highly skilled, flexible, creative, and attuned to working as a member of a team" [1] Consequently, educational institutions need to prepare their instructors for this type of new employee. Also, they need to create different types of recruiting and hiring methods to recruit the best-qualified instructors for their students and academic halls. Further, there should be a great need to focus on training online instructors to be able to work with the training entity, whether it be an institution of higher education or training learning center, in order to develop, design, implement, and evaluate current and future educational and/or training offerings, as well as work with newer technology to offer even more enhanced forms of learning media for students. Education and training for the workplace have changed greatly, and academicians will need to make changes, concessions, and implement changes in order to keep up to date with the needs and wants of both the employer (business communication), academic community, and today's adult learners.

The U. S. Department of Education (2002), they commented on these changes in terms of skills sets and literacy. They wrote that: "Workplace education programs focus on the literacy and basic skills training workers need to gain new employment, retain present jobs, advance in their career, or increase productivity. Curricula are developed by educators, working with employers and employee groups, who assemble written materials used on the job and who analyze specific jobs to determine what reading, computation, speaking and reasoning skills are required to perform job tasks effectively. By their nature, successful efforts to institute workplace literacy programs require strong partnerships among educators, employers, and employees." [2] In the next section, review the potential problems, issues, and challenges presented in the workplace and in academia in terms of chaos and conflicts in the workplace.

II. CHAOS AND CONFLICTS IN THE COMMUNICATION PROCESS

What are examples of chaos and conflict in the workplace? Chaos as defined in the Merriam-Webster Dictionary as the "utter state of confusion" [3] While many authors and academicians have argued that some form of chaos is necessary and the gentle balance of operations in organizations today in order for them to be successful, some may argue in the

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complete opposite direction. Nonetheless, it should be noted that in some organizations there is varying levels of chaos and conflict, which could be avoided if proper strategies, techniques, and/or procedures were in place and understood by all of the organization's human capital.

Therefore, who can determine whether the level chaos and conflict in an organization is sufficient, efficient, or problematic? While this rhetorical question be debated and discussed for many weeks, months, and years, this only provides contextual starting point for discussion in this paper on how to better equipped today's Executive MBAs and HRM professionals to become better equipped for such challenges and issues in the workplace. However, one of the key elements that can offer context and provide a game plan for all human capital is the creation and implementation of quality standards, policies, and procedures.

III. STANDARDS, POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

One way in which organizations can strive for better communications and interactions with all employees is the adoption of strong and proven best practices to help them to guide their workforce. According to Jones (1993) described best practices as centered: "on the very essence of good management: guiding employees toward greater productivity, liberating them from the burdens of disorganization without saddling them with restrictive bureaucracy, and helping them to overcome some measure of the troublesome flaws inherent in people and processes. These are the measures of effectiveness and efficiency." [4] If we look at the overall influence and changing technology and shrinking workforce (in part due to the retirement of Baby Boomers) in the workplace. this has caused many HRM professionals to search for more information and ideas on best practices in order to create better procedures, policies, and standards. [5] Nonetheless, as more changes in technologies have occurred in the workplace, there has been a growing number of changes in federal, state, and local laws. Decades before, Chin and Benne (1969) described this shift to the human problems as "dealing with the resistance, anxieties, threats to morale, conflicts, disrupted interpersonal communications, and so on, which prospective changes in patterns of practice evoke in the people affected by the change" [6] Now, even after several decides, the writings of Chin and Benne are still applicable, since conflicts and problems in communications still occur. In any event, today's HRM professionals consider best practices as: "an enduring commitment to a set of basic beliefs, traits, and operating stratagems. These are the guidelines for an organization: the driving forces that distinguish it from all others." [7] In 1990, The Saratoga Institute conducted a formal research project on the common traits of the best human asset management companies. The question that they used over and over with each participant was, "Who is good at _____?" The identified eight factors that appeared constantly in their study as: "1) value; 2) commitment; 3) culture; 4) communication; 5) partnering; 6) collaboration; 7) innovation and risk; and 8) competitive passion." [8] In fact, the Institute wanted to find out what was being done better in each of these factor areas. Also, the study was to help them to identify what was being done right and if it was part of the individual's interaction with their given organizational culture. On the other hand, while many people have researched and interviewed others to learn more about best practices, the field of academia has had to work even harder to develop, create, implement, and share some of the best practices with others. As realized both in academia and the business world, best practices do not happen just happen, they have to nurtured and developed to meet the needs of the stakeholders, environment, and overall culture.

IV. VIRTUAL TRUST AND MISTRUST

Along with the acquisition and modifications of best practices in industry, educational institutions have been creating and implementing a variety of practices and procedures in order to prepare all of their students to compete for quality and meaningful employment. Since technology has provided a powerful infrastructure, the emerging technologies have allowed colleges and universities, instructors, and students to achieve education on a much higher playing field – in a virtual learning environment. Equally important, many of these organizations and companies have embraced the idea of online learning as one form of harness both technology and training together as one, but just like some adult learners, there still is some hesitation on the behalf of some HRM professionals and managers in terms of determining the level of trust gained by virtual activities. Specifically, some professionals are still skeptical about the role and function of virtual managers in terms of the management of virtual teams and its virtual members. In the long run, is boils down to a game of trust versus mistrust by today's stakeholders.

For example, if one would look at the issue of trust in the workplace, in particular, on the virtual environment. One might question as to what is virtual trust and how does it differ in the virtual environment? On the other hand, let us review different types of trust. Uslaner (2001), noted that "Trust has a *moral dimension*—of ethically justifiable behavior as expectations. General trusters tend to have a higher ethical sensibility." [9]. Also, another type of trust is called swift trust. *"Swift trust" tends to be unstable, fragile*. This is when people (like adult learners) need to establish quick trust patterns with instructors, as in the online environment. In the virtual business environment, as well as the global one, these team members need to establish various levels of trust with their virtual manager and team members. While this trust may not be easily gained, there could be a growing need for team building exercises and interpersonal communications skills if the team members are not able to establish a reasonable amount of virtual trust and communications flow. For the purposes of this paper, we will highlight the terminology of virtual management and learning in the next section.

V. VIRTUAL MANAGEMENT AND LEARNING

In this section of the paper, we will focus on the role and function of virtual management and how this can be enhanced with the use of online (virtual) learning. Therefore, what is virtual management and how does it impact today's

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organizations? Basically, virtual management consists of the daily management of both the virtual team and workflow associated with it. While virtual teams or groups are created, there is no guarantee that all of its members will be productive, trustworthy, and/or technologically savvy. However, a good HR Department should be able to take the time to explore various learning approaches to help ensure proper online training to help new virtual group members to experience the online learning environment. As a result, this type of approach involves the strategic, as well as the managerial, skills of the HR department.

VI. EMBA AND HRM PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

Let us look at the EMBA and HRM programs in the context of changes in traditional business and management learning to that of modern day virtual learning, better known as online learning. In fact, many organizations have been accepting of newer forms of learning, ranging from computerized-based learning to today's modern online learning offerings. As more and more organizations have been following industry trends and best practices, they have been transitioning their training programs also over to online learning, along with developing their own forms of organizational learning.

While the corporate environment may differ from the academic setting; however, they have the need to learn and grow just as equally important as others in the academic world. While online learning has been focused more on the academic setting, many companies are learning that online learning has many benefits for corporations and organizations. In fact, in the corporate/business environments, many organizations are focusing on the "learning" element of their employees' daily work lives, as well as helping them to build the knowledge management from the experiences of this intellectual capital with a concentration on helping the organization learn from previous and current work experiences. Thompson (1995) wrote that "organizational learning involves the acquisition of new information and the ability to analyze that information creatively, learn from it, and apply that learning in useful ways." [10] Consequently, as organizations realize that there is a need to "capture" and "utilize" this type of learning, they also realize the need for the organization, as a whole, to concentrate on building up this learning element to include everyone in their respective organization, as well as setting up informal and formal learning center or circles. As such, organizations and communities have viewed the impact of online learning in the U.S., we also can look at how each type of learning can impact the business, education, and the world.

Finally, Sokolowska (2006) stated that "if we look at learning organizations we can see two types of trends . . . such organizations are understood in dynamic organizational categories that are oriented at their development, searches for new chances on the market and continually increases their effectiveness, efficiency and flexibility. The second group of learning organizations consists of such entities that choose growth through development of their employees." [11] Along with looking at learning organizations in general, we need to also focus on the need to develop core competencies, as well as being innovative, especially with the use of technology.

VII. EMPHASIS ON TECHNOLOGY IN THE COMMUNICATIONS EXCHANGE

Technology has changed the way business thinks, operates, and prepares for the future. However, sometimes technology is not used in the best ways. Meanwhile, as educational reform in classrooms have started to make changes in teaching strategies, applications, and use of equipment, some of the instructional staff, administrators, and learners many not be convinced of all of the changes, so this provides yet another set of challenges. As a result, many instructors are starting to see instructional methods moving from a sheet of paper to the computer. This ever-changing role and function of the technology in terms of the introduction and placement of personal computers in the classroom back in the 1980s and 1990s made a major impact in the field of education and business As more technological advancements started to appear, educational institutions started to find that computers had a larger storage capacity; were cheaper to purchase; easier software was being developed to navigate; students were starting to learn computers at an earlier age; and adaptation of course materials to the computer environment was being made easier for instructors.

As noted earlier in this paper, the term human capital would be used interchangeably for employees. Therefore, we can consider "human capital" as "the capabilities of the company's employees necessary to provide solutions to customers, to innovate and to renew. In additional in individual capabilities, human capital includes the dynamics of an intelligent (learning) organization in a changing competitive environment, its creativity, and innovativeness." [12].

Also, there has been an increase in the focus as to how employers are investing more money and time in developing their employees with the use of online learning. For example, Barbara Smith (2000), chief learning officer for Burson-Marsteller stated that "If we don't have the best people creating the best product, we can't compete. What I'm after is creating the best people in the industry. E-learning is an option that provides us with real competitive edge – it helps us maximize our intellectual capital" (para. 2). Therefore, there is a growing need for more investment and strategic development in the area of online learning training to help enhance the skills of online instructors.

The next section of this paper will provide an overview of how several educational institutions have been approaching the course work in communications in business programs to help better prepare student for both written and oral communications, both online and in person. It should be noted at this point in the paper that while online instructors have been empowered with various technological tools, as well as given the task of facilitating learning, they also have served as the frontline for customer service questions and guidance. Thus, many online schools have realized the need to create, design, develop, and implement better strategies for their online intellectual capital. In fact, some organizations

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have spent extra time focused on the frontline point-of-contact to help both adult learners, instructors, and technical staff.

VIII. CREATING TRAINING FOR COMMUNICATIONS ENHANCEMENTS AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Meanwhile, as more organizations move forward with technological advancements, as well as strategically planning for competitiveness in the marketplace, these entities have realized that real world applications and learning are important. Thus, many companies and educational institutions are starting to focus on the importance and potential application of a new approach to managing in the 21st century classroom and/or workplace with the use of knowledge management, instead of just relying only on key managers and their experiences individually. According to AllKM.com (2011), knowledge management can be viewed as a 'system to facilitate learning, innovation and sharing to achieve the strategic objectives of an organization" (p. 2). Even though many business and academic professionals still gravitate towards theoretical approaches, industry in general is starting to see more movement towards practical and meaningful approaches in terms of learning from knowledge gained by the collective whole.

Further, KMNetwork (2011) noted that knowledge management as being "more about the pragmatic and thoughtful application as it is not in the theoretical definition but in real world execution wherein lie the greatest opportunities and challenges" (p.2). With this strategic change in managerial approach, companies are learning how to rely upon their human capital, as a whole, to create their own knowledge management work product and sustain it within their own learning and work environments.

It should be noted here that one way that many organizations, whether in the business or academic setting, are capturing and sustaining the intellectual capital is through their engagement of their human capital in networks known as "communities of practice". Wenger (2006) defined communities of practice as being formation of "people who engage in a process of collective learning in a shared domain of human behavior . . ." (para. 3).

These communities can create, share, maintain, develop, and evaluate all types of knowledge through various activities, such as problem solving, sharing developments, documenting and working on projects, and mapping out knowledge and seeking improvements, as well as striving for better achieve of organizational objectives and goals. By understanding these various components of the daily life of the human capital, specifically in their work as communities of practice, organizations can capture more of the intellectual capital in terms of knowledge management, as well as understand more about communication downfalls, areas of misunderstanding and lacking of communication skills sets.

Further, the organization and its members can understand more about the impact of technology and how technology can help or hinder the workflow, as well as the communication process. While this paper is a cursory overview of several key topics all related to the communication process in both MBA and HRM workloads, it is still has an open door here for further research and discussion in these areas.

IX. CONCLUSIONS

As educators, we need to recognize that the demographics of our students are changing – and for the better. We need to embrace diversity and help nurture it along the way. Since technology has increased the possibility for more adult learners to participate in taking online courses and take more training in a non-traditional way in the workplace, newer technology has helped to free up more schedules, and yet offer education and training in situations whereas such training and education might have not been possible in the past.

Thus, as educators we need to be proactive in making appropriate changes in our programs and courses to help strengthen course offerings, as well as incorporating teaching strategies and techniques that will meet the needs of the course objectives, as well as motivating and encouraging the adult learners to want to learn even more.

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