

What Business Thinks of Communication Abilities

Published Studies and Commission Reports

The Business-Higher Education Forum, an affiliate of the American Council on Education, had as one of its six major recommendations the conclusion that “business schools should seek to insure that their graduates are competent in oral and written communication.”

America's Business Schools: Priorities for Change. Washington DC: Business Higher Education Forum, May 1985.

This survey of Fortune 500 vice presidents shows that 97.7 percent of them “believed that communication skills had affected their advancement to a top executive position.”

Bennett, J. and R. Olney, “Executive Priorities for Effective Communication in an Information Society,” *Journal of Business Communication*, Spring 1986, 13-22.

A survey of 175 personnel managers found that “both oral and written communication skills are the most important and valuable skills a graduating business student can have or acquire.”

Benson, G., “On the Campus: How Well Do Business Schools Prepare Graduates for the Business World?” *Personnel*, July-August, 1983, 61-65.

Over 5000 executives found that communication has had and continues to play the highest overall significant role in management advancement. About four in five respondents cite communication as the single, most important course for career preparation.

Bond, F., H. Hildebrandt, and E. Miller, *The Newly Promoted Executive: A Study in Corporate Leadership.* Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Graduate School of Business, 1984.

Harvard Business Review readers placed “ability to communicate” as the top ranked criterion for managerial success.

Bowman, G., “What Helps or Harms Promotability?” *Harvard Business Review*, January-February 1964, 6-26.

In this survey sponsored by the American Assembly of Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB), over 1000 academic and corporate respondents gave a #1 importance ranking for managers to all interpersonal skills, including written and oral communication.

Connelly, F., ed., “Accreditation Research Project,” *AACSB Bulletin*, Winter 1980, 12-15.

In this survey of 1000 personnel managers, “the results indicate that communication skills are most important for business jobs and career success.”

Curtis, D., J. Winsor, and R. Stephens, "National Preferences in Business and Communication Education," *Communication Education*, January 1989, 6-14.

The AACSB surveyed 430 marketing and personnel managers, who ranked communication number one in importance.

Edge, A. and R. Greenwood, "How Managers Rank Knowledge, Skills and Attributes Possessed by Business Administration Graduates," *AACSB Bulletin*, October 1974, 30-34.

Over 1000 executives selected communication "very important" more often than any other course in the business school curriculum.

Hildebrandt, H. et al., "An Executive Appraisal of Courses Which Best Prepare One for General Management," *Journal of Business Communication*, Winter 1982,5-15.

CEO's from 5000 US companies from a wide range of industries and sizes were asked "What are the three most important things you have learned in order to perform your role as an executive?" They ranked communication as number one.

Margerison, C. and A. Kakabadse, *How American Chief Executives Succeed*, New York: American Management Association, 1984.

Porter points out that two critiques of management education that appeared in the late 1980's (Porter and McKibbin, cited above, and the GMAC Commission report, *Leadership for a Changing World: The Future of Graduate Management Education*) independently of one another and with different inputs both reached the same conclusion: "business education had stagnated in recent years and that major change was needed." Together these two reports provide a rationale for four major recommended changes one of which is "continuing attention to the improvement of students' written and oral communication skills."

Porter, L., "A Decade of Change in the Business School: From Complacency to Tomorrow," Selections, *The Magazine of the Graduate Management Admissions Council*, Winter 1997, 1-8.

This AACSB study, based on over 300 interviews at over 60 colleges, concluded that MBA curricula devote "insufficient attention to communication skills."

Porter, L. and L. McKibbin, *Management Education and Development: Drift or Thrust into the 21st Century*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1988.

Ninety-five percent of the respondents indicated that the ability to communicate orally and in writing were factors considered important for success in their job.

Rader, M. and A. Wunsch, "A Survey of Communication Practices of Business Graduates by Job Category and Undergraduate Major," *Journal of Business Communication*, Summer 1980, 31-41.

The Graduate Management Admission Council reported findings from more than 2000 students at 91 graduate schools of business: respondents rated communication as the top personal attribute for becoming a successful manager. Communication skills were rated "very important" by 89% of the respondents. The study "suggests that students are more likely to choose business schools to become better communicators than to become better analysts."

Stolzenberg, R. et al., "Abandoning the Myth of the Modern MBA Student," Selections, *The Magazine of the Graduate Management Admission Council*, Autumn 1986, 9-21.

Source: Professor Mary Munter, Tuck School of Business, Dartmouth College, presented to the Association for Business Communication, 1997