

COMMUNICATION COMPETENCIES IN THE EARLY WORK EXPERIENCES OF COMMUNICATION GRADUATES IN GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

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ABSTRACT

In the early months or years of work experiences, new employees commonly experience different situations, such as coping with their new environment, conflict with co-workers, and how they communicate to the existing solve conflicts (Jordan, 2008). Thus, having early work experiences allow graduates to acquire skills, cultivate knowledge, and develop oneself. This study aimed to analyze the different experiences being experienced by graduates, to evaluate the communication competencies in establishing work relationships in a government agency, and to assess the other competencies used by communication graduates in a workplace. Personal interviews were conducted and transcribed data were analyzed using the grounded theory—open, axial, and selective coding. Findings indicate varieties of experiences, conflicts, communication competency skills, and other competency skills used by communication graduates in the public sector.

Keywords: *work experience, communication competency skills, other competency skills, government.*

INTRODUCTION

In this world, where professionals compete with each other, applicants, especially the Communication graduates, need to have an edge in finding a job since it gets rougher as the expectations and demands of employers increase, as well as competencies of job seekers and growth of qualified job applicants rise. As a matter of fact, it is said that there are 700,000 Filipinos who graduate every year, the reason why it is crucial for an individual to stand out among potential

employers (Cassells, 2015). This resulted to a more challenging employment situation for all kinds of professions (Sanchez & Diamante 2017).

Moreover, an individual who has built a strong foundation in his first work experience tends to stand out among other employees in his next job application. It is because the first work experience is a critical component in order to survive in the real world. Furthermore, it has become the most important criterion for employers in recruiting new employees (Boggaram, 2014).

Aside from first work experience, studies found out that soft skills are also vital in the professional world. It is important that soft skills are properly defined and understood. In line with this, Weber, et al. (2010) stated that the term soft skill is defined as the interpersonal, people, human, or behavioral knowledge skills that are needed to be applied as non-technical skills in the workplace and are essential for an individual (DeKay, 2012). It implies that technical skills are not the only job requirements that employers look for, but also soft skills or non-technical skills.

Thus, Communication graduates, who are working as social workers in a government agency, tend to understand that interpersonal skills are widely taught as a core element of being a social worker (Koprowska, 2014).

Also, in a study conducted by Horsley & Barker (2002), communication resources are needed to verify the ability of the government sector to effectively respond to crises, which is why further assessments regarding communication resources must be done. This statement implies that the public sector must design a model in order to prevent crisis in communication.

Another study has shown similar results wherein a unique model must be designed and is needed in the public sector, mainly in the public relations (Liu & Horsley, 2007). Also, it is said that meaningful communication between the people and the government is not just for

management rationality but it is an obligation between the people and the government (Viteritti, 1997).

The articles declared above clearly indicates that government sectors are in need of Communication graduates who can completely handle communication skillfully in order to avoid crisis in communication and to preserve the fine bond between the government and the people.

Objectives of the Study

The general objective of this study was to analyze the communication competencies of Communication graduates in the government agencies. The specific objectives include the following:

- (1) What are the communication competencies in establishing work relationship in the government agency?
- (2) What are the other competencies used by communication graduates in the work place?

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Optimizing Writing Skills

One of the communication competencies in establishing work relationships is optimizing writing skills. According to Farrell (2017), good writing skills help a person to be more credible and more capable of doing tasks. With this, it clearly states that writing skill is a vital communication competency in the work area for it helps a person earn the trust of his workmates, as well as his superiors.

Conflicts Arising in the Workplace

The researchers have found out that there were four types of conflicts in the working environment such as co-worker conflicts, environment conflicts, job conflicts, and personal conflicts. In support to this, Sheppard (2008) stated that graduates are experiencing hard

times in adjusting to the new environmental setting because they are having difficulties in terms of learning what to do to fulfill their job requirements.

In addition, Tucker (2007) studied employees with less than 13 months being employed on how they cope or adjust in the workplace. He found out that most employees, who feel like they are not accepted or liked by their co-workers, tend to have difficulties when adjusting or adapting to the new environment.

However, Farell (2014) stated that conflict at work is already common in the workplace that stresses each and every employee. This study implies that in every company, it is a given that conflict will always be present in the workplace.

Co-worker conflicts

With regards to the co-worker conflicts, the researchers found out that there were seven causes of co-worker conflicts in the work environment. According to the study of Anderson (2017), it is important that an organization must recognize and resolve the conflicts between co-workers. This might result to poor job performance. It clearly states that dealing with coworker conflicts helps in maintaining the good performance of the company. With this, if every employee will learn how to deal with co-worker conflicts, each of them will be competent enough that will help their company grow.

Environmental Conflicts

Environment conflicts also exist in the workplace. The researchers identified the different environment conflicts such as environment culture, difficulty in coordination, and regulations in the workplace. In the study of Thompson (2017), since environmental conflicts are the products of external stress, it is essential that once environmental conflicts are identified, they must be resolved quickly. It is because environmental conflicts are harder to solve rather than co-worker conflicts.

Job Conflicts

Job conflicts are also one of the conflicts that arises in the workplace. The researchers found out that the job conflicts that the participants are dealing with are: (1) level of difficulty; (2) simultaneous tasks; (3) managing priorities; and (4) time conflict.

Personal Conflicts

Three of the participants have declared that they are having personal conflicts in their workplace. One is that she has social anxiety which is why she is having difficulties in terms of interacting with her co-workers and the people around her because she is not used to socializing with people since mostly she does her work by herself before.

Dealing with Conflicts

Once conflicts are identified, the researchers have also gathered data on how Communication graduates deal with the conflicts mainly (1) utilizing skills, (2) behavioral aspect, (3) assistance, (4) organizing tasks, (5) adjust, and (6) impress.

In support to this, Jolla (2017) stated that in order to handle conflict in the workplace, one must talk with the person, focus on behavior not on personalities, listen carefully, prioritize the areas of conflict, and follow your plan.

Utilizing skills

In dealing with conflicts, the participants have declared that one must learn how to utilize their skills in order to be competent enough in the work area. The researchers found out that the skills that must be utilized in the workplace are as follows: (1) leg skill; (2) interpersonal skills; (3) critical thinking skills; (4) technical skills; and (5) time management skills.

Leg skills

A certain participant stated that utilizing leg skills in the workplace is needed in order to be competent enough in the workplace, especially if assigned to tasks that require leg skills like events. It is because according to her, she was also tasked to organize an event for the politicians. With that, she needs to run every now and then to check if everything is going well.

Interpersonal skills

After checking for the events, April's next task is to write an article about the said event. However, according to her, it is not every day that she gets to get information about the event. There are instances that she also has to go to another event to get information because she is also tasked to do an article about it. So, as a Communication student, she used her interpersonal skills to get information about the other event. She asked help from her workmates if they can get her information regarding the other event. With this, it clearly implies that interpersonal skill must be utilized because it will help them to be skilled enough in the work area.

Critical thinking skills

A certain participant has declared that it is important that you know how to resolve problems, especially when you do not have anyone to ask for help. It is essential to solve your own problems. With the use of critical thinking skills, one can be competent in the workplace to achieve your goals.

Technical skills

In analyzing the study, the researchers found out that another skill that must be utilized in order to be competent in work technical skills. According to Zandy, she does not only use her writing skills, interpersonal, and critical thinking skills in the work area. It is also important to acquire technical skills. Not all the time you will be given

the same tasks. There are times that you will be assigned to do tasks that are beyond your comfort zone in order for you to grow.

Time management skills

Another skill that must be utilized is the use of time management skills. According to a participant, she considers time management as the most important skill that must be utilized in the workplace. Since simultaneous workloads are unavoidable, it is essential to learn how to manage one's time.

Behavioral aspect

Also, to be able to deal with conflicts and to be competent enough, one must possess proper behavior. The participants have stated that a proper behavior is a must. According to a participant, professionalism is a must in dealing with job conflicts. According to her, no matter how good your skills are, if you do not know how to respect and value professionalism in the workplace, then there is a possibility that you will not be able to stay in that company.

Ask for assistance

Results show that in order to deal with conflicts, one must learn how to ask for assistance if there are things that he cannot already handle. It is proper to seek advice if you feel like you are already unsure of what to do. With this, you will be able to complete the task according to the standards of your superior/s since you have sought their advice. A participant, who works in the House Representatives, revealed that since most of the work in their office are really difficult and since she has only been working there for three months, she deals with the conflicts by seeking help from her seniors.

Organization of tasks

Moreover, the researchers have found out that the participants will be able to deal with conflicts if they learn how to organize the tasks that were given to them. It is because organizing tasks will help them

easily identify what duties they should perform first. In that case, if they were able to identify the task that they have to prioritize, then they will be able to finish the tasks on time.

Adjust in the workplace

A certain participant has stated that in order to deal with such conflicts, it is imperative to learn how to adjust in the work environment. It is because according to her, adjusting in the workplace and studying the company's standards is vital, since the tasks that you will be doing is according to the company's expectations.

Impress the superiors

Lastly, a participant has declared that to be able to deal with conflicts, one must know how to grasp attention of the superiors by impressing them. It is because according to that certain participant, since you are a new employee, you must learn how to impress your superiors so as to gain their trust and cope with colleagues.

Socializing with Fellow Workers

Socializing with fellow workers is essential in this study because it focuses on Communication students which means they are more on practicing their interpersonal skills in the workplace. In this study, it clearly indicates that using interpersonal skills helps one employee to be competent enough in the field that he chose. In connection to this, a study conducted by Lippman, et al. (2012) says that interpersonal skills are also known as social competence which means that it deals with the ability to interact positively and to be able to get along with others. With this, it clearly states that interpersonal skills are important skills that will help in making a person competent in the workplace.

Factors that Affect the Socialization Process

Generation and age difference

There are certain factors that affect the socialization process of Communication graduates in the workplace. These factors have a domino effect as to how they adjust inside the workplace. Accordingly, Gelner & Veen (2013) stated that age and generation gap are one of the factors that affect the way each new employee socializes inside the workplace. Meaning, having old and young employees in the workplace provides a larger pool of knowledge and a larger tool to improve competency among employees.

The study mentioned above contradicts with the findings of the study. Researchers found out that having a generation gap and age diversity inside the workplace tend to affect the adjustment and socialization of newcomers.

Based on the findings of the study, the participants commonly experienced difficulty in relating with the older employees--on how they act and see things, and vice versa. They are having a hard time adjusting because they feel like the older employees cannot understand the difference of their working actions from theirs. Some of them also feel like they cannot relate with the other employees.

Relationship with co-workers

A successful socialization of newcomers with their co-workers is visible when they have a smooth-sailing relationship in the workplace. Accordingly, a smooth-sailing relationship is also determined when newcomers perceive themselves as part of the organization and accepted by their co-workers inside the workplace. Thus, making them more willing to seek new information and/or build camaraderie that will lead to better and long-term relationships (Mueller, et al., 2010). With this, individuals who are satisfied with their relationships with their co-workers are apt to fit easily in the workplace (Brondino, et al., 2012).

Moreover, healthy relationships with co-workers greatly affect the socialization process, as well as the adjustment process of an individual. Saks & Gruman (2011) found out in a study that those

newcomers who build smooth-sailing relationships adjust faster than those who do not.

Embracing Sex Difference

Mulkeen (2008) describes workplace diversity as all the differences that exist within people such as sex, age, education, cultural background, religion, and work experience wherein diversity was defined by Dessler (2011) as a multiplicity of demographic features that completes a company's workforce.

Several researchers who investigated workforce diversity have found out that sex diversity in the workplace can positively affect the whole company's performance (Carter, Simkins & Simpson, 2003). When a certain company has an increasing status in terms of sex diversity, it could greatly affect the performance of its employees based on how the employees deal and embrace the diversity itself. Thus, everyone in the company should be able to embrace sex freely as it results to an employee's firm performance.

Handling Different Tasks

Managing time

In our study, the researchers found out that each communication graduate has their own way of handling different tasks assigned. It is for the fact that as a newcomer in an organization, an individual tends not to understand the nature of his job or how to fulfill his job. According to Taylor (2017), there will be situations in the workplace where employees will be asked to do extra tasks that are outside their job descriptions. However, newcomers commonly feel like they are given tasks more than what they need to accomplish.

SYNTHESIS

Figure 1 shows the different communication competencies that Communication graduates who are working in government agencies use in the workplace. The researchers found out two major categories

about the competencies of Communication graduates: communication competencies and other competencies.

Communication competencies have underlying themes which are optimizing writing skills that either show disappointment or resolve conflicts.

Next theme is dealing with conflicts, wherein it has its own subthemes that emerged as the researchers analyzed the data gathered. There are different causes of conflicts that emerged: (1) co-workers conflict due to generation gap, envy, incongruousness, competitiveness, nosiness, aloofness, and slow job performance of co-workers; (2) environmental conflict due to different regulations and culture of the company itself; (3) job conflicts due to simultaneous tasks, time conflict, level of difficulty, and managing priorities; lastly, (4) personal conflicts.

Next theme is socializing with fellow workers, wherein the researchers found out that the socialization of newcomers affected their process of adjustment inside the workplace. Thus, newcomers who were competent enough in terms of socialization tend to adjust easily and vice versa.

In terms of the other competencies used by Communication graduates, based on the analyzed data, newcomers were competent enough in terms of embracing sex diversity and handling tasks.

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