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UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN

**Acquiring communicative competence for the world of
work: a business needs analysis and its impact on
curriculum development and delivery**

**Minor dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment
of the requirements of the degree:
Master of Philosophy (Teaching)**

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Date: July 2003

DECLARATION

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

SIGNATURE: Signed by candidate DATE: 15/08/03

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ABSTRACT

This study, undertaken over a two-year period (2001/2) concerns the appropriate content for teaching communicative competence to contemporary graduates. It comprised two parts, phase one and phase two. Phase one set out to gauge the “fit” between the respective perceptions of Commerce students, staff and graduates in the field. Based on the findings of phase one, phase two then evaluated the extent to which students at the University of Cape Town (UCT) are being prepared for the commercial needs of their profession.

A combination of quantitative and qualitative methodologies was employed comprising questionnaires with multiple-choice and open-ended questions, interviews, both formal and informal, and discussions (classroom and office) to obtain primary data. Secondary sources as described in the international literature were also reviewed to provide an informed context for more in-depth evaluation and comparison.

Based on local and international socio-economic, educational and technological shifts and forecasts, it was assumed that the focus of existing communication curricula would be outdated and differ substantially to the communicative demands of the 21st century.

In a nutshell this overall assumption was, for the most part, unfounded; a plea to “stick to the basics” and not to “abandon” traditional oral and written communication modes and channels was sounded by all three constituent respondent groups. In particular, given the gendered and intercultural context of modern-day business transactions, face-to-face communication still proves to be the most popular and trusted channel of communication overall.

The ‘connectedness’ of the globe, the size and power of many multinationals and the proliferation of corporate governance scandals produced further conclusions relating to how the definition of communicative competence could (and should) be expanded to include greater individual, team and corporate responsibility. Sentiment, both local

and abroad, dictates that the global economy needs to incorporate sustainable, ethical and transparent business and communication practices that will benefit all stakeholders in developed and developing nations. Strategic partnerships across business, government and academia need to be forged in order to achieve lasting outcomes. How business communication programmes can foster the right mindset and play a role in tertiary institutions to achieve these goals, presents numerous opportunities for further research.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

UCT	University of Cape Town
PCU	Professional Communication Unit
OBE	Outcomes-based education
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
SAUVCA	South African Universities' Vice-Chancellors' Association
HED	Higher Education Development
NZQA	New Zealand Qualifications Authority
HE	Higher Education
V-C	Vice-Chancellor
NCS	National Curriculum Statement
PCU101F/S	Professional Communication Unit, Core Course for Management Studies (Business Science) and elective for B. Com students, offered in first or second semester of students' 3 rd year
B COM	Bachelor of Commerce degree
BUS473Z	Post-graduate PCU core course offered to Management Diploma students during first and second semester
PCU102S	Professional Communication, Core Course for Actuarial Science students, offered in 3 rd year in second semester (4 th year course from 2003)
CMC	Computer-mediated Communication
DL	Distance Learning
PQM	Programme and Qualification Mix
NPHE	National Plan for Higher Education
FtF	Face-to-face (also referred to as 'face-time')
VNO	Vomer nasal organ (also known as Jacobson's organ)
NEPAD	New (Economic) Partnership for Africa's Development
ABC	Association for Business Communication
GPP	Graduate Placement Programme
CDP	Career Development Programme
CEO	Chief Executive Officer

M/F	Male/Female
MtF	Male-to-female ratio
IS	Information Systems
AS	Actuarial Science
M	Marketing
HR	Human Resources
OP	Organizational Psychology
CS	Computer Science
SMS	Short message service (via Web or cellular communications)
MSN	Instant messaging (via Web or cellphone)
SMME	Small, medium and micro enterprises
HOD	Head of Department
SM/MM/JM	Senior, Middle, Junior Management
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
MBA	Master of Business Administration
GEM	Global Entrepreneurship Monitor
B2C/B2B	Business to Consumer / Business to Business
WAC/CAC	Writing/Communication across the curriculum
CHED	Centre for Higher Education Development

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The motive of change is always some Uneasiness: nothing sets us upon the change of a State or upon any new Action but some Uneasiness. This is the great motive that works on the Mind to put it upon Action.

John Locke, An Essay Concerning Human Understanding (1690)

1.1 A NEW EDUCATIONAL ERA

Changes in higher education development, (Steadman, 1995; Conceição and Heitor, 1999; Hall M., 2001; Asmal, 2001) curriculum transformation (Goff, 1989/90; Ramphele 1996/7; White Paper 3, 1997) and the global needs of the 'knowledge economy' (Hall and Mirvis, 1995; Lloyd and Bereznicki, 1998), are some of the key issues which inform this investigation into the communication needs of commerce graduates at the University of Cape Town (UCT).

Nineteen ninety-four saw a jubilant, post-Apartheid South Africa being welcomed back into the bosom of the international community. At the time that South Africa re-joined the world, however, the world itself was undergoing unprecedented and accelerated changes. Terms such a globalisation and the 'knowledge economy' were being bandied about to hail a new world order, a cyber landscape in which borders and physical space were being challenged and transcended.

At the cusp of the new millennium, UCT, with its first world heritage and reputation, and its African location, remains expectedly (and expectantly) poised to make a major contribution to prepare students to cope with new global circumstances and the changing demographics of the workplace. It also provides a platform for students to critically question hitherto taken-for-granted assumptions of first-world Western excellence amidst accusations (and more) of digital exclusivity, double standards, unfair labour and trade practices, protectionist policies and high level arch-capitalist corporate fraud and corruption, (Carter 1997; Teffo, 1998; Visser and Sunter, 2002).

Reports of alleged corporate wrongdoing fill newspapers, column upon column, as more 'captains of industry' turn out to be pirates and pillagers. The media who once

idealised (and idolized?) these corporate kings are now turning a far more jaundiced eye upon their scandalous shenanigans, and for many well-respected financial columnists such as Ann Crotty of the Cape Times Business Report, the gloves are off.

South Africa's international 'welcome back' seems at times quite double-edged as Minister of Trade and Industry, Alec Erwin, continues to discover as hard bargaining and bitter wrangles persist (e.g. trade talks with the European Union).

In these introductory chapters I will attempt to problematise these key issues so as to locate this study appropriately within turbulent local and international contexts of change and transformation.

1.2 OUTCOMES-BASED EDUCATION (OBE)

The policy of Christian National Education, spearheaded by the previous regime of South Africa, the Nationalist Government, was based on curricula which perpetuated race, class and gender inequalities (Steyn, 2001; Steyn and Van Zyl, 2001; James, 2001).

Post apartheid South Africa and the 1994 change in Government saw policy changes across many arenas such as law, labour and education. The policy of OBE, adopted by the new Government, attempts to redress the inequalities of the past. It advocates a learner-centred, team-based, results-orientated design with the emphasis on achievement of specified and measurable outcomes and application of learning rather than on 'covering content' (White Paper, 1997). It also seeks to inculcate "the promotion of the values of equity, tolerance, multilingualism, openness, accountability and social honour." (James, 2001:2).

The South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA)¹ is the statutory body approved by the Minister of Education, which, together with the structures of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF), is responsible for the registration of national

¹ A useful overview of the NQF can be found on the SAQA website at <http://www.saqa.org.za/framework/overview.html>

standards, qualifications and quality assurance accountability measures. In order to fast track educational recognition, the NQF recognises the concept of "lifelong learning" whether accessed formally or informally, within educational institutions or working environments (White Paper, 1997). Its aim is to provide the guidelines on the kind of learning that should take place and how this learning will be assessed.

The purpose of the South African Universities' Vice-Chancellors' Association, SAUVCA, is to debate the new trajectory in education and training in order to contribute to Higher Education Development (HED) and play a proactive role in moving from the old dispensation to approved and coherently managed qualifications offered by universities (SAUVCA Report, 1999).

Post-apartheid South Africa should/could have benefited from overseas examples as changes here, after years of isolation, follow decades of educational trial and error in Europe and the United Kingdom and more recently Australia and New Zealand (Goff, 1989,1990; Methven, 1997; Sauvca Report, 1999; Trenwith, 2000).

Despite lessons from abroad such as those provided by the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA), progress to adopt new educational policy has been painfully slow and frustrating to stakeholders. Curriculum 2005, the much vaunted OBE standard for primary and secondary education, became a source of ridicule and disdain as lack of resourcing and political will saw postponement and ad hoc piecemeal application. Many educators and teachers on the ground remain sceptical and demoralised. The knock-on effects caused by delay and accusations of 'dilly-dallying' held (and continue to hold) consequences for HE further up the ladder. Professor Wieland Gevers, Deputy vice chancellor at UCT (now retired) and SAUVCA's representative on SAQA, contends that "the implementation by SAQA and its various structures of the NQF has not gone smoothly despite SAUVCA's attempts and a review report of the implementation of the NQF has yet to be finalised" (V-C's report, UCT, 2001:9²). The Government and Ministry of Education, in particular, are determined nevertheless to overcome obstacles and adhere to the

² Available online: <http://www.uct.ac.za>

OBE mandate. Universities, despite complex ideological and epistemological tensions (see below), remain actively involved in order to help shape policy.

1.3 UCT'S VISION IN A NEW SOUTH AFRICA AND THE GLOBAL ECONOMY

It has become commonplace to refer to the present era as the 'Information Age' in which technological changes occur at an exponential rate. Today, "knowledge is doubling in less than a decade" (Anderla, in Bowman and Klopping, 1999:82). Of concern is that although more people are literate than ever before, the question is whether they are literate enough for a culture that is increasingly information dependent. Are we equipped, as educators and students, as places of learning in and for the 21st century, to grapple with complex and rapidly changing technologies in the multi-cultural global economy (Witmer, 1998)?

We have no option but to try. UCT's vice-chancellor, Professor Njabulo Ndebele, has re-committed himself to his predecessor's, Dr Mamphela Ramphele's, vision as articulated in 1996.

"The University of Cape Town's mission is to be an outstanding teaching and research university, *educating for life and addressing the challenges facing our society* (my italics). Addressing the challenges ... means that we must come to terms with our past, be cognisant of the present, and plan for the future" (Vision, 2001).

Professor Ndebele believes that changing the institutional culture of UCT is essential if the university hopes to "re-invent itself" as the rest of South has had to do (2001: 6). In their study on student perceptions on institutional culture at UCT, Steyn and Van Zyl (2001) found that tough decisions and hard commitment, especially around equity issues, were necessary if real changes were to be effected. Their findings suggest that the university, despite efforts at transformation, was still perceived as white, middle-class and English-speaking where the colonial values of the past, held sway. Shifting people's mindsets who equate world class with European values (i.e. the status quo) is a formidable goal especially as UCT has to safeguard its

reputation and assure the world, specifically the Western world, of maintained standards of excellence.

The university leadership feel very strongly that UCT can transform itself into a first class *African* university and that being a first-class African university is *not* a contradiction in terms (Ndebele, Vision 2001; Hall, M 2001; Gewers, 2001). It may have a duty to the world but equally it has a duty to engage Africa in helping to assuage the wrongs of the past. "We need to ensure that we find a balance between pursuing academic excellence in the global arena... and... *accountability* (my italics) in seeking solutions to socio-political and economic challenges facing South Africa" (Ndebele, Vision 2001). The above sentiments to which the university is staunchly committed, align strongly with the overall OBE vision.

However, this alignment is strongly contested, both locally and abroad. On the one hand, there is a fear that the ethos and traditions of a university "as a space for free intellectual enquiry" (Ndebele, 2001:7) may be hampered by an over-emphasis on the programme-based approach to curriculum design and the vocational leanings of OBE, with its roots in the labour movement (Sauvca Report, Gevers, 1999). The jury is still out for quite a few UCT academics such as Professor Chris Breen of the School of Education (2002) and Dr John Higgins of the English Department (2003). They question, sometimes quite scathingly, the appropriateness and benefits at tertiary level of OBE as well as the implications for academic freedom of government intervention and control.

There is an uneasy tension between complying with the National Plan for Higher Education Committee's Programme and Qualification mix (PQM) to fulfil the aim of providing "relevance for a new society" (Ndebele, 2001:6) and a university's traditional academic freedom to pursue learning whether 'career oriented' or not. Many academics find the market and business orientation which constructs the student as 'customer' highly distasteful (McMillan and Cheney, 1996). Learning for its own sake as an intellectual 'higher calling' pursuit has always been fiercely defended as a university's prerogative. Very real concerns have thus been expressed around prescriptive framework requirements, rigid 'content' rules and

degree standardisation creating inflexible 'sameness' (and lowest common denominator mediocrity?) rather than pursuit of excellence, innovation and diversity. The very aims of "quality teaching" (Shay, 1998) and open, flexible educational principles – ostensibly espoused by OBE – facilitating mobility through flexible entry and exit points between institutions and recognition of prior learning could be jeopardised by strict adherence to a unit standard methodology and bureaucratic mentality (Sauvca Report, Gewers, 1999).

1.4 CURRICULUM TRANSFORMATION

As a key indicator of professional competence and work-readiness (Birtwhistle, 1996; Morreale, 1998; Harvard Business Review), it is presumed that communication skills are enmeshed within all business and technical curricula and taught by all academic staff, directly or indirectly. The Professional Communication Unit (PCU) at UCT was, however, established in 1975 to provide additional specialised technical and business communication training to students entering professions such as Commerce and Engineering for the very reason that it was felt that professional curricula did not include or emphasise these skills.

This specialised training focused on the core competences of oral and written communication. Although these courses were not merely, as Pomerence (2001) characterises it, teaching "commas and periods" (p. 9) the aim of communication skills training before the advent of globalised computer-mediated communication (CMC) was mainly to teach students how to write and speak well. Although including the basics is still "readily demanded by the contemporary workplace" and "no apology should be made" for teaching these "core umbrella competencies" (Wardrope, 2001:243), there is no doubt that changes in the world over the past two decades have expanded the boundaries of business communication programmes abroad to include topics such as globalisation, cultural diversity, technology and ethics.

Emerging from past isolation and faced with

- growing student numbers, especially in commerce,
- a diverse student population, and

- the need in the new South African education dispensation to focus more directly on outcomes-based learning for a global economy, professional communication staff at UCT were expected – amidst a period of rapid change and some confusion – to ensure that decisions around curriculum design, content and approach remain informed and enlightened (Boud *et al*, 1993; Steadman, 1995; Katula, *et al*, 1999; Pienaar, *et al*, 1999).

The shift in curriculum focus (May/June 1997), outlined in the NQF and adopted by SAQA, was upheld in the National Curriculum Statement (NCS) of 2001 despite OBE implementation uncertainties. This shift in emphasis from the narrow, “closed-system” educational paradigm of the past to an “open and flexible system” committed to “career-oriented development” and “lifelong learning” (White Paper, 1997) has always been central to the “contextual” and “experiential learning approach” (Breen, 2000) advocated by participatory skills communication courses. This means that the goals of OBE align well with existing experiential teaching methodologies. However, as the focus on core competencies and appropriateness for the 21st century shifts and expands, how should communication specialists respond in terms of course curricula, both in content and delivery?

Given the flexible nature of communication (and, in particular, business communication) as a discipline, transforming parameters and paradigms should not be viewed as a key obstacle. By and large, communication specialists are not only uniquely qualified to teach communication (Munter, 1999; Wardrope and Bayless, 1999; Wardrope, 2001, 2002) but also to determine communication curriculum inclusion policy for their students. Unquestioningly, the onus is on communication teachers and practitioners to critically monitor global trends, but, more importantly, to pre-empt these trends and engage with them. “An effective pedagogy narrows or closes the gap between what is taught in pre-professional communications programs and what is expected on the job” (Dorn, 1999: 41) some years later. Changes now are so rapid that “to succeed in this knowledge-intensive environment, graduates will have to work co-operatively, generate and archive knowledge and communicate effectively on demand” (Netzley, 1999:7). Expanding the core competencies to

include the blossoming of new communication practices allows the definition of 'a literate person' to expand accordingly.

1.5 CURRICULUM CONTENT AND DELIVERY IN THE 'KNOWLEDGE ECONOMY'

The existing core, examinable communication course offered to UCT students in Commerce is described in the Commerce Faculty handbook as follows:

PCU101F/PCU101S PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATION

First or Second Semester, Half Course, Workshops: 2 double periods per week.

This core course is available to all third-year Business Science students and is *not* open to students from any other Departments, unless with permission (e.g. some B Com students may do PCU101F/S as an elective). Objectives of the course are that students should be able:

- To write reports and proposals
- To plan and give persuasive presentations and oral reports
- To prepare visual aids for oral presentations and graphic aids for written messages
- To give a formal oral presentation as part of a small group

The syllabus includes:

Theory:

- Formats, style, vocabulary, organisation patterns and readability for oral and written messages
- Group presentation techniques

Application:

- Report writing, proposal writing, email, integration of graphics and visual aids, and group oral presentations

Prescribed text:

- A communication handbook, a course outline and a book of exercises will be given to every student.

Contact Periods:

- PCU101F First semester special fields: Students will meet for two double periods per week: 6 and 7, Tuesdays and Fridays.
- PCU101S: Second semester special fields: Students will meet for two double periods per week: 6 and 7, Tuesdays and Thursdays.

Duly Performed Requirements:

- Every assignment must be handed in on time; oral presentations must be delivered at the specified times
- Students must obtain a minimum average of 40% for work done during the course
- Students must attend all workshops

Examination Requirements:

- Oral examination: group oral presentation to a panel of examiners
- Written examination: three and a half hour paper.

Students must achieve 45% for each examination. Their class and examination marks are then averaged. The pass mark for the course is 50%.

Course Convenor: Ms Terri Grant

Figure 1: PCU101F/S Course description: Commerce Faculty handbook 2003

The PCU101F/S programme is one of three core courses offered in the Commerce Faculty. The other two are BUS473Z, a second semester course for post-graduate diploma students and PCU102S, a 4th year course for Actuarial Science students. These courses cover the recommended core umbrella competencies and include “critical thinking and analysis, clear expression of thoughts” (Roever, 99:88-89) as well as “leadership, communication [and] teamwork” (Ryan, 99:91). Computer-mediated communication (CMC) is covered and practised by way of email (between student group members and students and workshop leader) and discussion of email and internet practises in class as well as computer-mediated presentations such as PowerPoint. No on-line programmes are offered, however.

These are therefore brick (residential) as opposed to click (distributed classroom or distance learning) programmes. The 1990's has seen a major renewal in interest in distance education and instructional technology in HE worldwide. Although UCT does not offer Distance Learning (DL) programmes, many other institutions such as Stellenbosch University, do. Tertiary institutions are not the only parties interested in DL and global education, however. “More than 200 companies are fighting to offer consulting services in the promising area of e-learning for business.” (Economist, 'Lessons', 2001 quoted in Lievrouw, 2001: 6).

UCT is taking CMC technology very seriously, nevertheless, with “Information and Communication Technology” and “Entrepreneurship” being earmarked as part of its Programme and Qualification Mix (PQM) in response to the National Plan for Higher Education (Vision 2001, 6).

This is a worldwide trend. Entire issues of communication journals have been devoted to the use of the Internet, World Wide Web and CMC as pedagogical tool as well as preparatory work-place skill (Communication Education, 43/2, April 1994; Journal of Communication, 46/1, Winter 1996). Still others debate the issues around the 'new economy' where this term is broadly used to designate a variety of recent trends that converge integratively across organisational and cultural borders to include transnational blurring, downsizing, outsourcing, mergers, telecommunications and computing technology, globalization and hegemonic

discourses that prioritise first-world knowledge, entrepreneurship and the market (Dertouzos, 1997; Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, 1998; Taylor, 2001; Visser and Sunter, 2002).

1.6 OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

Chapters two and three of this dissertation will delve deeper into the underlying assumptions and background to the investigation and provide a literature review. This will allow me to further contextualise the study within various frameworks, all of which intersect across the broad canvas of a *Communication Needs Analysis in Business*. Of import therefore are the following issues and concepts:

- Communicative competence – a theoretical framework
- Educational perspectives and contexts
- Educational scope and objectives
- The role of 'face-time' in the global world of the 'Knowledge Economy'

Chapter four will cover the design methodology which spanned a two-year period. This chapter is divided as follows:

- Sampling Approach
- Survey Instrument
- Sample Size
- Full circle: final student commentary

The findings section of the report will consist of three chapters (five, six and seven) which will record both the quantifiable, coded and the qualifiable, open-ended results gathered from the three target respondent groups: student (2001 and 2002), staff (2001) and professional (2002). Phase one results will be interrogated in chapter six, using the working assumptions as set out in chapter two; phase two results and evaluation will follow in chapter seven.

The concluding chapter, chapter eight, will comprise conclusions based on these reflections, the value and significance of the study, some limitations as well as directions for future research.

The reference section will be followed by a number of appendices which include sample questionnaires used during the course of the two-year period, themes and patterns used for coding, 'extra' interview questions and more detailed background on the statistical sampling methodologies used in phase one and phase two of the study.

University of Cape Town

CHAPTER TWO: DESCRIPTION OF THE RESEARCH FIELD

Curiosity is one of the permanent and certain characteristics of a vigorous intellect.

Samuel Johnson, The Rambler (1751)

This chapter will give a brief overview of the research topic, question and problem as well as the rationale for the study. Finally, the six working assumptions which underpin this investigation will be listed and a flowchart depicting the project as a whole will be shown.

2.1 RESEARCH TOPIC

Acquiring communicative competence for the world of work: a business needs analysis and its impact on curriculum development and delivery

2.2 RESEARCH QUESTION

What are the communicative needs of business graduates as we move into the 21st century and to what extent are existing curricula meeting these needs?

2.3 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM AND RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

From a business communication perspective, the late 20th and early 21st century has been variously labelled the 'knowledge economy', the 'global economy', the 'information age'.

"Communicating in the workplace... can be defined as the multi-directional and multi-cultural transactions and interactions that occur within and between business people and/or companies. Whether these exchanges are local or global, interpersonal or electronic, they have 'the job-related message' as a core ingredient."

(Grant and Borchers, 2002: 5)

Rapid-fire changes in technology and consequent impact on communication delivery hold challenging implications for graduates poised to enter the world of work. In my introduction to the questionnaire for professionals I contended: "It is generally

generally accepted and expected that the advent and proliferation of internet and cellular communications will impact on how people communicate and the choices they have/make. Are these new modes of communication or merely transportation media? Have they changed the nature of personal and corporate communication or merely added new, speedier channels for the traditional interpersonal, group, mass and written communication genres? In other words, is email a new type of communication or merely a new (quicker) way of transmitting correspondence?"

This investigation and analysis will attempt to identify these changes and to provide some ideas about what professional communication studies should be incorporated to equip graduates with relevant knowledge and skills. This assessment will allow staff to:

- evaluate existing curricula and syllabi so that communication programmes more accurately reflect what is required, and
- keep abreast of new developments for the benefit of graduates entering a globally competitive business environment.

2.4 WORKING ASSUMPTIONS

These are as follows:

- The communicative skills of the majority of students have changed from local/national, traditional modes of communication, e.g. face-to face, oral presentations, the long report, business correspondence, e.g. letters and memos) to transnational/global electronic and cellular communication and less formal, impromptu and team-based styles of presentation.
- Many graduates are finding alternative entrepreneurial employment opportunities in the informal sector outside institutionalised corporate structures.
- Visual literacy is becoming more important and visual/graphic modes of communication need to be emphasised (Raymond, 1994; Tufte, 1997);

- Intercultural communication and multiculturalism are fast becoming new 'literacies' for communicatively competent transactions (Steyn, 1997; Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, 1998);
- Gender shifts are taking place as more women enter the world of work and commerce in particular, giving rise to shifts in traditionally masculine rules of engagement (from businessmen to business people);
- There is a discrepancy in fit between what educators and people in the workplace perceive to be necessary communication knowledge and skills.

These assumptions are based more on informal discussions with students and colleagues, both local and international than well documented research findings. One too cannot escape media coverage of the ever-changing cyber landscape nor the proliferation of communication devices and the urge to "connectivity".

2.5 PERSONAL ORIENTATION TO TOPIC AND PROJECT FLOWCHART

I am concerned not to fall into the trap of change for change sake or to be so blinded by panic, lest we 'fall behind', that age-old truths informing human communication and communicative competence get sacrificed at the altar of 'technology'. However, nothing is static, shifts occur, and if proactively managed can merge seamlessly and co-operatively to enhance and reinforce rather than to fracture. Giving change its head, riding the changes with willingness, curiosity, and keeping an open mind may guarantee a bumpy ride but equally, ensure opportunities for informed renewal.

The flowchart on page 15 attempts to capture the process that emerged during the project. It also traces the cyclical nature of phase one and phase two and shows how the implications of phase one were fed back to students and communication staff. This gave rise to further implications which will be fed back to the business and academic communities to enhance business and curriculum development.

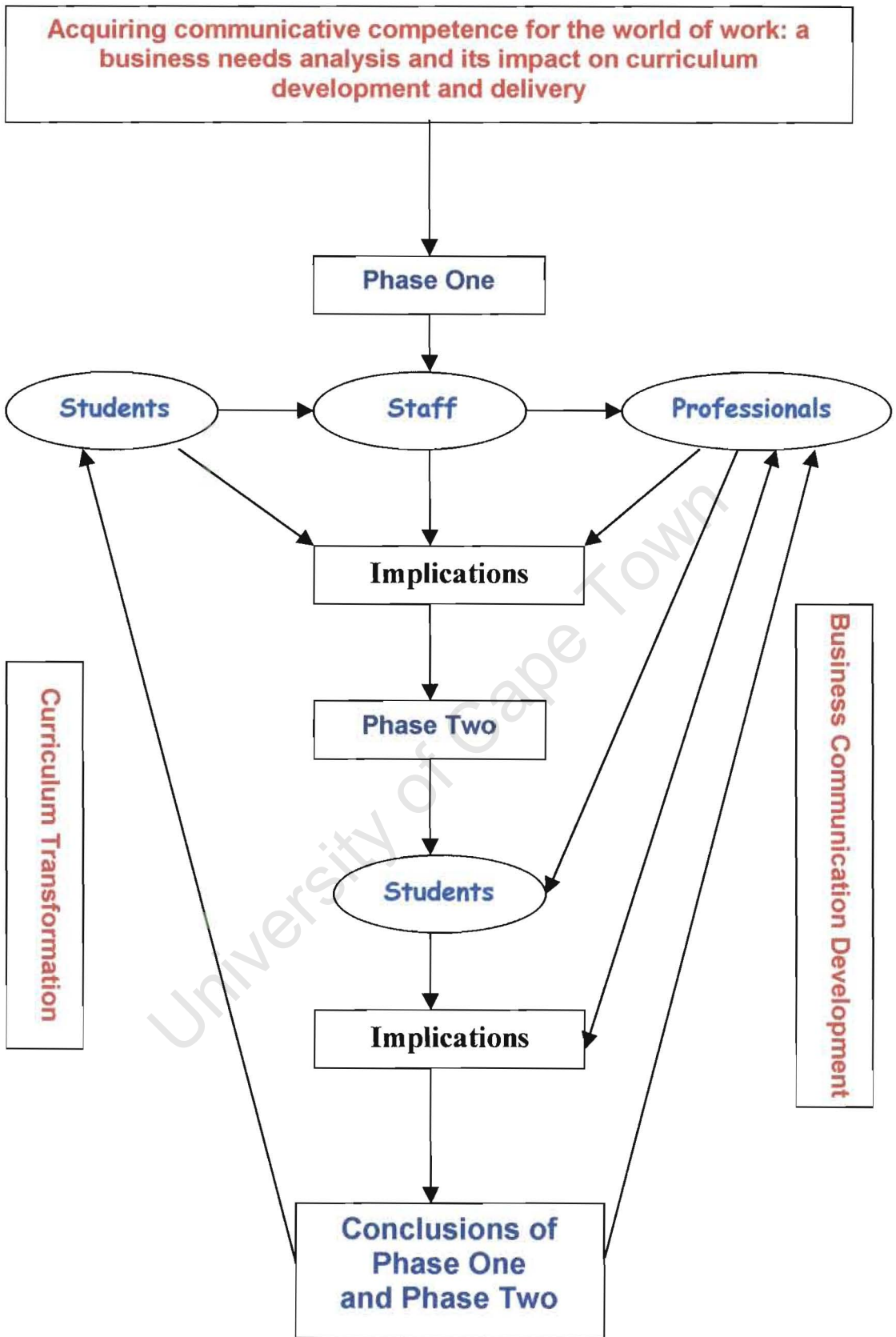


Figure 2: Flowchart of Business Communication Needs Analysis

CHAPTER THREE: BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY AND REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This overview and review will debate definitions and perceptions of communicative competence as contextualised within certain educational paradigms and of how extended definitions of communicative competence can perform a more inclusive task within a multi-cultural, global economy. The role of and dichotomy between traditional and computer-mediated communications (CMC) needs to be problematised and critically interrogated to establish useful definition parameters for the 'knowledge economy'.

3.1 COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The major goal of a communication needs analysis in business is to establish how communicative competence is perceived in order to determine effectiveness in pedagogical delivery. It is important to note that in this study, communicative competence is not being tested or measured *per se* but rather that perceptions of competence are being compared and evaluated.

Many questions have arisen about the definition of 'communicative competence' from a local and international perspective.

In their book, *Communicating across cultures in South Africa*, Kashula and Anthonissen (1995) use Gumperz's definition of communicative competence (1972). "Whereas linguistic competence covers the speaker's ability to produce grammatically correct sentences, communicative competence describes his ability to select from the totality of grammatically correct expressions available to him, forms which appropriately reflect the social norms governing behaviour in specific encounters (p 10).

Beside being sexist, I would argue that if this definition is applied too narrowly, it would not adequately reflect the scope and complexity of the verbal and non-verbal components of communicative competence, especially if we subscribe to the findings

Hall, (1959, 1966) and Mehrabian (1971) during a period of post-second world war study that over 90% of our message content is non-verbally transmitted.

Even though more recent studies (Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, 1998) give a more conservative estimate of 75%, the non-verbal component is still hugely influential. "Although some may contest these figures or the methodology used to reach them, there is not doubt that a significant proportion of messages is non-verbally conveyed" (Grant and Borchers, 2002: 235). To be communicatively competent one would need to understand the 'grammar' of non-verbal communication including the use of silence.

If non-verbal communication is as culturally inflected as verbal communication, then practitioners could well learn to speak a language verbally but have little non-verbal understanding or sensitivity. Additionally, they may be communicatively competent in one culture and not necessarily in another. Ecological, organic understandings are not merely transposable – a one size fits all philosophy. Measuring intercultural communication competency has always been keenly contested with challenging albeit contradictory findings emerging from various studies (Gudykunst and Hammer, 1984; Spitzberg 1989).

Theorists do agree, however, that learning to speak another's language, although a good start, is not enough (Scarcella, *et al*, 1990). Language is culturally embedded. One would need to understand the "speech communities" (Kaschula and Anthonissen, 1995:9) in which particular languages (or dialects) are spoken. Degrees of competence would intersect across two continua, the one involving cognitive, content-based message transmission – the more overt dimension of communicative competence; the other, the affective, feeling/attitude-based dimension, the more covert dimension. Being fluent in the former may help with the task dimension (e.g. the problem solution) but being competent along both axes would enhance the relational and social dimension as well (the dialogical connection).

Socio-linguistic theorists such as Gumperz and Hymes (1972), have frequently advocated a communicative approach to language teaching so that learners not only acquire a target language grammar but also learn to understand and appreciate the socio-cultural context and features of a communicative event (Hymes, 1979).

How communication competence in general has been conceptualised over the years has varied greatly. "The field of communication competence has an extensive record of factor-analytic work endeavoring to identify the fundamental dimensions of competence" (Spitzberg, 1989: 246). No fewer than "136 distinct conceptual labels attached to factors empirically derived and associated with competences" (ibid) have been listed during decades of research but Spitzberg's two dimensions of "appropriateness and effectiveness" (1983, 1984, 1989) are generally accepted as pivotal in communication research and have been applied to health communication (Taylor, 1994) as well as intercultural research (Steyn, 1997) on competence.

In their book, *Interpersonal Communication Competence*, Spitzberg and Cupach (1984) define communicative competence as "the ability to interact appropriately and/or effectively" (p 74). This introduces a participative and dialogical imperative which resonates with Rogers's and Kincaid's (1981) convergence model of communication and Arnett's (1992) interactive communicators-as-partners perspective. The former scholars view communication as a joint venture where participants negotiate meaning towards mutual understanding; the latter seeks equal and respectful management of and responsibility towards the communication event by both parties, the teacher and student, for example, as they engage in conversation.

Spitzberg and Cupach (1984) claim that competence cannot be rated by only one party as it is conceived by and resides in both interactants interdependently. Not only does this seem to align with more current communication theory, but also engages an ethical standpoint as it presupposes conscious accountability by all the parties involved in the transaction: teacher and student; employer and employee; business person and customer or client. As co-workers and co-learners, both parties are responsible for striving for communicative competence.

Sptizberg's dimensions of effectiveness and appropriateness relate not only to cognitive message transmission but to affective understanding and behavioural congruence as well: an overarching, ecological fluency which marries the more overt task orientation to the more covert relational, social dimension of communication.

Confidence to engage is also a dimension of communicative competence that needs to be considered. First language participants, (especially white male) may be perceived as more communicatively competent because of their overt assertiveness and dominance (Henley, 1986; Katz, 1991; Coates; 1993). Research abroad has found that second-language communicators, especially if they were disadvantaged or marginalised, may be more silent and constrained (Kim, 1994). In a medical study, Young and Storm Klinge (1996) found that certain cross-cultural communication interactions became more problematic when second language issues enter the equation and that certain cultures "are less assertive and participate less" than others (p 29). The power equations and perceived status differences in educational contexts must play a role. Many black and Asian students seem more passive, seeing (and accepting) 'the teacher' as the powerful figure who knows best (Aldridge, Fraser and Huang, 1993). My own tertiary teaching experience endorses this finding, particularly with black, Muslim and Chinese female students. Not understanding particular 'culturally embedded' responses and preferences may thus detract from competent transactions.

A brief mention here of high and low context cultures is also relevant (Hofstede, 1984; Gudykunst, *et al*, 1992; 1996; Weaver, 1994). Western teachers and students from low-context, individualistic cultures may favour direct communication and value self-disclosure. Some African and Islamic cultures – especially female members – may more easily fit into the collective, high context cultural paradigm where oblique, indirect communicative displays are valued and practiced, indeed demanded (Weaver, 1994; Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, 1998).

According to Spitzberg and Cupach (1984), interactants perceive some actions and people as more competent than others. The perception of competence could be problematic if preconceptions, prejudices and cultural stereotypes involving race,

language and gender muddy the waters. Hegemonic expectations of excellence, for example, may be reserved – albeit unintentionally or unconsciously – for Western, white, masculine models. If these are then equated with ‘management material’, it makes it extremely difficult for constituent power brokers (e.g. existing partners in a firm or Board of Directors) to promote someone who does not ‘fit the bill’ (black/Asian/Coloured female or disabled person, for example). No matter how intrinsically competent that person may be or have the potential to be, if his or her competence is rendered invisible or is ignored, then the party (culprit?) responsible for the judgment (or lack of one) simply becomes blind and, in fact, displays and demonstrates true ‘incompetence’.

Another concern, briefly raised in chapter two, needs airing. The lack of communicative honesty and openness relating to financial and commercial disclosure and transparency has led to an explosion worldwide of huge and hugely complicated fraudulent corporate scandals such as Enron (2001) and Worldcom (2002). Should communicative competence (which, according to Spitzberg and Cupach (1984), includes accountability) not therefore include and embrace ethical values and ‘know-how’; not only to think ethically but to live and enact it too (Appelbaum and Lawton, 1990; Varela, 1999)? Even if one accepts this as an ideal, is it educationally feasible?

3.2 EDUCATIONAL PERSPECTIVES AND CONTEXTS

Many researchers and educationalists have debated whether communicative competence can be taught in the traditional sense, and if so, whether the type of short, curriculum-based tertiary programmes, with a strong skills bias, can accomplish such a goal (McCroskey 1998; Lynott, 1998). There is no doubt that the belief that such training makes a student more communicatively literate may be tinged with subjectivity, perhaps wishful thinking. Perhaps the task orientation is ‘easier’ to teach/learn than the deeper, more dialogically organic competencies. However, committed communication teachers and professionals still feel that any exposure, any attempt at consciousness-raising, no matter how little, is better than nothing. The university of Cape Town itself recognises this quest.

In a university address, ex vice-chancellor of UCT, Dr Mamphela Ramphele, endorsed the university's advertised promise of graduating a person who will be "a good analyst, a problem-solver and a good communicator ... versatile enough to work across professional boundaries and innovative enough to recognise new opportunities in a changing environment "(1996/7).

The fact remains that although we may desire that all lecturers and curricula across every faculty inculcate the values of "graduateness" espoused by Dr Ramphele, more often than not, lack of time, interest and expertise determine that these skills are simply ignored. This is especially true when the mindset is that communication – long regarded as a 'soft people skill' – is not a core subject competency (Munter, 1999).

Some detractors go so far as to say that "much of communication behavior is genetically influenced and difficult to control or change" (McCroskey 1998), i.e. why bother? However, this school does concur that "some" important communication behaviour is learned otherwise we would all share similar verbal and non-verbal responses and patterns irrespective of culture or upbringing. So although temperament may have its origins more in nature than nurture, "there is general agreement that temperament is manifest largely in the context of social interaction" (ibid). What we are, inherently as communication beings, can therefore be enhanced (or hindered) by our social interactions and "it is highly likely that genetics and learning interact with each other to influence communication behavior" (ibid). Also, if a culture of "lifelong learning" can be instilled in tertiary contact – no matter how fleeting these communication courses may be – then some measure of goal achievement can be claimed (White Paper, 1997; Lynott, 1998).

3.3 NEEDS ANALYSIS OBJECTIVES AND EDUCATIONAL SCOPE

The overall research project is multi-faceted and has comprised a number of key areas. It arose out of an earlier investigation into Scenario Learning (Grant, 1999, 2000), which focused on how professional communication could be taught/learnt experientially within the OBE framework. The following development, at the cusp of the new millennium, arose out of the following key questions:

- Are we meeting the needs of students entering the global workplace in the new millennium (Netzley, 1999)?
- Are we adequately addressing what will be required of business students as communicatively competent graduates in the workplace (Morreale, 1998; Wardrope and Bayless, 1999; Wardrope, 2001, 2002)?

Needs analyses, business surveys and destination studies are not new. Working nationally and internationally, tertiary institutions, public and private sector research foundations, business and industry and governments have investigated the needs of society in order to equip the job market with a skilled and expert workforce.

Analysts believe that the shifts in the world of work are enormous; global demands dictate that we identify much more precisely the impact of these contemporary and rapidly changing demands and as teachers and communication scholars to then equip students with the skills necessary to meet these challenges effectively, vigorously and responsibly (Birtwhistle, 1996; Annenberg 1998). We need to do so based on solid research and not mere hunches or hearsay.

A review of similar surveys and overseas opinion (Munby, 1980; Yaldon, 1985; Nasta, 1994; Australian Survey, 1996; Netzley, 1999; Wardrope, 2001) as well as scrutiny of local conditions (Fielding, 1993; Monyooe, 1999; Grant, 1999) must inform (and fuel) this Needs Analysis, especially as opinions differ and past research is characterised by discrepancies and contradictions (Munter, 1999; Lievrouw, 2001).

One of the key objectives of this study therefore will be to find answers to the following questions:

- what curriculum changes need to be made in teaching effective communication in the computer-mediated electronic age, and
- what is the impact of technology on 'traditional' human communication arenas, specifically face-to-face communication?

As we accelerate down the fast-moving CM highways where communicators are removed across geographic and cultural boundaries, where the information age has

exploded our notions of 'data accessibility', and database expertise becomes a greater resource than the raw material, product economy, understanding the role and impact of technology on education and business takes on new urgency (Leinbach and Brunn, 2001). The wealth of information, stored in vast databases, concerning global knowledge, business and market conditions, defines what is meant by 'the knowledge economy'. The accessibility of this information via the Internet has given even the smallest enterprise – even in the remotest parts of Africa – the potential of becoming a global player (Mersham and Skinner, 2001, Visser and Sunter, 2002). Detailed records of people and products – all the stakeholders involved – can be recorded, modified, updated, maintained in real time by 'word of mouse'.

The role of 'face time' in a CMC environment is an issue that confronts every practitioner (Hallowell, 1999; Hamelink, 2001). What is the tension that binds/separates traditional versus computer-mediated communication? Is it ancillary and complementary or juxtaposed and adversarial or both?

3.4 FACE-TIME IN THE KNOWLEDGE ECONOMY

If I could coin phrases, I would prefer to use the terms learner and learnee than teacher and learner as I suspect that the process of authentic learning – especially at tertiary level - is mutually negotiated and shaped between teachers and learners and that the educational 'investment' is jointly inter-dependent (Freie, 1970; Greene, 1973, 1986; Grant, 1999; Breen, 2000).

My training and experience as an educator, especially in communication, has reinforced my belief in experiential learning and participative, hands-on educational principles. Effective deep-level learning occurs as a result of dialogical engagement with the subject matter (whether of an abstract/theoretical or concrete/practical nature) and the centrality of self within the learning equation. This equation or triangle comprises the:

- educational source (learner/learnee),
- content or field of focus, and
- educational receiver-participant (learnee/learner).

Dialogical engagement demands personal interaction (Arnett, 1992). Arnett, like many proponents of face to face (FtF) communication, values the intimacy of sharing physical (and emotional) space. But "with intimacy comes responsibility" (Arnett, 1992:19). He advocates that teachers and learners should view themselves as partners in learning and maintains that teachers need to be able to maintain relationships through differences with integrity and civility. Traditionally, interpersonal communication involves the physical meeting of people (e.g. students and teachers) within a real space (e.g. a class room) at pre-determined times. Contemporary engagement may, however, be technologically engineered to occur in cyber time and space in real time or 'after hours'. As no physical presences or spaces are necessary, the interaction is computer-mediated rather than interpersonally managed (Freitas, Myers and Avtgis, 1998; Witt and Wheelless, 1999). The question is whether this type of "conversational exchange" (Arnett, 1992: 7) would count as true dialogue.

As on-line, distance educational programmes and e-commerce are increasing in a globally competitive environment, the 'removal' of, what Hallowell (1999) calls, "the human moment" (p 58) may become more and more of a reality. In his article, Hallowell (1999) cites a study in the late 90's undertaken by the Carnegie Mellon University which found that people who substituted social interaction with spending time on-line had "higher levels of depression and loneliness" (p 63). One of the study's major conclusions was "that the electronic world, while useful in many respects, is not an adequate substitute for the world of human contact" (ibid). Researchers Bensaou and Earl (1998) found further that "the right *mind-set* for managing information technology" (p 119) was crucial (my italics). Their point was that technology can never substitute physical human intervention but that IT can and should be strategically aligned to complement and serve human communication and thus bolster and enhance communicative competence.

The Bensaou and Earl study (1998) of American and Japanese approaches to technology utilisation found that "the Western bias is toward technology for technology's sake. The Japanese bias is toward appropriate technology" (p 124) and

the co-habitation of “high tech” with “low-tech” (p 127). The respondents in this and other studies (e.g. Barnlund 1989; Munter 1998) saw people and technology in complementary, harmonious¹ partnerships not competitive substitution scenarios. This is an important distinction. Computer-mediated communication (CMC) and the use of technology in education, business – indeed all aspects of life - is a *fait accompli* and has enormous potential for positive (re)generation and accelerated access and delivery, if intelligently and coherently managed (Althaus, 1997; Witt and Wheelless, 1999; Arbaugh, 2000).

What is a concern is the substitution argument, that technology and cyber communications are ‘better than’ traditional interpersonal communications and can enhance effectiveness and success consistently, rendering ‘face-time’ obsolete and out of date. Just as the ‘paperless office’, first championed in the 70’s, never materialised – “more information is being stored on and transmitted by paper than ever before” (Bowman and Klopping, 99:87) – so, it could be argued, traditional interpersonal communication is more relevant in such a highly technological (and multicultural) age than ever before.

Face-time can be defined as the physical interaction of people in one-on-one and/or small group scenarios. Hallowell calls it “an authentic psychological encounter that can happen only when two people share the same physical space” (1999:59). More than physical presence is necessary, however. According to Hallowell, sharing space with a stranger in a queue or on a bus cannot be defined as a ‘human moment’. Emotional and intellectual attention is also a prerequisite, especially where global transactions are concerned as intercultural issues may further complicate the transaction. Paying attention is a key ingredient.

Numerous researchers and educationalists such as Dewey (1938, 1954, 1964); Arendt, (1958); Rogers, (1961, 1980); Freire, (1970); Greene (1973, 1986); Merleau-Ponty (1964); Vygotsky (1964); Arnett, (1992); Davis and Sumara (1997); Valera, (1999) over many decades of research in education, psychology and communication

¹ The philosophy that underpins the principle of valuing people is *chowa*, or harmonization which is a powerful idea in Japanese culture. In an IT context, *chowa* means that technology should fit the people using it rather than

have found that being involved in the human moment and actively participating in the transaction strengthens and harmonises cognitive, affective and behavioural understanding. Hallowell (1999) suggests that isolation, the lack of physical human contact damages a person's emotional health and sense of identity and that studies on sensory deprivation on people of all ages, from infant to the aged (Langer, 1989; Rowe and Kahn, 1998; Trethewey 2001) have found evidence to show that socially isolated people are more emotionally stunted. Medico-scientific enquiries (Taylor R, 1994; Steer, 2000) have linked this type of isolation/alienation to lower immune-system responsiveness and lowered T-cell counts².

Scientists have discovered that positive human-to-human contact reduces the blood levels of the stress hormones epinephrine, norepinephrine, and cortisol. Hormones such as oxytocin and vasopressin promote bonding and trust (Hallowell, 1999). These hormone levels rise naturally in the body when people are appropriately immediate to one another physically and feel empathy for one another. Most important is that scientists have found that these hormones are suppressed when people are physically separated. Hallowell contests that this is one of the reasons that people find it much "easier to deal harshly with someone via e-mail than in person" (1999:63).

What then transpires in physical interpersonal communication that has found favour with communication specialists, psychologists and educators over the centuries? One of the answers could be physiological and chemical.

In a medical address to physicians during 2000, John Steer, a Cape Town-based ear, nose and throat specialist, spoke about the role of Jacobson's organ³ which is located in the brain. Identified anatomically as a tympanic nerve, it serves as a sensory conduit which seemingly links the sensory organs communicatively bringing

the other way around (Bensaou and Earl, 1998).

² Medical surveys have found increased T-cell counts in the blood (with resultant heightened immune system responsiveness) in people characterised as having a 'positive' and/or 'optimistic' frame of mind.

³ Named for its French discoverer, L. Jacobson, whose publication in 1811 referred to this chemosensory structure in the nose (medically known as the vomeronasal organ or VNO). It was then promptly ignored by the medical and scientific fraternity until the 1980's and only recently, has its communicative and territorial influence become an area of research.

this canal, cartilage, plexus, nerve or organ – it is known by all of these names – into chemical concert. Being ‘in tune’ takes on a whole new meaning. Dr Steer has operated on patients where this organ has been damaged and/or has to be removed. He contends that such patients seem to lose their ability to judge others astutely, that they trust too easily (seem gullible) and lose their intuitive ability to “size up” a situation (Steer, Personal Communication, 2001).

Dr Steer further speculates that people need physical presence and interaction to fully activate this organ and hence our ability to judge others and ‘read between the lines’. We often hear expressions such as having a ‘nose for trouble’, ‘smelling out the opposition or competition’, having a ‘hunch’, experiencing ‘burning’ ears or feeling instant attraction/repulsion when meeting someone for the first time. This often translates into what we describe as business ‘acumen’ or more informally, ‘street-smarts’. Throughout history, people have sought to transact face to face, not only for more accurate and immediate verbal communication but also to fulfil their need to trust ‘their instincts’ and pick up on the richness of non-verbal and visual cues (Jones and LeBaron, 2002; Burgoon, *et al*, 2002).

Although little can be found on the role and impact of chemical and hormonal reactions or neurotransmitters in communication education research, studies on non-verbal communication and body language accelerated during the last half of the 20th century (post-second world war). Researchers such as Edward Hall (1959; 1966; 1976), Ray Birdwhistell (1970) and Alan Mehrabian (1971; 1972) did pioneering work in this area. More recently, Gumperz (1992), Beebe *et al* (1996), King (1997) and Burgoon, *et al* (2002) have continued the tradition.

Theorists who advocate dialogical communication and the intimacy of personal interaction such as Buber (1937), Rogers (1961) and Arnett (1992) do so for a host of reasons. These range from the heightened immediacy of physical engagement and relevance of ‘voice’ (McCallum, Hargreaves and Gipps, 2000) to experiential, participative, ‘hands-on’ criteria (Kolb, 1984; Katula and Threnhauser, 1999). Although the energy levels and adrenaline rush of active involvement is generally evident in interpersonal communication, often giving rise to seemingly heightened

states of motivation and well-being, very little is known of the bodily changes, the psychological and physiological impacts being wrought. This study does not intend to attempt to measure these bodily changes. It does, however, analyse and highlight respondent perceptions in order to assess needs, requirements, common use and preferences in communicator style, channel, media and modes of delivery and then relate this to how and what we teach.

Although champions of traditional interpersonal communications do not want to be perceived negatively as “pedestrians on the information highway” (Bilimaria in Clark, *et al*, 2001: 39), they do hold firm that CMC and DL (distance learning) are not the panacea to all pedagogical and course delivery ills of the 21st century.

In his ground-breaking investigation, which became known as the “no significant difference” study, Russell (1997), found no significant difference in educational outcomes between mediated and traditional teaching and, more significantly, no difference between expensive, resource-heavy, high-tech teaching offering all the whistles and bells and cheaper, low-tech approaches such as ‘how to’ videos and paper-based instructional media. This, as discussed later, may prove reassuring to poor, resource hungry communities, the ‘have-nots’.

Some theorists feel that, unlike certain subject matter, skills development is highly dependent on a participatory, learning-by-doing pedagogy. As teaching professional communication skills is the core business of communication courses offered at UCT, this type of experiential teaching methodology seems most appropriate. In her article, Ryan (1999) cites Hickman who avers that “it’s much more difficult to do the skill development for a technology based program” (p 93). To further bolster her argument, Ryan (1999) includes an extract from the International Association for Management Education in the USA which found a “new emphasis on skill development ... recognising that particularly in terms of measuring subsequent career success, ... core skills – leadership, communication, teamwork” and, more recently “managing diversity “ are crucial (p 91). “New communication technologies tend to filter out important contextual and social cues” resulting in an “impoverished communication environment” which could “eliminate social presence, degrade the

quality of communication, impair working relationships, and undermine task performance compared to FtF interaction unless communicators are able to compensate for such losses” (Burgoon, *et al*, 2002: 658). According to Arnett (1992), true dialogue allows participants to “call out the best” in themselves and become “more than they may have originally thought possible” (p 125). Burgoon, *et al* (2002) found that the “proxemic, environmental and vocalic nonverbal cues” available in FtF communication permit “value-added” benefits associated with heightened empathy, involvement, trust and morale “relative to text-only [online] interaction” (p 673). How successfully one can engender this outcome online or teach these skills ‘long distance’ is highly contested.

Most theorists, however, do not advocate an either/or. According to Griffen and Anderton-Lewis (1998), introducing a CMC course component not only satisfies the job market demands for information technology skills but allows less confident and often previously disadvantaged students (if they have the skills and the access) to take part by providing a type of “rhetorical safe house” (p 9) where they may feel comfortable to ask questions online and in private. The loss of important contextual information and non-verbal cues, so indispensable to proponents of FtF, dialogical communication, may be viewed as an advantage to certain students or employees if it blurs the need to identify self, levels social class and obscures race, gender and age (Althaus 1997).

Proponents of CMC claim that, for the very reasons mentioned above, it may improve participation, discussion and debate (McComb 1994), enable collaboration anywhere/anytime as it is non place- or time-dependent (Lopez and Nagelhout, 1995) and improve student perception of learning (Althaus 1997) as CMC is regarded as ‘cool’. Its impact on learning *per se* was not tested in this study. However, this same group of researchers warn that advantages only accrue when both staff and students are skilled enough to access and utilise “complex and rapidly changing technologies” (Witmer, 1998) inclusively rather than exclusively at the right time and for the appropriate task. The pedagogical challenges and obstacles could outweigh the benefits if CMC and/or DL are badly understood, implemented, taught, delivered or managed (Andrews, 1995; Mabrito, 1995; Witmer, 1998).

There is another edge to the debate. Jerry Farber (1998) found that DL has enhanced testable, quantifiable knowledge outcomes but claims that although this may be the sole standard of success in distance education, it is not the sole point of education *per se*. Lievrouw (2001) contends that education encompasses “the life experiences and socialization that result from personal involvement with the campus setting” – staff and students (p 6). Farber (1998) claims that “competence” must be complemented by “education”. “If we want no more than measurable competence, it comes fairly cheap. But if we want education ... we need to stop pretending that we can deliver the university experience on a screen” (Farber, 1998: 797).

Citing previous studies, (Pascarella and Terenzini 1991, and Austin 1993) to reinforce his belief, Farber (1998) further claims that:

“university educated people differ from other groups in terms of their cultural and political styles (e.g. they tend to be less authoritarian and dogmatic, are more flexible and tolerant of ambiguity, and show greater preferences for abstract, reflective thought, and rational, critical problemsolving” (p 797).

This resonates with Ramphela Mamphela’s definition of ‘graduateness’ discussed earlier. According to Farber’s research, “the greatest influence on such attitudes and orientations is exposure to, and interaction with, other students” (1998: 797).

The classical dichotomy in communication studies between CMC and FtF interaction will continue to be debated, sometimes hotly. Theorists generally recommend, however, that CMC and traditional interaction should be viewed as important supplements to one another, a synergistic partnership based on age-old principles of effective communication: purpose and target audience.

Furthermore, given the digital revolution and the changing technological face of the ‘knowledge economy’, exposure to both will provide the best possible ‘outcome’ of all and more accurately reflect the low-, medium- and high-tech business environment

of the 21st century globally and, in particular, the third world characteristics of the African continent with its all too few pockets of first-world sophistication (Mersham and Skinner, 2002; Hamelink, 2002).

The reality of the African continent, often side-lined and shrugged off as beyond the so-called digital divide, is that, technologically, it is overwhelmingly under-resourced and under-qualified and that many communities are, and remain, excluded and marginalised. For these communities this 'dichotomy' or 'debate' may be purely academic as they struggle to supply the basic educational essentials. A worrying world-wide trend is that, despite technological breakthroughs, the 'new economy' has conspired to make the richest first-world nations richer and the poor third-world nations, poorer (Dertouzos, 1997; Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, 1998; Mersham and Skinner, 2001, Hamelink, 2001).

The Information Age thus holds enormous potential for the 'haves'; enormous challenges for the 'have-nots' as one realises that only "those countries with real navigational access" to the knowledge economy have any hope of keeping up and prospering (Grant and Borchers, 2002: 7). "Our era, in addition to being an era of global communication, is an era of staggering inequality" (Schuler, 2001:6). In his article, Schuler (2000) refers to the Human Development Program Report of 2000 which found that "global inequalities [have] increased in the 20th century by orders of magnitude out of all proportion to anything experienced before" (p 6). Dertouzos argues that information-age poverty is inevitable "if left to its own devices..." (1997:241).

As long as ultra-capitalist agendas control the Internet and e-commerce, the digital divide will continue and inevitably widen. This is not a win-win or win-lose scenario. Ultimately it is lose-lose as the world's poorer nations plummet further into the digital chasm and, in the process, burden themselves and the first world with growing socio-economic deficits and endless 'aid' which benefits the few rather than the many. Keeping the Internet "altruistic" (Mersham and Skinner, 2001: 222) and a vehicle to benefit poorer communities and nations as well as making technology infrastructure and services "more available and less expensive" (Kretchmer, 2001: 7)

is part of the challenge for government, business and academics alike. Schuler (2001) believes that the only way this growing divide can be bridged is through constant special interest group, NGO and academic activism to ensure that “electronic democracy” (p 6) goes beyond mere lip service (Carter, 1997; Wilhelm, 2000). If credibility, support and momentum can be sustained, both locally and abroad, NEPAD², may well confound its critics and be a proactive force for good.

This research covers a wide landscape as it resonates across practical skills training, educational frameworks and global business communications in order to find answers to ‘where from’ and ‘where to’. The major aim is thus to look for overlapping narratives, disparate knowledge ‘bites’ that resonate - whether from pedagogical, communicative, commercial, technological or psychological arenas - and to attempt to create a synergy, similar to that ascribed to Jacobson’s organ itself. In Dorland’s Medical dictionary (1968) this organ is defined as an “anastomosis” (p 79). To anastomose means “to create a communication between two formerly separate structures” and an anastomosis refers to the “pathological formation of a passage between any two normally distinctive spaces or organs” (ibid). This ‘passage’ between the old and the new, traditional and electronic, people and technology, with its many pedagogical implications and differing world views, holds the challenge implicit in communication research.

The field of communication has long been accused of being an eclectic ‘mish mash’ of traditions and disciplines (Jones and Baron, 2001). One could argue, rather, that this over-arching, holistic, interdisciplinary approach more than adequately reflects its subject matter, humans, and is therefore entirely appropriate. Chapter four will pursue this line of enquiry in greater detail.

² New Economic Partnership for Africa’s Development is one of President Thabo Mkebi’s key initiatives to bridge the digital divide and promote economic growth.

CHAPTER FOUR: METHODOLOGY

A communication needs analysis in business presupposes that the sample chosen will adequately represent the target population so that the results may be generalized to that population and provide useful answers to the questions posed (Rosier, 1988). The survey research method was therefore deemed the most appropriate. *Sur-* is a derivative of the Latin *super*, meaning "above, "over, or "beyond." The element *-vey* comes from the Latin verb *videre* "to look" or "to see". Thus the word *survey* means "to look or to see over or beyond" (Leedy, 1980:97). As the 'overseeing parent' method of enquiry, the survey method is adequate. However, this thesis employs a triangulation of methodology. A "synthesis of sorts" (Jones and LeBaron, 2002:505), an epistemological merger between quantitative and qualitative approaches was mooted as providing the potential for greater thoroughness.

4.1 DESIGN METHODOLOGY

This empirical study was made up of several stages and the design chosen therefore comprised varying complementary methodologies appropriate to each stage and set of objectives (Babbie and Mouton, 2001). The survey method utilises the questionnaire and interview as its major modes of observation.

Although this method can be located in a positivist research paradigm, a more multi-faceted, hybrid approach was sought given that the subject matter itself, communication, has multidisciplinary origins and intersects across many research fields (Spitzberg, 1984; Powers, 1995; Wardrope, 2001). Business communication is but one facet of communication and is in itself interdisciplinary by nature. This characteristic can be seen as an advantage as it "affords some flexibility" (Wardrope 2001:244) both pedagogically and methodologically. Even the Association for Business Communication (ABC) describes itself on its web page as "richly interdisciplinary, drawing membership from such disciplines as management, marketing, English, communication, linguistics, information systems, to name only a few" (ABC, 2001).

Primary data, both numeric and textual, was thus obtained using four questionnaires as well as face to face discussion and structured and unstructured interviews with students, staff and business associates. In this way, descriptive as well as causal and evaluative information could be obtained (Mouton, 2001). As Mouton puts it:

“It is common in ... evaluation studies to utilise all available modes of observation: both structured (questionnaires;...) and less structured (focus group interviews; individual interviews;... observation)” as well as “documentary sources” such as reports, records or programme information (2001:159).

I hoped to ‘lift’ the study from a purely or mainly technician, and possibly one-dimensional, vehicle for statistical ‘fact’ (and the factual basis itself remains a moot point as argued below) taken at *one* point in time to a more organic study where subjective views, expectations and perceptions could be both recorded ‘objectively’ yet evaluated subjectively to allow patterns, causes and ‘textures’ to emerge *over time* (2001/2).

Although the quantifiable, scientific methods of research have always enjoyed greater acceptance as being more able “to adopt the orthodox stance of complete neutrality and impartiality”, (Scott and Usher, 1996:13), Usher, in his critique of the neglected epistemological assumptions of educational research, questions whether research as social practice can ever be completely neutral and impartial, irrespective of research tradition. Usher continues:

“Furthermore, every ontology and epistemology is itself culturally specific, historically located and valued-laden” (1996:14). He goes on to claim that there is a powerful tendency to think of the scientific method (and Western philosophy) as “universal and ‘made in heaven’” (1996:14). For social and educational research, this reliance on a positivist/empiricist epistemology with its orderly, predictable, lawful ontological assumptions about the nature of the world, is highly problematic. Human endeavour, social events, communication behaviour cannot be so neatly categorised. They are by their very nature open and indeterminate or, to put it bluntly, messy.

Qualifiable research methods may provide more nuanced avenues of enquiry and a combination of the two paradigms could allow a multi-layered approach appropriate to the field of communication. Accusations of eclecticism may persist but researchers over many decades have found the methodological divide between quantitative and qualitative research unnecessarily wide and adversarial (Anderson, 1987; Bavelas, 1995; Jones and LeBaron, 2002). Bavelas (1995) argues that the distinction involves a number of false dichotomised assumptions. Among these are that quantitative studies are objective, deductive, generalizable, regarding reality as something 'out there' and discoverable. Qualitative research is labelled as subjective, inductive and non generalizable regarding reality as socially constructed and interpreted. In practice, however, these distinctions tend to blur especially in the realm of communication where investigators employ both paradigms and routinely use many forms of direct and indirect observations of human behaviour (Jones and LeBaron, 2002). It could be argued, for example that qualitative studies have greater generalizability because they are more naturalistic and contextualized and less artificial and sterile than their quantitative counterparts.

There is a further advantage to adopting a combination approach: enhanced legitimacy. It is hoped that this multi-faceted design will provide a way of triangulating results in order to maximise reliability of findings (specifically, coding methodology) and the validity of findings (specifically measurement techniques).

The investigation thus progressed from spotlighting students (2001), to staff (2001), to workplace graduates (2002) and finally re-engaged students (2002) over a two-year cycle via questionnaire, interviews, both formal and informal, and classroom observation and discussions (Berg, 1995; Booth and Colomb, 1995; Morgan, 1997).

Reviewing the literature (books, journals and internet sources) was helpful in gathering information relating to previous research germane to the area under scrutiny and confirming similar concerns, both business and academic. The

investigation, although locally situated, is informed by local and international events and issues which have precipitated changes in communication, some overt and accelerated, others more subtle, even contradictory. The study is located in and 'filtered' through an influential interplay between 'hot topics' such as HE transformation and shifting educational paradigms, technological innovations inherent in the knowledge economy and job-related communicative competence for a multicultural world. As pointed out in chapter two, all impinge on 'the graduate' in his or her quest for global workplace literacy, mobility (navigability?), access and marketable outcomes.

4.2 SAMPLING APPROACH

At the outset, a sample of past UCT graduates in Management Studies and Commerce was to be selected using Alumni lists from both Student Records and the Commerce faculty. These lists were obtained for the years 1993 – 1999 and comprised thousands of names. The contact details, however, were so outdated that tracking down these students proved futile and this method was abandoned. It was then decided to approach the user work sites based on Graduate Placement Programme (GPP) and Recruitment Agency information (supplied by the Career Development Programme at UCT) as well as those firms with traditional links to UCT (sponsors, prize-givers, bursars, donors and internship providers, details of which were obtained from the Commerce Faculty).

In the past, a large number of commerce graduates have found employment in the large formal sector, the traditional corporate workplace. More recent GPP statistics have found that newer graduates work across the spectrum from small to medium-sized enterprises in the informal and semi-formal sectors and that many of these graduates are self-employed entrepreneurs.

"The world of work has changed. Gone are the cradle-to-grave days of corporate parenthood. As a job-seeker today, you need to be communicatively competent, mobile, entrepreneurial innovative and connected... You may work in the informal or formal sector, in a real or virtual office. Whether it's a pack-up-and-go street stall, out

the back of a pick-up or a giant multi-national, the chances are you'll move, outsource, adapt, re-invent your jobs far more often than your parents did and possibly change careers a couple of times" (Grant and Borchers, 2002: 13).

It is for this reason that organisations such as Business Beat and BigNews, whose mission is to mentor and publish small business initiatives respectively, were also approached. The Business Beat office and training/seminar venue is based in Observatory, Cape Town. The Director, Gavin Chait, himself a UCT graduate, sanctioned the recruitment of several survey respondents who filled in questionnaires and answered interview questions informally (2002). Informal discussions were also held with Marilyn Honikman, Media Consultant at BigNews, a black empowerment newspaper for the small to medium business sector (2003). The BigNews office is also based in Observatory, Cape Town.

As with all human research, the ethical questions relating to confidentiality and permission were considered. University procedures were followed and a completed Ethics in Research form, obtained from the School of Education, was submitted. Permission from all questionnaire and interview respondents was sought and the rationale for the research was explained via covering email or in person. Although the subject matter was not regarded as personal, embarrassing or offensive, confidentiality was guaranteed when requested. Although these factors may not guarantee that responses are "accurate and truthful", "full and sincere", being cognisant of these factors, as the researcher, should enhance success rate (Rosier, 1988)

4.3 SURVEY INSTRUMENTS

This comprised questionnaires, interviews and classroom discussion.

4.3.1 Questionnaires

Three separate questionnaires were drawn up, one for Commerce students, one for Commerce academic staff and one for professionals in the workplace (see appendix 1a, b and c on page 124). The last was by far the most comprehensive as it underscored the key focus of the study. This particular questionnaire was devised with the help of a UCT academic, Professor Trevor Wegner of Statistical Sciences and a professional, Mr Henry Barenblatt, the CEO of Research Surveys, South Africa's largest ad hoc survey company.

In order to satisfy the demands of this study, where both fact and opinion/feelings/attitudes are relevant, the original 10-page questionnaire comprised both quantitative, multiple choice and qualitative open-ended questions. This was piloted on 10 respondents. All responded that the questionnaire was too long and time-consuming. Although the data obtained was very rich and substantial, it was felt that the sample would be so small as to render the results invalid. A compromise was reached and a 7-page, simplified version was distributed. The staff and student questionnaires, adjuncts to the former, were less detailed (4 pages).

The study was stratified in this way to produce three data sets, each addressing a particular question relating to communicative competence:

- Commerce student: what do you think you need to know?
- Commerce staff: what do you think your students need to know?
- Business professional: what do you think is actually required?

4.3.2 Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were held informally with business professionals, similar to those conducted at Business Beat mentioned above, as well as with university staff in offices, classrooms and staff rooms. I seized whatever opportunities presented themselves. I kept a notebook and frequently asked permission to record comments or, if a number of people were present, I would record viewpoints immediately afterwards.

By arrangement, I spent a week at various firms arranging impromptu, semi-structured interviews with staff at various levels of the organisation. These usually followed questionnaire completion and were used to amplify or clarify questionnaire impressions.

More formal, structured interviews were arranged with professionals in business and industry through networking contacts or HR departments. I obtained permission to tape these interviews and had them transcribed for more in-depth analysis (Kvale, 1996). Sample size is discussed below.

4.3.3 Classroom Discussion

During the second semesters of 2001 and 2002 (the target student groups for this study), I used classroom time to encourage group discussion by raising some of the issues relating to communicative competence, gender, culture, and role of technology. I also kept notes of impressions and observations garnered in this way.

4.4 SAMPLE SIZE

The survey sample size for all respondents contacted will be given.

4.4.1 Questionnaires

In total, just over 1000¹ questionnaires were distributed to students, staff and graduates in the workplace. A variety of distribution methods were used: e-mail, hand delivery and faxing for professionals; internal mail for staff and hand delivery for students. Due to cost and time, traditional posting of questionnaires was avoided. Very similar methods of return were used. Four hundred and seven completed questionnaires were received².

¹ The total is probably much higher, given the ease of electronic dissemination. I sent questionnaires as email attachments to HR managers who, in turn, distributed these to their staff; I often got replies from employees who I had not contacted directly. Word of mouth also helped muster past graduates.

² A number of respondents omitted single questions and/or comments. These could still be used. Three questionnaires, however, were too incomplete and were thus discarded.

4.4.2 Interviews

Beside informal discussion with university staff and professionals (as mentioned above), I held fifteen pre-arranged interviews at UCT and in the workplace. Although I took notes during and/or after each interview, I obtained permission to tape four in-depth professional interviews. These were conducted in the offices of the people in question.

4.4.3 Classroom discussion

I taught 58 students during the two semester classes of PCU101S (2001/2) and conducted classroom discussions as part of their programme. I also held one focus group discussion with a group of eight B Com Honours students.

4.5 DATA CAPTURE

Both questionnaires and interviews provided data.

4.5.1 Questionnaire

With the help of Statistical Science staff and two post-graduate students, Makhosi Radebe and Ian Durbach, the questions that could be coded were captured in Excel. The two simpler student/staff questionnaires (comprising twelve questions each) were coded and collated first in order to eliminate any coding problems that may occur and to ensure reliability. The professional questionnaire comprised twenty-six questions for coding. Working with themes that I had identified as significant and material to the study (see appendix 2 on page 145), descriptive statistical techniques were used to help summarise the data of each group of individuals (student, staff, professional).

The descriptive statistics were followed by chi-squared tests of association. This in turn allowed for the emergence of relationships between variables, patterns and themes and to test for significance (e.g. status, gender, preferences) as well as validity. The three different respondent groups in the sample could then also be compared statistically. Finally, groups were compared (categorical variables with continuous variables) and confirmatory analyses were conducted to formulate and test hypotheses and investigate

implications. (See appendix 3 on page 147 for more detailed background on the statistical tests conducted).

The ranked Likert scale-type questions were followed by “Why?” in order for respondents to substantiate and/or rationalise their choices. The open-ended questions were interspersed so that all the ‘long’ questions requiring commentary were not left to the end. Both Professor Wegner and Mr Barenblatt advised this approach to minimise attention loss. The theory holds that multiple choice questions are easy to fill in and that respondents may tire and cease to fill in the questionnaire or do so superficially if all the ‘difficult’ questions are left until the end.

The open-ended questions invited explanation which included giving account of feelings, attitudes, hunches, experiences and anecdotes. These too were analysed with the view to finding similarities and discrepancies. It was of special interest then to check respondent status, gender, age or inter-cultural demographics in order to record patterns or themes.

These could be compared to the statistically significant coded findings to ascertain overlapping ‘voices’.

4.5.2 Interviews

Where possible, questionnaire respondents were asked additional interview questions and further elaboration of interesting viewpoints could be pursued. (See appendix 4 on page 151 for an example of ‘extra questions’.) The interviews were analysed according to themes drawn from the questionnaires.

4.6 FULL CIRCLE – FINAL STUDENT COMMENTARY

The results of the above study (based on questionnaires 1 to 3) were abstracted into 10 major findings covering the definition of communicative competence, channels of communication, status roles in communication, visual communication, individual versus team communications, curriculum inclusion issues, intercultural and gender significance, role of technology and general impact of communication on organisational health. These findings

were presented to students in the final week of their communication course. They were asked to briefly study the Needs Analysis results, to comment on the communication course they had just attended and to indicate whether they felt they were:

- 'getting' what the world of work deems appropriate and relevant communication knowledge and skills?
- confident that they were on the road to coming communicatively competent graduates?

They were also asked to distinguish between the role of their degree course in general and the specialised communication course in particular in equipping them with these skills.

This six-page summary questionnaire was handed out one year later (2002). I used the same course (PCU101S) to obtain both student data sets. Once again, statistical tests were used to plot outcomes regarding the quantifiable ranking of questions and qualitative approaches were used to analyse the open-ended questions (see appendix 5 on page 152).

4.7 DATA DISPLAY

The statistical analysis of all four questionnaires allowed for verbal and visual representation. Extensive use of graphics such as pie charts and bar graphs to help display the data gathered from all four questionnaires were used to view results during the course of the study. (Raymond, 1994; Tufte, 1997).

Some of these were then selected to be included in chapters five, six and seven. The strength or weakness of certain positions, emergence of patterns and comparisons between variables and respondent sets are far easier to grasp when the verbal and visual work in concert. Visual aids were thus used not only as part of the methodology – an analytical tool – but also in this final dissertation to enhance readability and 'communicative competence', one of the key theoretical cornerstones of this study.

CHAPTER FIVE: RESULTS OF PHASE ONE

Chapter four set out the methodologies used in this study and the reasons for using a composite, multi-layered approach. The findings obtained from phase one are described and evaluated in chapters five and six respectively. Phase one comprises findings garnered from Questionnaires one to three, interviews and staff and student discussions.

Chapter seven will present the findings of phase two, (Questionnaire four) which provide a student commentary upon the results of phase one. Appropriate graphics will be included in each section to add clarity. All four questionnaires can be found in the appendices (pp 124 – 144).

5.1 STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRES (2001)

The following section details the most significant student findings based on the coded questions, interspersed with quotations from the open-ended questions to substantiate points made. The gender and special field of each respondent quoted is identified in abbreviated form (e.g. M/AS = male, actuarial science)¹

5.1.1 Demographics

- Of the 130 respondents, the gender profile in the classroom was approximately equally distributed (53% male, 47% female);
- Most students (75%, n = 97) have had work experience, independent of gender.

5.1.2 Communication channels

These results were obtained by tallying the choice of channels. Only the top three choices were accepted in the count. These choices counted equally and were not weighted.

¹ See List of Abbreviations on p xii for special fields represented.

Face-to-face (FtF) communication (n = 119) was comfortably the most popular among males (93%) and females (91%), followed by informal group discussion (69%, n = 90). Although males outnumbered female respondents and it may thus seem from the graph below that they preferred group communication, proportionally, preferences for group and telephone use were higher for females than males (68:72% mtf² ratio and 35:43% mtf ratio respectively).

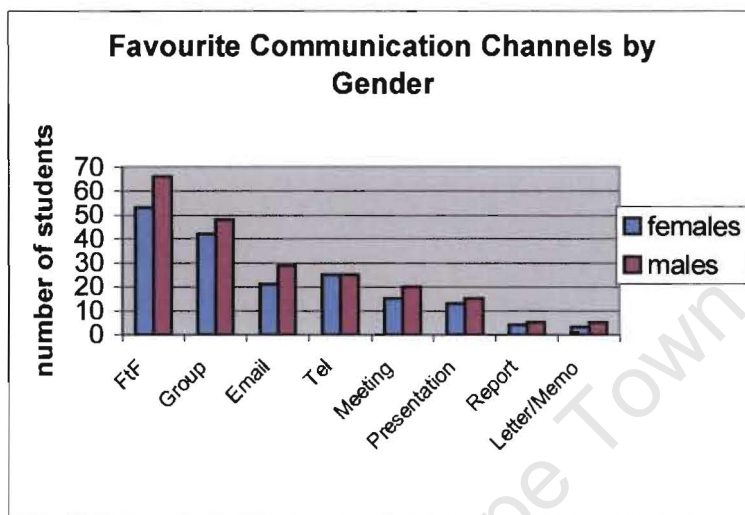


Figure 3: Student communication preferences

Other channels were marginally popular. Typical responses were as follows:

“I like to work with people face to face.” (F/M)³

“Face to face is personal and 2-way which is good.” (F/IS)

“I prefer speaking to people directly as I feel this is more productive.” (M/IS)

“I enjoy face-to-face because it is very real and promotes honesty”. (F/HR)

“Most of the new channels distance the giver to the receiver: I don’t think anything can replace person to person communication.” (F/M)

² Mtf ratio: male to female ratio

³ F = female; M = male; followed by abbreviation for special field – see List of Abbreviations on p xii)

had this as their favourite channel. There were no other gender associations. Some of the reasons given were:

“Instant messaging, SMS, cellular communications have added a new dimension to phoning.” (F/IS)

“Less pressure than face-to-face [but] more personalised than letter/report.” (F/IS)

“You don’t have to look at person.” (F/AS)

“I like to hear people’s voice and their tone of voice – speaks volumes.” (F/OP)

- Of the broad communication arenas (writing – electronic; writing – traditional; oral; interpersonal and group), writing channels and skills, both electronic and traditional were rated marginally the most crucial in terms of curriculum inclusion (mean: 4.11 and 4.00 respectively). Students recognised the need for verbal clarity, audience analysis and flexibility:

“Electronic communication has given us ‘new’ ways of communication but fundamentally our audience/targets still require the same things.” (M/IS)

“Still need to know old ways – not always going to be in a place where technology is available, need to be able to adapt.” (F/IS)

“It is still necessary to know the basics....if we know how to write, technology can facilitate the traditional ways.” (F/M)

- Within these arenas, the mean average rating of the top 5 sub-channels considered essential skills were: report writing (4.50), oral presentations (4.46), business plans (4.42), graphic aids (4.35) and visual aids (4.27).
- Those with work experience placed more importance on using visual aids (4.39 vs 3.94) and less importance on casual briefings (3.38 vs 3.68) relative to those without work experience. Visual and graphic communication expertise is considered essential to complement

communication expertise is considered essential to complement written and oral media:

“I believe that old methods of communication such as letters via post and presentations and meetings without graphics projected have become obsolete. We must now become competent using new methods such as video-conferencing, email and hi-tech data projection.” (M/IS)

“New channels have been added and there is a trend towards the use of more graphic communication which is much faster.” (M/IS)

5.1.3 Comparisons of note

- Some strong gender associations with ‘importance’ ratings were noted but this was generally because females rated everything higher on average. Females rated the importance of diversity issues particularly highly relative to male ratings (4.14 vs 3.61). Areas that need special attention in the workplace were often linked to intercultural issues:

“Relating to other people of different cultures.” (F/IS)

“Cultural communication, especially giving instructions to people of different background.” (F/M)

“Group work especially intercultural teams” (F/M)

“Understanding different cultures.” (M/AS)

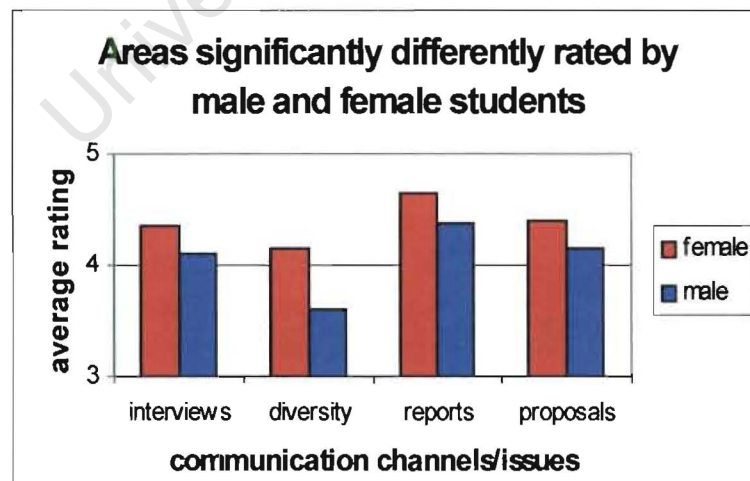


Figure 4: Gender rating differences

5.5.4 Feelings on role of technology

- Feelings on the role of technology were fairly evenly divided, and uninfluenced by gender. Forty-six percent (n = 58) felt that technology played an ancillary and complementary communication role whereas 54% (n = 67) felt that technology had fundamentally altered the way we communicate. The vast majority perceived this as a double-edged sword.

“The use of email, and to a lesser extent, cellphone, has meant that one can communicate without ever making personal contact. Hence communication is very impersonal. Although this may be beneficial in some cases, it means that business has taken on an almost mechanical feel” (F/M)

“We now no longer need to be face to face with others while communicating so while modern communication brings us close, it also imposes distance. This leads to subtle differences in whether you are ‘connecting’ with others.” (F/HR)

“Can communicate quickly, easily [but] does have negative effect with people spending too much time on internet.” (M/IS)

“More people stay at home or in the office and communicate remotely – it’s convenient but more impersonal.” (M/IS)

The tremendous opportunities that can accrue however, if technology harnessed appropriately, were also keenly felt:

“Companies can restructure their policies and plans due to the impact of technology especially if they want to take full advantage of it.” (M/IS)

“Technology has fundamentally altered communication by:

- Adding new channels of communication
- Increasing speed of communication
- Changing the way people think about and see communication
- Allowing a global environment into the workplace
- Increasing flow of information exponentially.” (M/IS)

5.1.5 Organisational health

- Over 90% (n = 117) of respondents felt that effective communication is critical to business success. This was again independent of gender.

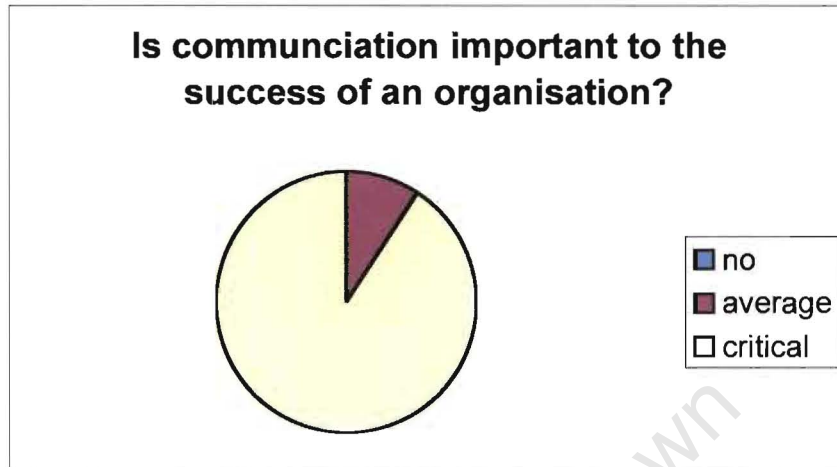


Figure 5: Impact of effective communication on business success

"[The] inability for any organisation to facilitate sufficient communication between its members leads to waste of resources, time, efficiency and finally, downfall." (F/OP)

"Vital as an intra-company tool, also as means of reaching customers/suppliers." (M/M)

"One of the key factors to achieve competitive advantage in such a challenging society." (M/M)

5.2 STAFF QUESTIONNAIRES (2002)

The following section details the most significant staff findings based on the coded questions, interspersed with quotations from the open-ended questions and follow-up interviews to substantiate points made. The gender and position of respondents quoted are given, using their own descriptions e.g. HOD (Head of Department), lecturer, professor.

5.2.1 Demographics

- Of the 23 respondents, 15 were male (68%) which nearly approximates the gender profile of the university (60-40 male to female ratio).
- Most staff (73%, n = 17) answered 'yes' to non-academic work experience (prior to academic post or on-going in terms of private work and consultancies for both the public and the private sector).



Figure 6: Non-academic versus academic work experience only

As can be seen below, males typically have more non-academic experience (business and government) than females. Most of this relates to consulting experience.

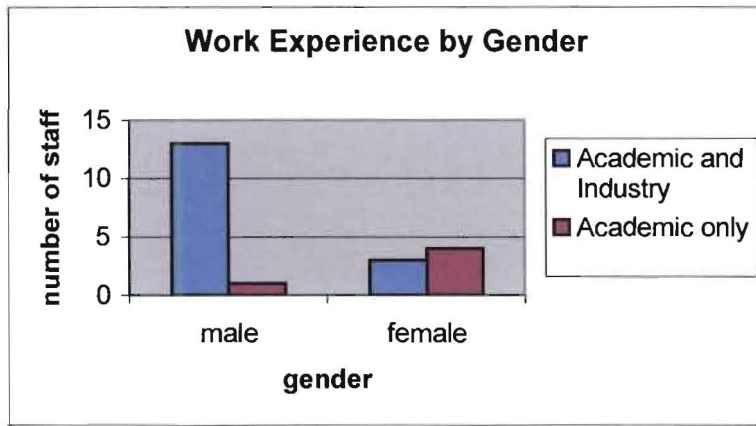


Figure 7: Male/female academic/non-academic work experience

5.2.2 Communication channels

- FtF (86%, n = 20) and informal group discussion (68%, n = 15) were deemed the most popular channels, although email was also popular with staff. There were no gender associations. Responses echoed those made by students:

“Face to face interaction plus [the] ability to read/understand body language, promotes openness in communications.” (male professor)

“Face to face has the advantage of permitting nuance, body language, etc. and progressing matters immediately.” (male department director)

“Face-to face: In the workplace the element of personal contact is, in my opinion, considerable” (male senior lecturer)

“The more direct the communication is, the more effective it is” (female programme director)

“Personal contact is always the best. [It] enables immediate feedback.” (male lecturer)

“I enjoy one to one communication” (male lecturer)

Although the “convenience”, “speed”, “ease of use” and “accessibility” of electronic communications were appreciated, warning bells were sounded throughout. Responses to electronic channels were far more variable,

invoking strong positive or negative feelings. This was borne out by substantiating commentary:

“One actually needs to be more correct and formal [using electronic communication] because it is an impersonal medium. Thus we are still ‘getting used to it’ as human beings.”

(male lecturer)

“Technology (email) is responsible for less personal face-to-face contact with co-workers.” (male course convenor)

“Email is an organisation leveller between staff and students.”

“There’s a general lack of courtesy... ‘soul’ in most emails.”

(male lecturer)

“Email is a disaster in terms of personal relationships.”

(female senior lecturer)

“We need to understand the power of these new tools to participate effectively.” (male lecturer)

“Email has become a way of managing. It’s easier because it’s quicker and more convenient (and generally less stressful).

But it is actually a ‘cop-out’ – rather than confronting issues one-to-one, managers ‘manage’ by email.” (male senior lecturer)

- The same order as for popularity (FtF, group, then email) was observed in the effectiveness ratings (see figure 8 below). Although not favoured, meetings were also rated as effective by a significant percentage (25%, n = 11) of respondents. No gender associations were observed.
- There was a very strong relationship between what was favoured and what was deemed effective.

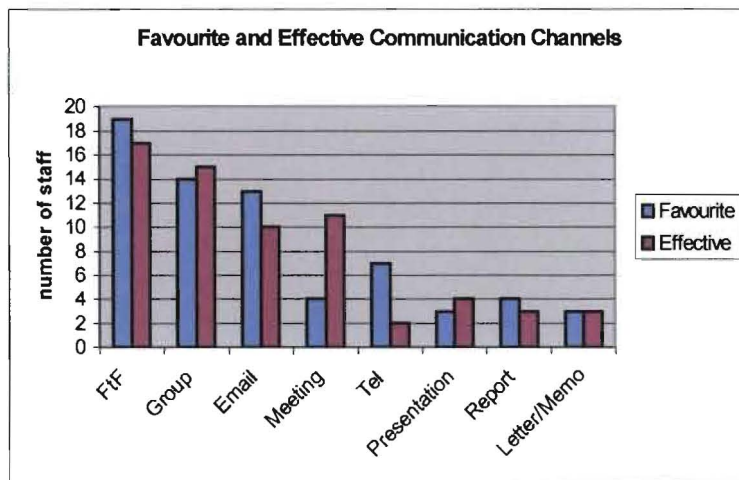


Figure 8: Comparison of staff channels for both male and female

- The broad arenas recommended for curriculum inclusion were very evenly rated. Traditional and electronic written channels were most popular (4.07), followed by group work (3.95) and oral communication (3.85).

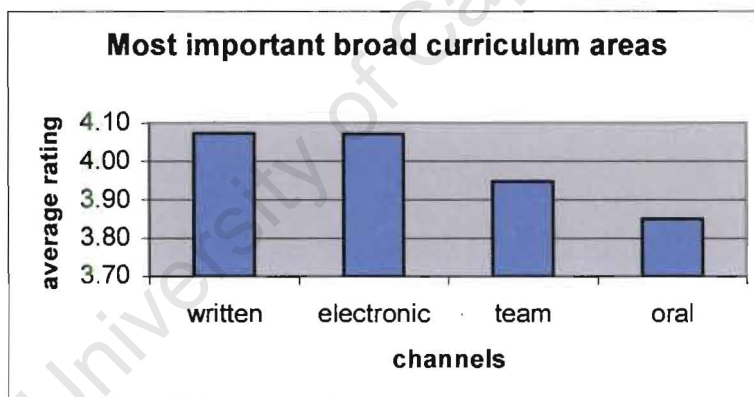


Figure 9: Recommended curriculum inclusion areas

A similar pattern of responses to students was observed.

“Yes – it is the combination of skilful communication using electronic means and the traditional stuff that has to be balanced. You have to be able to do both.” (male department director)

“It is complementary but so much of our communication is first

set up by new channels and then mediated through these channels that the old channels play much more focussed and constrained roles.” (male head of department)

- The top 5 individual sub-channels within the broad arenas were: Listening (4.76), report writing (4.67), business plans (4.50), oral presentations (4.33) and email (4.24). The top three were particularly highly rated, forming their own cluster of 'dominant' channels.

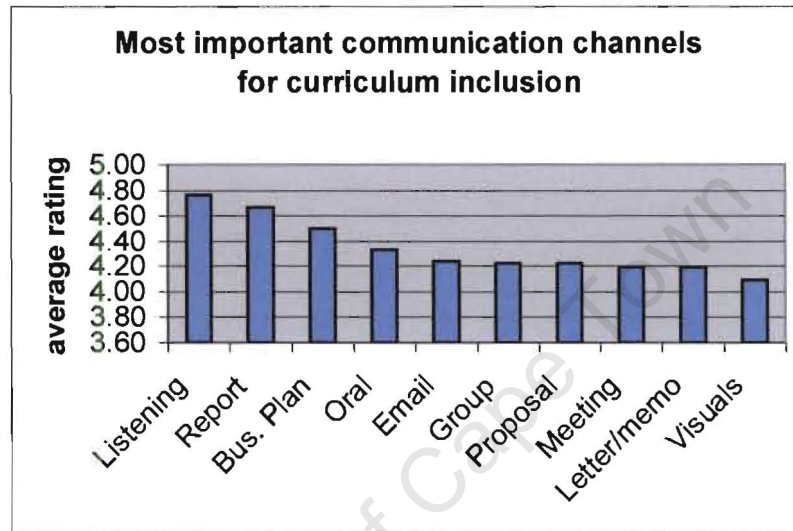


Figure 10: Communication course curriculum recommendations

5.2.3 Comparisons of note

- Those with only academic experience rated electronic channels (email and internet) lower than those with dual experience.
- Those with only academic experience (male and female) rated interpersonal channels lower than those with dual experience. Those with dual experience, especially women, rated interpersonal and team communications higher than those with only academic experience.
- Females rated several individual areas higher than males: body language (3.52 to 4.43 mtf ratio), listening (4.64 to 5.00 mtf ratio), telephone (2.93 to 4.00 mtf ratio) and diversity issues (3.80 to 4.71 mtf ratio). The difference was particularly strong for telephone

communication and diversity issues

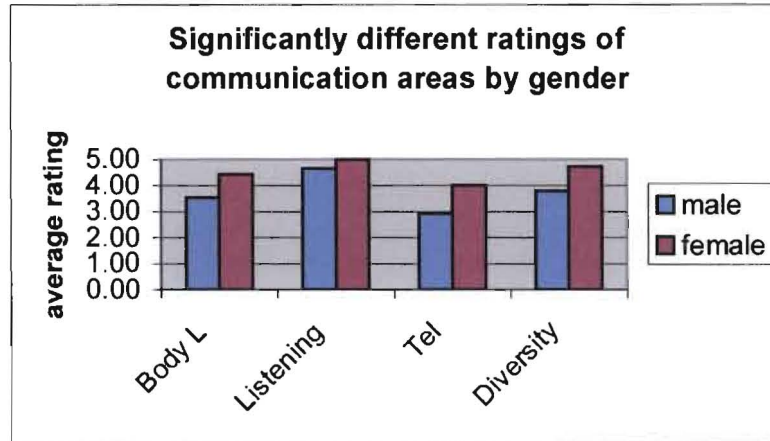


Figure 11: Higher overall ratings by females

Typical responses were:

“Tasks need to be clearly understood. With cultural diversity, the parties communicating must know what each is expecting of the other.” (female lecturer)

“Listening to what is said (and not said) is very important especially in multicultural teams” (male professor).

5.2.4 Feelings on role of technology

- Most respondents (61%, n = 14) felt that technology was fundamentally changing communication. A significant number expressed feelings of ambivalence, sometimes a nostalgia for the “good old days”, adding riders to their choice of A (ancillary role) or B (fundamental change).

“It should be A but emails, writing letters/memos electronically, have changed ‘traditional’ communication channels.”

(male professor)

“Generally the impact of technology is overstated. Communications are quicker and easier but fundamentally stay the same.” (male HOD)

“[Electronic communications] could be positive or a mindless

dump of data massaged into a semblance of a viewpoint.”

(male professor, department director)

“Unnecessary/sloppy use of electronic media makes life easier for the sender and a nuisance for the recipient.”

(male professor, HOD)

“Communication across time zones [is] much easier but much more irrelevant information is communicated.” (male professor)

5.2.5 Organisational health

- About 80% (n = 17) of respondents felt that effective communication was critical to the success of any business venture. All seven female respondents (100%) and two thirds of male respondents felt this (75%). Females were thus more strongly associated with this feeling than males.

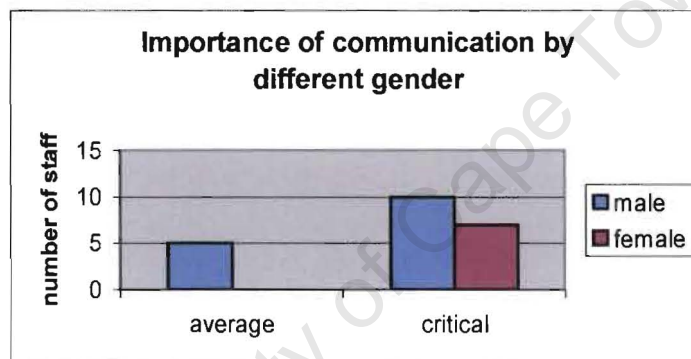


Figure 12: Relationship of communication to business success

“Internally, [communication] assists with motivation and a sense of belonging – externally in managing the organisation in the market place.” (male professor)

“Very important – recent corporate governance issues are largely issues of poor communication. Companies’ reputations tarnished by poor communications (. . . includes financial statements . . .)” (female associate professor)

“Communication is care for others!” (female senior lecturer)

The dual role played by communication, both internally and externally, underlies most staff clarifications.

5.3 PROFESSIONAL QUESTIONNAIRES

The following section outlines the most significant findings based on the coded questions, interspersed with quotations from the questionnaires and interviews to substantiate points made. It was possible to extract far more detailed information from this longer, more complex questionnaire. Coded questions were also weighted in terms of choices (top three) to give more nuanced information. Gender, status and business sector (where given) have also been indicated for all respondents quoted (e.g. M/SM, sales = male, senior management, sales)⁴.

5.3.1 Demographics

- Of the 115 questionnaires received, gender was circled by 100 respondents (87%). Of these, 71% male (n = 71).
- The average work experience was almost 10 years but this was very variable with a standard deviation of 7.6 years. There was no gender association.
- The average time spent in current position was 3.8 years but again, this was very variable with a standard deviation of 4.3 years.
- As can be seen in figure 12, females have spent a significantly shorter period in their current (senior) positions than males.

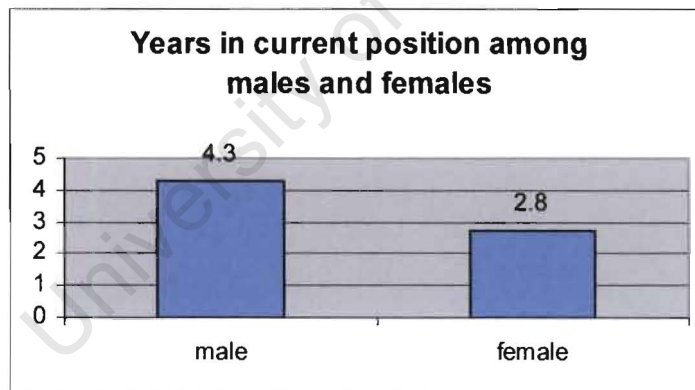


Figure 13: Comparison of years of seniority between male and female

- Only about 20% (n = 22) of respondents were self-employed. No gender association was noted.

⁴ SM/MM/JM = senior, middle, junior management

- Job status: Twenty-two respondents did not circle a category. Of those who did, 58% were senior managers, 29% were middle managers and 13% were junior managers. It must be noted that those who ran their own businesses were ranked in the senior category. There was no gender association although it was further noted that females have been in senior positions for a much shorter time than their male counterparts (1.5 years less on average).

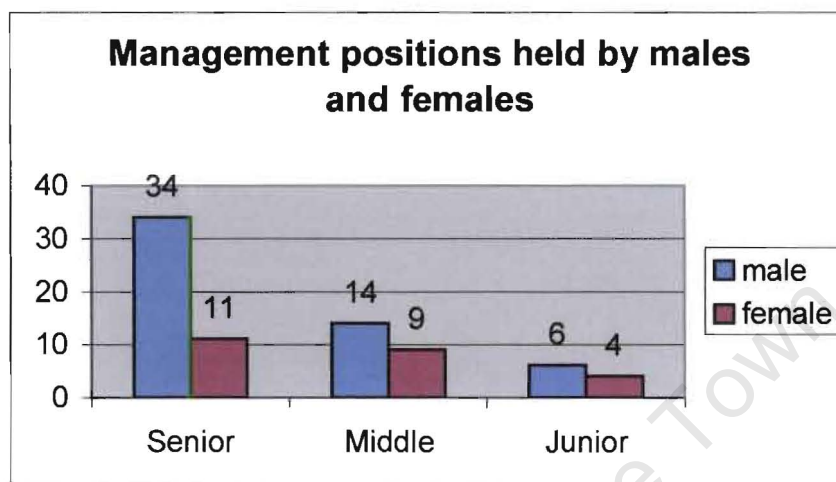


Figure 14: Male to female ratio in terms of seniority

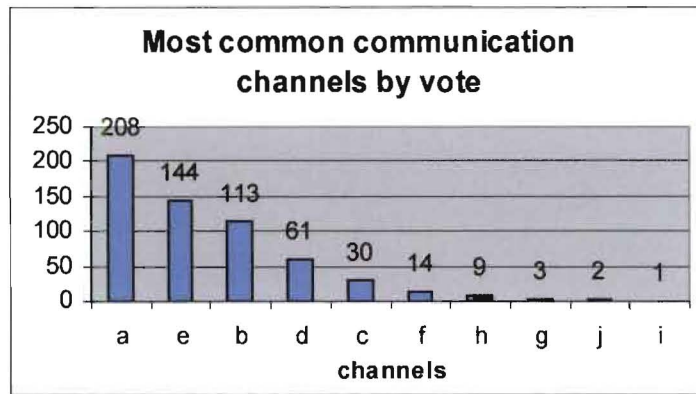
- The size of the organisation varied considerably from largest corporate structure (4.28) to smallest group, e.g. 'one-man band' (3.6). No gender association was noted.

5.3.2 Communication channels with comparisons of note (internal)

Choices were weighted to more accurately convey sentiment than merely using a yes/no approach.⁵

- The most commonly used communication channels overall were FtF, (31%, n = 208 votes) email (25%, n = 144 votes) and telephone (20%, n = 113 votes). Males preferred FtF (32:27% mtf ratio) while females preferred email (27:24% mtf ratio), followed by meetings (16:12% mtf ratio).

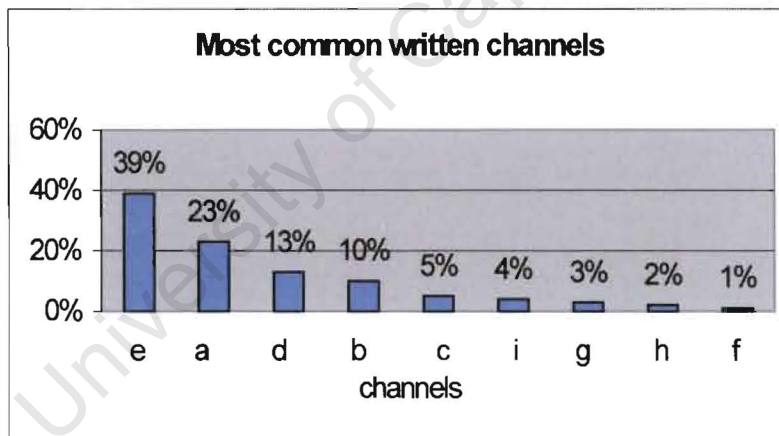
⁵ First choice = 3 votes; second choice = 2 votes; third choice = 1 vote. Votes were then tallied and a percentage based on total votes cast was used.



Key: a (FtF); e (Email) ; b (Tel); d (Meeting); c Memo; f (Report); h (Presentations) g (Proposal); j (Interview) i (other)

Figure 15: Most commonly used channels (male and female)

- The most commonly used written channels were email (n = 227), reports (n = 135, then letters/memos (n = 74). Males used traditional business correspondence (24:21% mtf ratio) and reports (15:6% mtf ratio) more than females who preferred email (38:42 mtf ratio).



Key: e=39% (Email); a=23% (Report); d=13% (Letters/Memo); b=10% (Instructions); c=5% (Agenda/Minutes); i=4% (Proposal); g=3% (Policy Documents); h=2% (Legal Documents); f=% (Other Internet use)

Figure 16: Overall communication use: male and female

- The most commonly used oral/interpersonal channels were telephone (31%, n = 83), meetings (26%, n = 70) and FtF (25%, n = 67). There was a difference, however, to what is commonly used and what is preferred. Votes and counts

differed quite substantially with votes highlighting the popularity of FtF communication (42%). FtF was the favourite channel for males (44:37% mtf ratio) although female ratings for telephone (18:25% mtf ratio) and email (15:21% mtf ratio) were higher than male ratings.

- Overall favourite communication channels were FtF (42%, n = 242), followed by telephone (20%, n = 118) and email (17%, n = 98). A weak gender association was noted in terms of telephone use; males did not rate the telephone as a favourite.

“Oral communication, be it face to face or telephonic remains personal and satisfying. However, electronic communications [are] not dependent on the person being available at the time – very cost effective regarding overseas communication.” (M/SM, financial)

“All can and should be used in a well balanced combination appropriate to the recipient and the message in order to benefit communication as a whole” (M/MM, banking).

- From a curriculum inclusion perspective, professionals recommended training in electronic modes of communication (4.2), oral communication (4.1) and traditional modes of writing (3.9). This is slightly more disparate than the student and staff groups but reasonably closely bunched nevertheless. No gender association was noted. As previously noted, evaluations of electronic communications were far more variable, evoking much stronger positive and negative responses.

“Technology has allowed people to forfeit accountability. The use of email and cellphones has put more pressure on management up the chain as people always look to them for answers – often results in people being very risk-averse which can lead to a culture of ‘blame’”. (M/SM, sales)

“Many face to face or telephonic interactions have been replaced by email. This has led to a less personal workplace – the real people are hidden behind email addresses and computer screens” (F/MM, legal).

- Within these broad curricular arenas, listening, followed by presentations, was perceived as being the most important.

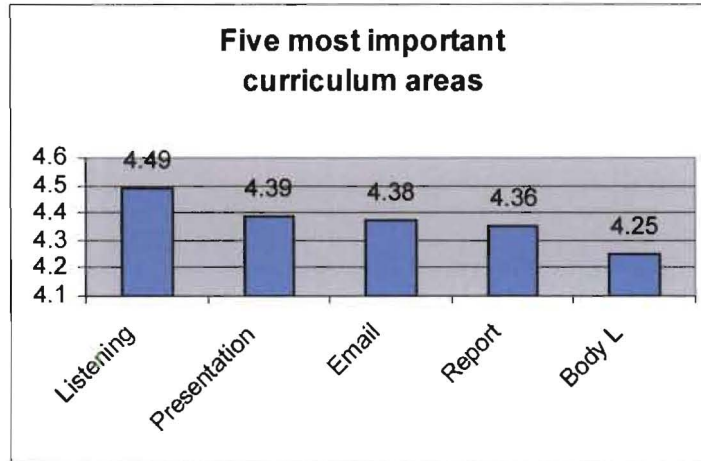


Figure 17: Sub-channels within broad arenas recommended for curriculum inclusion

- There were three significant gender associations. Females rated telephone communications (3.67:4.17 mtf mean ratio) and diversity issues (4.03:4.44 mtf mean ratio) more highly while males rated report-writing more highly (4.44:4.13 mtf mean ratio).

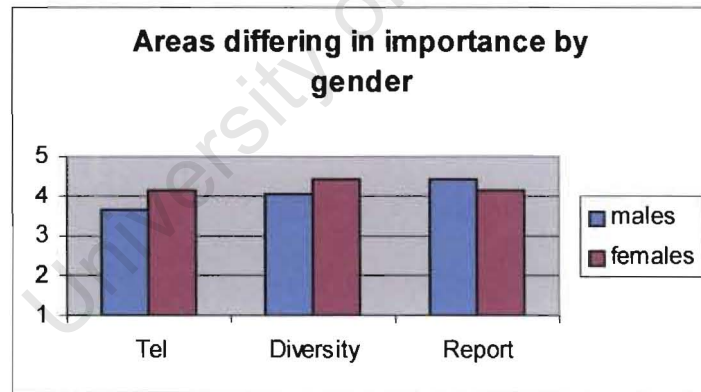


Figure 18: Significant gender differences noted

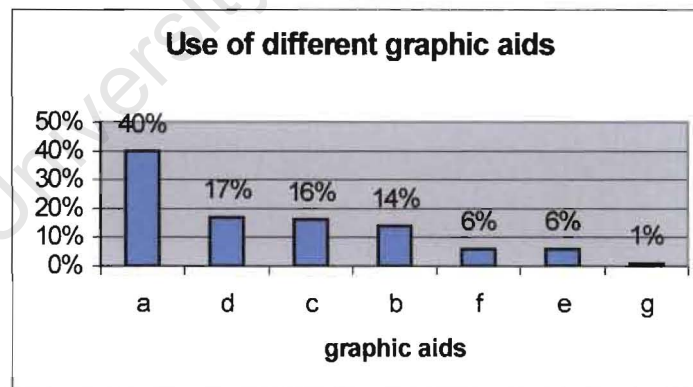
5.3.3 Communication flow (internal and external)

- The main direction of communication was horizontal/lateral between colleagues (54%) with upward (20%) and downward communication (26%) sharing the remaining 46% about equally. There was no gender association.

- Most respondents (78%) rated their success in using internal channels as 'mostly' (second category on the Likert scale). The remaining percentage was shared about equally with 'always' and 'seldom'. No gender association was noted.
- In terms of target recipients of communication, the most common external work-related parties were customers/ clients (47%), suppliers (22%) with financial parties (15%) in third place but the customer/client category dominated. The most popular external channels were telephone (33%, n = 198), email (28%, n = 169), then FtF (20%, n = 117). There was a weak gender association with males more involved with financial parties and females with suppliers.
- Superiors were the most common source for commissioning work but customers, then colleagues also did so. There was a weak gender association with females receiving more instructions from superiors and colleagues (internal sources) than males (external sources).

5.3.4 Visual literacy

- Thirty-one percent of respondents "mostly" and "sometimes" used graphic aids respectively with 22% saying they "always" did. Very few respondents seldom or never used graphics. No gender association was evident.
- Tables were the most popular graphic aid used (n = 196) but diagrams (n = 83), bar and line graphs were also popular (n = 77 and 71 respectively).



Key: a (Table); d (Diagrams/Flowcharts); c (Bar charts); b (Line graphs); f (Illustrations/drawings); e (Photographs); g (Other)

Figure 19: Use of graphic aids in documentation (male & female)

- Use of visual aids in presentations was very evenly spread among groups “always”, “mostly” and “sometimes” but “mostly” was the most common with 30%.
- Data projector with laptop use dominated (43%) followed by the overhead projector (21%), flipchart (16%), and white board (11%). Females preferred computer-mediated presentations in a weak gender association.
- The Internet as a visual medium was used sparingly with email being the most common Internet application.

5.3.5 Workload distribution

- In terms of allocating work responsibility for preparation, 55% and 52% claimed to be “solely responsible” for written and oral tasks respectively, such as reports and presentations. This category dominated in terms of partnership or team work. However, if more than one person was involved in a particular task, then members shared “joint control” (49% for written and 40% for oral). There was no gender association in any combination.

5.3.6 Telephone: landline versus cellular

- In terms of telephone, use of landline phones has decreased over the period from 73% two years ago to 58% today. Respondents speculated that this would drop to about 49% in two years time.
- The group with diminishing landline use – many of whom were self-employed - showed a great dominance in cellular communication use. Their landline figures dropped from 60% two years ago to a speculated mere 28% in two years time.
- The upper quartiles within corporate structures, however, showed that there were still significant numbers that are not embracing cellular communication (90% landline use two years ago to 75% today and only a predicted drop to 70% in two years time). There was no statistically significant gender association but it does appear that females have taken up cellular communication more enthusiastically than males, particularly in the last two years (with a concomitant drop in landline use). SMS (via web to cell phone) and MSN (instant messaging) were also on the increase, especially with women.

5.3.7 Feelings on role of technology

- Unlike staff where the majority felt that technology had fundamentally changed the way we communicate, here there was much more of an even split with 52% of professionals saying “no”, it had not. Some felt that the claim for this dominance was over-rated. This group felt more strongly that technology merely provided ancillary, complementary functionality. According to an interviewee:

“The written and spoken word...that’s the basis of everything because all the other things we’ve been talking about like email, like the Internet, those are only distribution methods. It doesn’t necessarily mean that language is going to change because of distribution methods...it’s amazing how many people in those dot.com days said that the old paradigm was gone...the old economies are shot, you know, but the dot.coms came and went and it’s back to basic business with a lot more options and a lot more options in the future as well... but the basics, tell your students, stick to the basics first and foremost.”

(CEO, market survey company, male)

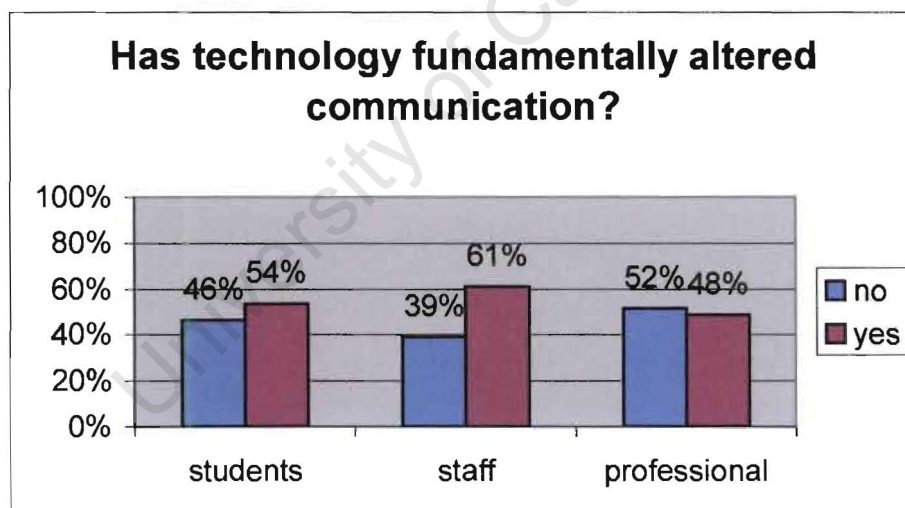


Figure 20: Comparison of three respondent sets

Almost all respondents grappled with the opportunities and risks inherent in global electronic communications.

“The lack of personal interface... makes it difficult to get to core

issues of discussion... especially when communicating globally.”

(M/SM, printing/packaging)

“One of the key criticisms of electronic communicators is that they lose interpersonal involvement and do not think before they send.”

(F/SM, retail)

“The fact that the medium is informal yet cold and unemotional can lead to ambiguity. The informal yet often impersonal tone is often misread.” (M/SM, Management Consultant)

One of the advantages of CMC was also labelled its greatest disadvantage: accessibility.

On the positive side, the following comments were typical:

“The global access of information [means] that people with information can no longer dominate. Anyone can find extensive reports and research on the Web. The information advantage is no longer who has the information but who knows how best to use it.”

(M/JM, telecommunications)

“People can now compete equally on line and have a website presence. Internally hierarchical power [has been] diminished. A virtual office [is] also possible as physical presences unnecessary.”

(M/MM, construction)

Negative sentiment typified statements such as:

“Easy, cheap access has allowed many untrained or non-skilled entrants which has added to an explosion of information that cannot be vetted or absorbed. This leads to overkill.” (M/SM, publishing)

“People need to be more specific and meaningful in their communications. There is far too much communication generated over less serious issues purely as a result of technology.” (F/JM, auditing)

“Although faster, technology can lead to overload and loss of impact. Everyone ‘needs’ a copy of everything but in reality no one actually responds and there may be a lack of ownership.” (M/SM, beverage)

“Far too much [is] written since the advent of email. So much trivia doing the rounds!” (F/MM, marketing)

“The information age is characterised by a glut of ‘overcommunication’ on incidental issues” (M/JM, NGO)

However, most commentators see the benefits of “balance” and feel that with “growing maturity”, selection and utilization will improve, resulting in improved competitiveness.

“It’s important that these new channels are used to achieve business goals as opposed to being used for the sake of technology.”
(M/MM, undisclosed sector)

“Adaptation is not yet complete so naïve, irritating use is still too prevalent. The industry has not yet matured.” (F/MM, Accountancy)

“All new forms of communication have enhanced work-placed communication; they have added huge opportunities for real-time, long distance communication and have broadened the scope of communication. We need to ensure we do not underestimate their influence and impact.” (M/SM, financial)

“Instant communication through emails and access to data from the Web and Intranet create significant improvement in efficiency and are essential to business competitiveness and survival.” (M/MM, retail)

“If you do not embrace technology, you [will] inevitably lag behind.”
(M/JM, manufacturing)

5.3.8 Organisational health

- Once again, in terms of organisational health, respondents overwhelmingly noted the importance of effective communication to the survival of any business, large or small (95%, n = 108). These results are very similar to those displayed on page 48. Terms such as “critical”, “crucial”, “key” and “major” were used.

CHAPTER SIX: EVALUATION OF SAMPLING AND RESULTS

The findings recorded in chapter five will be evaluated in this chapter in a similar order to that presented in chapter five.

This section comprises three sections which focus on respondent demographics, work experience and communication channels. The chapter concludes with an evaluation of the working assumptions listed in chapter two.

6.1. DEMOGRAPHICS

Some demographic data was obtained directly, other answers were gleaned indirectly.

6.1.1 Language, age and race

Although the questionnaires did not include questions related to home language, race or age, various inferences could be made based on names of respondents, length of employment, use of language and volunteered information (e.g. "As a second-language speaker....", "English is not my first language"). Also, all students registered for a core communication course fill in 'white cards' giving full details so, in terms of the student respondents, age and home language were known.

The majority of the students were senior business or B Com students in their 3rd year with a few 4th years. Fourteen post-graduate Commerce Honours students were also included. The average age was 22. Judging by the number of years in employment, the average age of the professionals was mid-thirties. The average age of the UCT staff profile was closer to 40.

Although most names were Western, English names (70%), other groupings were also represented: Afrikaans, Xhosa, Zulu, Portuguese, Greek, German, French and Chinese with a few Eastern Europeans such as Russian, Polish and Czech.

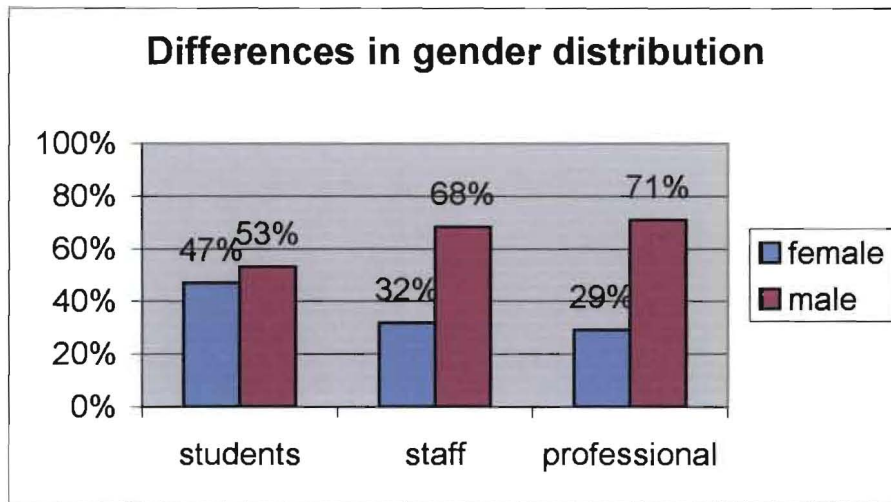


Figure 21: Comparison of male/female percentages

6.1.2 Gender

It was interesting that the 2001 student profile was almost equally distributed across gender which indicates how many women are entering business professions. More slowly to reflect this, however, was the reality of the staff or professional profile which was (and still is) mostly 'pale male'. It was also noted that most of the senior staff (senior lecturer to full professorship and head of department/school/deanship) are still white male. Fortunately this gender association was less significant in the professional group although 'promotion' to seniority seemed to have happened much later for women than men. The 'glass ceiling' seems far from shattered.

Manuela Tomei, (2003), gender specialist and author, found that "discrimination remains rampant in the workplace worldwide, depriving women, ethnic and religious minorities of equal jobs or pay... Women were the most common target and were subject to the 'glass ceiling' and significant 'pay gaps' even when their educational level was equal to that of men."¹ Kim McFarland, South Africa's Businesswoman of the year for 2002, acknowledges what she calls the 'stiletto ceiling' for women in the male, mostly white asset management industry.²

¹ Manuela Tomei's report, "Time for Equality at Work", 2003, was commissioned by the International Labour Organisation (ILO).

² Jackie Cameron. 2003. Simply the Best. (Interview with Kim McFarland). *Leadership*, February issue.

6.2 WORK EXPERIENCE

This section includes students' work experience as well as race and gender discrepancies in the workplace.

6.2.1 Students

More students had work experience than originally assumed. This has been a gratifying development over the last decade. Whether this is from choice or financial reality (soaring costs, fewer subsidies and bursaries) it augurs well for a balance of theoretical/academic to practical/experiential learning and financial responsibility. During classroom discussion many students indicated that they worked not only for financial reward, however. By successfully obtaining entrée for vacation training in various companies, especially the large corporate multi-nationals such as Deloitte & Touche, McKinsey & Company and KPMG, students were attempting to create a 'communicatively competent' impression and give advance evidence of their technical abilities.

According to Professor John Simpson, (2002), Head of Management Studies at UCT, many top students are headhunted in their senior year. This was borne out by Career Development Programme (CDP) staff³ (2002) and the Graduate Placement Programme (GPP) statistics. Students intending to do articles (e.g. auditing), often worked or job-shadowed at firms where they had applied to do their articles or to fulfil bursary obligations.

As many of these students thus had work experience and knowledge of the workplace, many of their questionnaire answers correlated well with the professionals.

6.2.2 Workplace discrepancies

The fact that the male to female student ratio dropped from near equal (53:47) to less than a third (71:29) in the professional category could signify that fewer women 'make it' or continue uninterrupted after graduation. There are almost as many women as men graduating in commerce and yet the corporate and academic staff

³ Various GPP interventions occur during the year under the auspices of the CDP where students apply or are invited to be interviewed by various corporations on campus.

reflection, especially at senior level, is still predominantly male. Even with equity legislation firmly in place, business, especially 'big business', is also still predominantly white.

This reflects Spitzberg's and Cupach's (1984) contention that perceptions of communicative, social, trait and relational competence will dictate who will be affirmed and who will not. The hegemonic power base will continue to operate oppressively if equated along a default continuum favouring first-world Western, white male at the top of the scale, down – with various notches – towards the black female (especially if her background is more traditional or rural) at the bottom of the scale. This echoes 'pecking order' classroom observations closely. The "master narrative of whiteness" – with the emphasis firmly on both terms 'master' and 'whiteness' – is hard to dispel (Steyn, 2001:3).

Whereas in the past, women merely accepted their plight, today many take on the establishment and call foul. The front-page article of the Sunday Argus of 11 May 2003 has the ex-Cape Metropolitan Council's Health department head (black female) sue for racial and gender discrimination in the Labour Court. The top Unicity Director of Health post was given to a white male although she was the incumbent at the time of advertisement. "I believe the city failed to address employment equity in top appointments and that I was discriminated against because I am a woman and I am black" she is quoted as saying⁴.

Government has expressed concern at what it perceives as a 'dragging of heels' in transformative efforts in the public and private sectors. As mentioned in chapter one, even UCT, with the best of intentions, is perceived as maintaining the status quo (Steyn and Van Zyl, 2001). The truism, 'old habits die hard' will see a perpetuation of deeply ossified prejudicial behaviours unless interventionist change strategies are fully sanctioned, understood and followed through at all levels of the institution. Hegemonic power bases of old will be hard to budge unless 'mental transformation' is, to use Varela's (1999) term, 'enacted'. Interpersonal competence is a joint venture

⁴ Headlined: *Racial scrap over plum job – Doctor says she didn't get top city post because she is black* by Lenore Oliver

and requires staunch commitment on both sides to push and be pushed for long-term mutual benefit (Freire, 1970; Rogers and Kincaid, 1981; Spitzberg and Cupach, 1984; Arnett, 1992).

The media have been quick to report on equity and affirmative action issues, a highly contested area. During the Apartheid regime, labour legislation such as job reservation, institutionalised an inequitable job market. As many previously disadvantaged South Africans know, 'levelling the playing field' in terms of new legislation will never be easy or quickly attained.

The Government has been slow to enforce punitive action against companies whose equity targets have not been met, preferring a willing-partner attitude and volunteerism. Harsh critics, even within Government circles, (especially the Labour/Union Movement) fear that, unless punitive action is taken, business and industry will continue to defy legislation and maintain their wait-and-see attitude, paying mere lip service to calls for transformation and a more equitable division of the spoils. The long-term consequence of inaction may lead to polarisation, attitudes/action similar to those evinced in Zimbabwe and a lose-lose situation for both the 'have's' and the 'have-nots'.

6.3 COMMUNICATION CHANNELS: TRADITIONAL AND ELECTRONIC

Direct, FtF and mediated communications (computer and telephonic) are evaluated in this section.

6.3.1 Face to face communication

It is interesting, if somewhat surprising, to note that even with a young, technologically savvy audience, the traditional FtF channels of communication were mooted as the most favoured/preferred by all three groups. The results for workplace graduates correlated well with academic findings. One very interesting quotation from an interview held that:

"I always say air tickets are cheap, telephone (calls) are expensive and e-mails even more expensive. Can we begin to calculate the costs of

missed opportunities to have face-to-face interaction given the size of projects people work on."

(CEO, Asset Management Company, male)

This type of response accords with some findings in the literature. "Face to face communication is typically considered the richest medium" (Bowman and Klopper, 1999: 87; Jones and LeBaron, 2002). The underlying refrain of approval is predicated upon the need for physical presence enabling verbal and non-verbal "effectiveness" and participation. The element of "feedback", necessary for mutual understanding and openness, is a common rationale.

Many respondents across all three groups mentioned how critical it was for communicators to pick up on "non-verbal cues" and body language especially in multicultural environments. As mentioned, females and other minority groups⁵ scored and commented on this necessity more frequently than males.

In his study, *What have we not learned about diversity in the university?*, Davis (2002) concludes that the university experience is still mostly dominated by the cultural values of white, Western, male hegemony. He questions how educators can guarantee a classroom environment where there is space for interrogating cultural and gender norms through shared experience and dialogue. He concludes that one of the greatest pedagogical challenges is to transform the classroom into a safe space where the hegemonic dimensions of society can be challenged and where 'the other' can be encouraged to 'speak up' and 'out'.

Although the black and white student percentages at UCT are approximately 50-50, the 'lived' experience of university life, traditions, scholarship and staff profile still mainly reflect the cultural values of the dominant white narrative. There are many voices and stories yet to be heard (Steyn and Van Zyl, 2001).

The subject of non-verbal effectiveness, the ability to pick up on non-verbal cues and read body language underscores much of the approval ratings for face to face

communication be this one-on-one, dyadic or team-based. The interrelationship between the verbal and the non-verbal as well as the cultural context and environment within which communication takes place is seen as a cornerstone of communication effectiveness and competence across all three respondent groups and interviewees. The entire September 2002 issue of the *Journal of Communication* is devoted to this interrelationship and also urges a more contextualised and integrated research approach.

As early as the 70's, researchers were concerned about isolationist studies. Kendon (1972) in Jones and LeBaron (2002) argues: "It makes no sense to speak of verbal communication and nonverbal communication. There is only communication" (p 500). One of the sticking points, Jones and LeBaron argue, is the separation of quantifiable and qualifiable research methodologies. The interrelationships of different message modalities has been the subject of a good deal of communication interest in the 90's although the lack of integrated research across methodology and within the field of communication (e.g. verbal versus non-verbal) makes a 'dialogue' between these issues difficult. This dilemma speaks to the eclecticism mentioned earlier and also resonates with the discussion of Jacobson's organ. The "co-active influences", the interplay between separate message 'bytes' works toward a new "confederate" interpretation (Jones and LeBaron, 2002: 500). The debates on eclecticism will continue as long as these issues remain unresolved.

6.3.2 Computer-mediated communication

The problems of misunderstandings and 'flaming' via email, Internet chatrooms and newsgroups and more recently, SMS communications, were mentioned by all three groups even while the advantages of "speed" and "convenience" were being acknowledged. These very features were identified as part of the problem as users tend to hit the send button without due thought. There is no opportunity for regret or retrieval.

⁵ Even when in the majority numerically

Another point mentioned was the “vulnerability” one is “subjected to” as an email user. One interviewee called email a “brutal medium.” You are totally exposed. Senders can “tamper with messages”.

This interviewee continued:

“IT departments have to become particularly good at understanding tampering, spotting it, managing it. Because there’s this huge space for subversion and what I call, communication terrorism in this new world.”

(M/SM, investment/financial services)

This echoes the age-old argument of ‘man versus machine’. Attempts to blame the ‘brutal’ technology, the medium, rather than question the ethical, responsible and mature conduct of users characterises many of the harsh criticisms of CMC.

6.3.3 Gender discrepancies

In all three groups, it was interesting to note that men never listed the telephone as their “most favourite” channel. This included cellular/SMS communications. Women students, staff and professionals showed far more affinity to the telephone than males. This particular female stereotype seemed factually based. Although one could argue about the generalizability of this finding, the fact that it was upheld across student, staff and professional categories – opinions gathered over a two-year time span – tends to support and lend credence to it.

The findings showed that upper quartile (senior management) telephone use is mostly landline (and therefore male). Contrary to this, female cellular use has increased dramatically. This may relate to the finding that fewer women are in the ‘upper echelons’ and those that are, have been there for a much shorter time.

An interesting anomaly in the workplace (professional group only) is that FtF communication is a male favourite (preferred and commonly used) whereas, although also popular with females, its use was more equally shared with telephone, email and meetings (in terms of actual use). One could speculate that women may

not be afforded as many 'up front' or visible opportunities for FtF communication and may be relegated more to the background. Nominated by her colleagues, Businesswoman of the year (2002), Investec's Kim McFarland says she works closely with the chief executive officer. "Whereas he is often in the limelight, she takes backstage, attending to the nitty-gritty of keeping the business machinery running" (p 24). McFarland who claims that her "greatest strength is intuition" (p 20) concludes of her boss: "My job is to run the business. I execute his vision" (p 24).

The findings also showed that source of work and delegation is more often internal for women whereas for men, it is external. This could indicate that as men spend more time 'out there' with clients, financiers, suppliers, they are more visible and exert more influence while women take their instructions within the firm (behind closed doors?). If perceived as more communicatively competent, (Spitzberg and Cupach, 1984), the spokesman at meetings, presentations, launches or social events may quite literally be a man, irrespective of qualifications, regard or intention (Katz, 1991).

Another inference is that channels favoured by women such as email or telephone may be perceived as less direct and threatening (?) "in the tough, male dominated" (Cameron, 2003:20) and highly competitive business environment.

For all questionnaire categories, female scores were higher than males. It appears that males continue to display less overall interest in communication issues than females (Coates, 1993) and considerably less knowledge of and interest in intercultural and diversity issues (Kim, 1994). Female student and staff ratings for interpersonal issues such as listening, body language and diversity were higher than male ratings (King, 1997).

The fact that work experience mediated choice and reflected higher scores for interpersonal and diversity issues overall may lead one to conclude that the reality and challenges of the multi- and intercultural workplace need to be experienced firsthand in order to have an impact (whether this impact is positive or negative). This reinforced the belief that work experience for both staff and students might go a

long way to deepening intercultural awareness, if not necessarily expertise or sensitivity (Davis, 2002; Dixon and Wright, 2002).

As we could see from the professionals, women in the workplace were still far more 'in touch' with these issues than their male counterparts no matter how inexorably (albeit slowly and painfully) the profile of the workplace may be changing (Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, 1998).

6.4 COMMENTS ON WORKING ASSUMPTIONS

It was especially instructive to compare academic results with the professional sector (questionnaires and interviews) to finally be able to determine how the communicative needs of graduates today differ from past assumptions and more importantly, the nature and extent of these shifts. These assumptions will be discussed in the same order as listed in Chapter two.

In general, judging by these samples, far fewer shifts than previously thought seemed to have occurred.

6.4.1 Assumption 1: *Change from traditional/individual emphasis to electronic/group emphasis*

As can be seen from the findings, assumption one (chapter two, p 13) was only partly upheld. A general feeling after reading the open-ended questions and interviewing people was one of overall conservatism and respect for traditional modes of communication. What was preferred and what was commonly used were also frequently dissimilar. Even where electronic modes are used (and highly recommended for curriculum inclusion) one-on-one interpersonal communication seemed to be valued more highly; i.e. was preferred. Electronic (and, to a lesser extent, cellular) communications seemed to be treated with a mix of awe and fascination combined with indulgent irritation and frustration relating mainly to their glitches, costs, unreliability, intrusion and security risks, causing a nostalgia for the "good old days".

Cellular and associated technologies are advancing in leaps and bounds and their adoption in small business, the SMME⁶ sector is accelerating. “You may work in the informal or formal sector or virtual office.” The chances are that if “it’s a pack-up-and-go street stall [or] out the back of a pick-up”, mobile, portable and soon-to-be wireless communications technology will be far more in demand as the lifeblood of the entrepreneur, who may quite literally be, on the move (Grant and Borchers, 2002: 13).

This phenomenon is not only a function of mobility, however. Limited landline connectivity has many previously disadvantaged communities, the ‘have-nots’, becoming the fastest growing cellular market. As one interviewee said:

“...the statistic I heard while ago...half the people living in the world today will die – will be born and die – without receiving or making a phone call [but] cell phone technology will revolutionise the whole country. They will have faster numbers in ownership of cell phones than they have in landlines. Leapfrogging technology is par for the course in Africa...”⁷

(CEO, market survey company, male)

Once again, this speaks to the issue of the ‘digital divide’. One of the interviewees held quite a cynical view about the role (or lack of it) of ‘Big Business’.

“So business, whatever it does, it actually worsens the divide because it deals with the have’s and the privileged and the one’s with jobs. In our country, the ones without jobs, business can’t reach them because they haven’t got money...”

(CEO, asset management company, male)

⁶ Small, Medium and Micro Enterprises

⁷ Eight months after this interview, Government, in partnership with cellular service providers, issued joint statements in the media about providing free cellular communications to South Africa’s poorest (May 2003).

With unemployment figures increasing rather than decreasing, the question of marginalized communities will remain a sore point. This resonates with Schuler's (2002) prediction of soaring inequality, discussed in chapter three.

While cellular use may be accelerating in certain sectors, corporate cellular use is increasing at a much more sedate pace. Corporate respondents claim to be more office bound and many admitted that cellular telephony was frowned upon or forbidden in some cases because of cost. Sales personnel were exceptions.

Traditional business communication (letters and memos, in particular) are definitely on the wane and have been replaced by email under most circumstances. According to a professional interviewee:

"Memos are a very occasional occurrence in our organisation – they used to be commonplace. Electronic correspondence excludes all those who are not computer literate (or have no access) and they are left in the dark. One's reach with paper was far greater"

(Male manager, service industry).

Use of traditional hard-copy reports, formally bound and delivered to recipients, is also on the decrease. Email reporting (with attachments) is increasing with the onus on the recipient to print out a copy if desired. This holds many implications regarding cost, professionalism and author control over layout and design.

Another interviewee expressed concern at the growing use of stock, 'ready-made' electronic reporting mechanisms. Turnaround time has got to be fast if one is to remain competitive. He contended:

"Today, the email comes through in the morning, they want a quotation that afternoon... Now you download forms... You fill in the blanks and so it becomes a bit cookie cutter but you have to institutionalise it if you're going to respond in time. So the ability to be creative in some of these tenders sometimes suffers." (CEO, research company, male)

Team-based group communication is also popular but has not, as yet, overtaken the “solely responsible” individual contribution. Although the more informal impromptu presentation is common, the more formal oral presentation, especially if computer-mediated, is still prevalent.

Computer-mediated group writing is also becoming far more feasible as the technology and software improves (Munter, 1998). If this trend continues, ‘shareware’ will accelerate via keyboard, pointer and voice-activated, wireless technologies. This in turn could blur the distinction between communication channels as multi-channel use becomes the rule rather than the exception.

Another implication is that departments and institutions cannot, in the global knowledge economy ‘go it alone’ (Shay, 1998; Ryan, 1999; Clark *et al* 2001). Questionnaire and interviewee comments aligned with global trends espoused in the literature that players need to work with economies of scale and forge strategic partnerships and teams with other university departments, government and industry in order to compete economically, commercially, technologically and pedagogically. Sharing wealth, knowledge and expertise will minimise, if not eliminate duplication of effort and resources creating inter-disciplinary, inter-faculty and/or transnational mergers and “co-opetition” (Grant & Borchers, 2002: 6), a type of synergistic co-operative competition or competitive co-operation, which may allow the best of both mind-sets to engage in ‘postmodern’ interplay.

South African business and Government parastatals too reflect a keen urge to form alliances and work synergistically with international partners. Old Mutual, Didata, Investec, Telkom and Sasol are recent examples.

6.4.2 Assumption 2: *Growth of small business enterprise*

An increasing number of graduates are finding employment opportunities outside institutionalised corporate structures. From classroom discussion, it became evident that many students operate small businesses, often informally, during their university careers. These ‘backroom’ or ‘garage’ entrepreneurs then continue their ventures

upon graduation, often employing university friends in the process. Mark Shuttleworth⁸, a UCT Business Science graduate, is a case in point.

However, according to the sample, only about 20% (n = 19) are small business operators; the vast majority of respondents still fell into the medium and large corporate structure categories. Given equity legislation, many 'pale male' graduates have been reported as complaining about reverse discrimination. The reality, however, substantiated by this sample (who were mostly white male) is that, although preferential treatment for white males may be on the wane, many Business Science and MBA graduates are still being snapped up both locally and abroad by the 'big firms' and government sectors. More recent statistics (2003) show that white male business professionals have, in fact, gained ground!

The Global Entrepreneurship Monitor, an annual report compiled by UCT's Graduate School of Business's Centre for Entrepreneurship found that South Africa lags behind when it comes to business training and entrepreneurship. South Africa came 25th out of 29 countries in the number of new firms (lowest of the developing countries in the GEM). "This suggests that we have a low survival rate among our start-ups" (January 2002 issue, No. 60, BigNews)

According to UWC's Head of Department of Management, Professor Philip Hirschsohn (2001); Anders Aeroe, chief economist of Wesgro (2003) and Eric Wood, Liberty Group associate professor at UCT's GSB (2003), these dismal figures have not improved over the last few years⁹.

One of the male professional respondents felt that the "entrepreneurial spirit" was missing. "People talk a big game but [are] very bureaucratic still." Some but not many graduates are "finding alternative employment in the informal sector outside institutionalised corporate structures" (Assumption two, chapter two, p 13).

⁸ An IT billionaire who recently became Africa's first 'space traveller'.

⁹ As argued in a paper delivered by Professor Hirschsohn (2001), "Global Competitiveness through Cooperative Strategies" and reported by Theresa Smith in the Cape Argus Business supplement, Network, 10 April 2003.

6.4.3 Assumption 3: Importance of visual literacy

There is no doubt that visual literacy has increased in this highly eye- and screen-minded generation and that business communications, both oral and written are substantiated, amplified and clarified using visual and other readability aids (Raymond 1994; Tufte, 1997). The intensification of cultural diversity and the speed with which messages need to be understood in the competitive, global economy enforces a more multi-modal approach to literacy with “far-reaching effects on the characteristics of English (and Englishes, globally...)” (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996:34).

One of the interviewees, a male marketing director, contended:

“People don’t like reading a lot of copy anymore. I mean we’ve had a big challenge in the last couple of years to simplify the way that we’ve imported our data and in fact, we don’t even write reports much anymore. We present PowerPoint presentations, very powerful picture stuff, employing a lot of graphics, a lot of bar charts and actually importing photographs to make the scenes come alive and then add very pertinent conclusions and recommendations as to where the research is taking the client..... You know, you don’t need to have a translator when you’re looking at a photograph.”

However, according to the questionnaires, the percentages were not as high as conjectured and fell into the “mostly” (oral) and “sometimes” (written) category. Business communications, especially writing, are still largely text-bound and less visual than more technical and scientific communications which have always relied on illustrations and graphics to a much greater degree.

More than any other group, students realise the impact of visual communication and included visual and graphic aids in their ‘top five’ curriculum inclusion areas. Although not highlighted by the professionals to the same degree, the need for visual competence was accepted as desirable and advantageous. Perhaps Kress and Van Leeuwen’s (1996) warning still lies some way in the future: “Not being ‘visually literate’ will begin to attract social sanction. ‘Visual literacy’ will begin to be a matter of

survival, especially in the workplace” (p 3). Staff respondents did not comment on this aspect at all and are still far more concerned with linguistic literacy, “good grammar” and “clear, logical thought”.

The Internet, however, is a visual and graphic interface. As most companies today offer a Web presence and as a great deal of B2C and B2B communications¹⁰ are conducted on the Internet, students and graduates are required to understand Web usability principles (Grant and Borchers, 2002). According to the sample, however, most Internet use is still ‘entry-level’, consisting mainly of email with some Web surfing and search engine research (some of which was personal rather than work-based). Assumption three is therefore only partly substantiated (chapter two, p 13).

6.4.4 Assumption 4: *Growth of socio-cultural literacies*

Socio-cultural literacy has been shown as a key issue but is still largely ignored by male respondents. As South Africa is a patriarchal society and males are still in the majority in the workplace (James, 2001; Steyn and Van Zyl, 2001), diversity consciousness and accountability may progress haltingly unless an infusion of male ‘consciousness-raising’ can be vouchsafed. This has pedagogical implications. Classroom observation over the years not only substantiates this reluctance but has convinced me that education at primary, secondary and tertiary levels could/should be imbued and galvanized

- by overt action (actual programmes)
- with goal-directed outcomes (examinable assignments)
- via a ‘full-frontal’ attack (oblique, indirect methodologies seem to carry no or little weight), and
- institutional endorsement (a ‘we take this seriously so you better too’ attitude).

¹⁰ Business to Consumer; Business to Business

The fact that these literacies play a role and will impact on multicultural local and global interactions irrespective of acknowledgment, acceptance or sanction creates suspicion and frustration. Assumption five remains a goal not yet fulfilled (chapter two, p14).

6.4.5 Assumption 5: *Feminising of the workplace*

The assumption that gender shifts are taking place, especially in Commerce, was not evidenced to the degree expected. The traditional male rules of engagement are still prevalent. Blatant types of discrimination were fading, but “subtle, less visible and more insidious forms” (including testing for HIV before employment), had emerged worldwide” (Tomei, 2003). South Africa’s equal opportunity legislation and Bill of Rights entrench equality but many obstacles still remain in both white and black society. Assumption six, like five, is part of a wish list that will require constant intervention (chapter two, p 14).

6.4.6 Assumption 6: *Discrepancies in perception*

The assumption that there is a discrepancy between what is required in the workplace and what is taught is upheld, on the one hand, and refuted, on the other (chapter two, p 14). Firstly, the communication course in question is skill-based, as favoured by professionals in the study and certain theorists discussed in the Literature Review. “The ability to communicate has increasingly risen to the top of surveys ranking the personal qualities of college graduates sought by employees” (Andrews, 99:2). Sherry Morreale, Associate Director of the National Communication Association, summarises a recent report, “Help Wanted: Workforce Development and the New Economy” which concluded that the “so-called ‘soft skills’ such as interpersonal communication, problem-solving and critical thinking, are more valued than ‘hard skills’” (2002:7).

Secondly, curricula and syllabi approaches and outcomes do align well regarding all broad communication arenas and sub-channels, as denoted by the existing course outline of the core programme in question on page 8. The ‘vocational’, life-skills approach also aligns significantly with OBE principles and Dr Mamphela Ramphele’s exhortation to “graduateness” (1996/7).

However, more attention needs to be given to technology issues from a theoretical and philosophical perspective and not just technical know-how (how to use PowerPoint or create an effective graph). Although these skills are necessary, greater input needs to be 'co-owned' between teachers and learners about the behavioural, affective and cognitive impact(s) of technology as outlined by the theorists in the opening chapters. Under the facilitative guidance of the communication practitioner, students need to engage with all their teachers across the curriculum, outside business stakeholders and peers to contest the various trends and debates that are on-going. If they do so via the Internet, for example, then they learn to use the technology while in search of various answers and solutions (Ryan, 1999; Clark, *et al*, 2001).

Similarly, issues of gender, diversity, intercultural communication as well as ethics and corporate citizenship require much greater awareness and commitment across all curricula; a short, intensive communication course, while offering a useful initiative, cannot be held ransom to full-blown responsibility. Diversity and multiculturalism are not mere sub-sets of professional communication to be artificially severed from day-to-day academic or work-based existence. As exhorted by UCT's V-C, Professor Ndebele, (Vision 2001), his predecessor, Dr Mamphela Ramphele (1996/7) and reinforced by Steyn and Van Zyl's findings (2001), the "deep-seated ambivalence towards transformation" cannot be allowed to "affect the credibility of the university and the morale of many of the students" (p 71). According to Dr Ramphele, (2003)¹¹ this is equally true of South Africa and its citizens who seek:

- "a participatory democracy that gives weight to all citizens;
- a prosperous knowledge-based economy;
- a more equitable society that has redressed apartheid's structural socioeconomic inequalities;
- a good neighbour in southern Africa and a good citizen of the continent;

¹¹ *Development – Our beloved country can be more than a dream* by Mamphela Ramphele, Managing Director of World Bank Legal Resources Centre of South Africa, reported in Business Report, Cape Times, 25 April, 2003.

- a champion of an Africa that is dynamic and respected in the global community” (p 2).

Having dealt with the findings of phase one and evaluation of these findings in chapters five and six, the results of phase two will now be presented. As can be seen from the student commentary in chapter seven, there are many affirmations of the existing communication course curriculum and teaching methodology but the discrepancy in answers between different special fields presents a whole new vantage point that, if considered, may broaden and strengthen programme content and delivery and ultimately provide a more inclusive and integrated curriculum of quality and relevance for the multicultural ‘knowledge economy’.

University of Cape Town

CHAPTER SEVEN: PHASE TWO

This chapter includes findings, evaluation as well as comparison between special fields (e.g. marketing, organizational psychology, information systems) which comprise the constituents of the undergraduate core course in communication.

7.1 STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE (2002)

The follow-up questionnaire for students (see Appendix 1d on p 139) summarised the results outlined in chapter five (phase one). Another group of students (same course, one year later) were asked to comment on this research project, particularly on what students, staff and business professionals deemed relevant and appropriate communication skills and knowledge for the world of work in the 'knowledge economy'. They were also asked to comment on the communication course they had just attended as part of their degree. They were asked whether they felt they were:

- 'getting' what the world of work deemed appropriate and relevant knowledge and skills at the university?
- confident that they were on the road to becoming communicatively competent graduates for the world of work?

7.1.1 Students' Definitions of Communicative Competence

Of the 153 questionnaires obtained, 150 supplied definitions. Of these, 90% (n = 135) incorporated one or both of Spitzberg's two dimensions of "appropriateness" and "effectiveness" (1983, 1984, 1989).

Students identified effectiveness as "success" of communication or whether the expectations of the sender were being met by the receiver i.e. the more congruent the sender-receiver expectations, the greater the success.

"Someone who can say what others want to hear in an efficient, clear manner." (M/IS)¹

¹ Gender and special field abbreviation. See List of Abbreviations on p xii.

“Someone who can listen, understand what is being said (ask questions until understood), and then be able to relay that what was heard and understood to someone else but in a better form.” (F/OP)

The second definition hints at good restatement and summarising skills and presupposes that “misunderstandings” can be eradicated by question and answer (feedback). By far the most common interpretation of effectiveness featured the ability to eliminate or minimise “misunderstanding” or “ambiguity”.

“One who is able to effectively communicate to his/her superiors/colleagues ... spoken or written ... in such a way that there is no misunderstanding.”
(gender/special field undisclosed)

“Writes and speaks clearly i.e. no ambiguity.” (F/AS)

Effectiveness was also characterised by “confidence” and “eloquence”. A full 28% of students (n = 42) felt that a key ingredient of communicative competence was the ability to communicate “assertively”, “confidently”, “authoritatively” without “nervousness.” Some included the terms like “charisma” or “dynamism” and stated that communicators should be “articulate” and be able to communicate with “spirit”, “enthusiasm”, not be “boring” or “lose the interest of the receiver”. Others felt that a communicator should be “comfortable to defend himself and his viewpoint”, “be at ease” yet be able to “accept criticism”. A few students added a cynical note to their definition: “Confident, even if they don’t know what they’re talking about.” (M/M)

Effectiveness also featured “efficiency” in that communicators should be able to get their point across “quickly”, “economically”, “succinctly” and “coherently” both verbally and visually and be able to “simplify complex information”.

The second dimension, appropriateness, was reflected by ‘correctness’ of channel, medium, register, level of language, style, tone, format as well as choice of visual/verbal means of expression.

“Be able to communicate in writing or orally, planned or impromptu – whatever the occasion demands.” (M/IS)

“Someone who knows what channels they should go through when dealing with a problem/question/investigation. A person who is able to work well in group settings [or] who is computer literate...” (F/IS)

“Knowing your formats and being able to apply them in professional manner.” (M/IS)

“Capable of producing a good report, instructions or memo [and] someone who can communicate through all forms of current media.” (F/AS)

“A graduate that understands the requirements and formats of all communication media that are involved in their specific fields.” (M/CS)

Only a couple of students mentioned that an appropriate language choice should be made (i.e. hinted at multi-lingual abilities and fluency).

Over 70% of these definitions (n = 106) reflected implicit linear models of communication which “compartmentalised communication into discrete units, which progressed from left to right, starting with the speaker” or transmitter (Grant and Borchers, 2003:8). These students viewed communication as message processing, static, product-oriented and source dependent. Recipients were seen less as participants than passive receivers and the environment or context often went unmentioned. Much of the emphasis was on directional persuasion and the goal tended towards manipulation and control of response, preferably agreement. Although about half the definitions (n = 73) mentioned or hinted at the necessity of feedback, the active role of the recipient (as participant) in ensuring successful communication was not elucidated to the extent that understanding could be assumed. A few students acknowledged the central role of listening:

“Someone who can get someone else to understand what is in their head, and also to listen attentively to anyone else.” (F/OP)

“Someone who understands the importance of listening, non-verbal communication and conflict management.” (M/B Com. Hon)

“Someone who is able to communicate own ideas and those of others.” (F/M)

Most definitions characterised competence as a trait associated with a fixed talent rather than a function of situational and mutually accomplished processes. Very few students hinted at the conception of competence as an interpersonal, dialogical, negotiated, relational process of quality that will be determined anew, with each communicative sequence and circumstance (Spitzberg, 1984; Rogers and Kincaid, 1989; Arnett, 1992).

There is no doubt that certain behavioural skills and attitudes could enhance competence but context, situation, participants, goals and choices will all impact on how competence is rated and by whom. Only a handful of students hinted at this type of complexity.

Although the more cyclical models of communication were emphasised in the programme (and the notes/textbook supplied), the more historical, linear definitions of communication prevailed. Some students did mention the need for “mutual understanding” and “consensus” but these were by far in the minority (about 20%, $n = 31$). Divergence of opinion, “disagreement” and difference were seen as obstacles to rather than opportunities for or characteristics of fruitful engagement (Grant and Borchers, 2003).

Extending the definition of competence to include social, intercultural and ethical competence was rare. Only two students mentioned the importance of “intention”, one noting the importance of the communicator’s “honourable intention”, a few mentioned “open” or “honest” communication and two included the word “sincerity”. A handful ($n = 4$) mentioned the need for “trust” in the transaction. An accounting student likened competence to “good governance”.

Diversity was hinted at by some students when they defined effective communication as the ability to communicate with people from “all walks of life”, “backgrounds” or “levels”.

“One that can interact with all levels of those round them, while effectively reading into their feelings and dealing with the situation both sensitively and effectively...” (F/AS)

“Someone ... who can speak with others, be they strangers or associates, small groups or large.” (M/IS)

“Someone who is able to transfer info to people of different backgrounds in a suitable manner.” (gender/special field undisclosed)

“One who understands the importance of communication and its effect on the working environment.” (M/AS)

“A graduate who is able to communicate with workers from all levels, e.g. managers, cleaners, board of directors, etc.” (F/M)

“I think one needs to focus on etiquette, ethical as well as cultural factors, not so much on [use of] language (English).” (F/CS)

For the most part, however, levels referred to the ability of a specialist to communicate “technical” or “work-based information” “clearly”, “understandably” as well as “simply” and “concisely” to a lay audience. The background or level had more to do with educational parameters and qualifications than race, class, status or language group.

In summary, given that about half the respondents were Western, male and white², it is perhaps to be expected that “direct”, “dynamic” and/or “assertive” transmitter-focussed definitions would prevail incorporating certainty and congruence-seeking behaviours. It is also unsurprising that students doing a skills course in business communication rather than studying communication *per se*, would tend to assimilate the short-term, functional and outcomes-based ethos rather than grapple with more converging (and diverging) models of communication or see the bigger picture of contextual, transactional, global communication. Although the latter paradigm is more appropriate in multi-cultural business negotiation, it is seemingly not being acknowledged. The exhortation to view competence as one’s “ability (and willingness) to be:

² Even though some students did not identify themselves, their class records were available (i.e. student ‘white cards’)

- open to change
- tolerant of ambiguity
- flexible to circumstance and context
- interculturally sensitive
- globally (com)passionate” (Grant and Borchers, 2003: 12)

is yet to be achieved.

7.1.2 Students’ commentary on findings of phase one

The second part of the questionnaire probed whether communication competence training is being ‘received’. Students were asked to study each relevant finding summarised in Questionnaire 4 and then to rank their answer for a) their degree generally and b) their communication course specifically. This was done for all eight work-based findings.

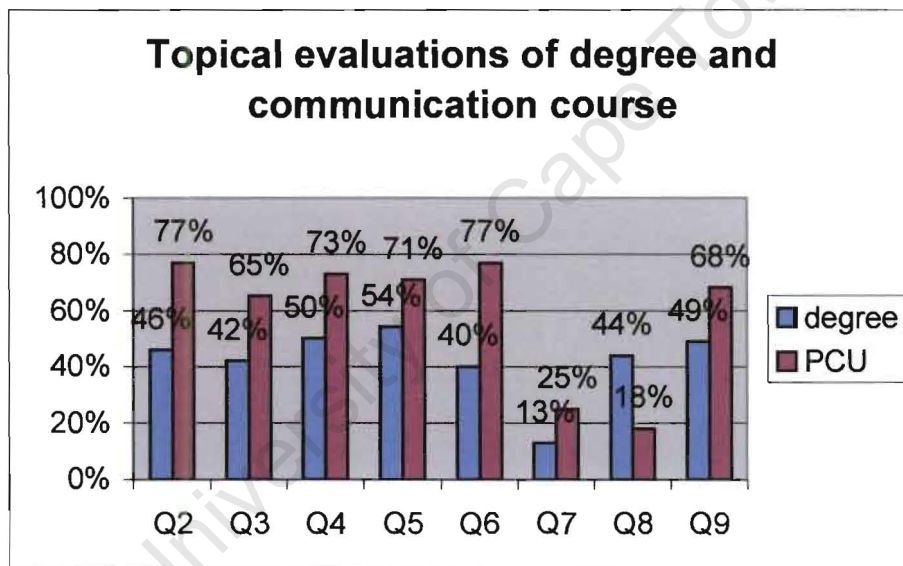


Figure 22: Comparison of responses on eight key areas

As mentioned in chapter four, the eight areas (Q2 – Q9) focussed on channels of communication (Q2), status roles in communication (Q3), visual communication (Q4), individual versus team communications (Q5), curriculum inclusion issues (Q6), intercultural and gender significance (Q7), role of technology (Q8), and general impact of communication on organisational health (Q9).

In order to obtain as accurate a measure as possible, only those respondents who answered “always” and “mostly” on the Likert scale were used to produce the results above. Those that ticked “somewhat” were omitted.

7.1.2.1 General results across all special fields

As can be seen from the percentages above, students across the board felt strongly that their additional communication course was far more able than their general degree to equip them with workplace communication skills. Many linked this success to the perceived abilities and knowledge of the communication staff. Although some students felt that their business science or B. Com curricula aimed to inculcate communication principles overall, very few felt that their degree course actually succeeded in accomplishing this aim (or that commerce staff had the necessary expertise):

“My degree course gives implicit assistance through the way things are presented but, for example, we seldom work in groups in my course and thus are ill prepared for difficulties.” (M/AS)

“The focus is more on content than presentation or principles of effective communication.” (M/IS)

“You don’t really get training in this – just expected to do it.” (F/IS)

“We are not helped with these aspects but are required to acquire these skills on our own.” (F/IS)

“Communication skills are hardly addressed... and ...there are no communication opportunities to discuss gender in the Information Systems Department.” (F/IS)

“We just got taught numbers.” (M/AS)

“Most courses are theoretical – work environment content and context not covered.” (M/AS)

Of their communication course, the following remarks were typical:

“This is probably the only course offered that teaches students to present and to write professionally.” (M/AS)

PCU, in particular, concentrates on audience analysis, etc. and helps a great deal in acquiring the necessary skills.” (M/M)

“The course is an eye-opener and relates to the real world.” (M/IS)

“Interaction both with colleagues (oral and report) and because of small group size, allowed for interaction with lecturers as well. (F/special field unidentified)

Tells you what to do and what not to do in the business world.” (M/IS)

Having to mix with people from different backgrounds during projects is a learning curve.” (M/AS)

Different people in groups – learnt to deal with differences – like the real world.” (F/AS)

“PCU has covered almost all communication forms needed in the workplace.” (M/AS)

Two areas were found to be weak in both the degree and the communication programme: intercultural/diversity issues (Q7) and role of technology (Q8). Question eight was the only focus area where the degree scored higher than the communication course. Although some students felt that more attention needed to be given to both these issues, many Information Systems (IS) students – who made up more than half (n = 79) the student numbers in the sample – felt that their degree is (or should be) better equipped than the communication course to train students in technology issues and to go beyond mere technical expertise. Many students had access to very up-to-date hard- and software and felt they knew more about CMC than their communication lecturers.

On the other hand, many students did not expect their degree to provide them with any intercultural competence. Statements like “not relevant to my degree” pointed to an attitude of separation where students simply did not regard this type of competence as integral to their working lives and way of being in the world. Some students admitted: “I have never thought about this before”. Whereas most other findings were well substantiated with lengthy comments, this question was also often ignored or ranked but unsubstantiated. Although some awareness was evinced by the communication course score, this is also well below the other scores implying that a) not enough is done, b) what is done is falling on deaf ears or simply not being

understood or taken seriously. One student (white male) felt: "I think most intercultural discrepancies appear in the workplace rather than at varsity."

Gender issues seemed to interest female respondents only. A handful of black female students bemoaned the sexist behaviour on campus (fellow students and staff). "Gender/intercultural issues [are] avoided entirely. Females not encouraged." One male complained about "the many difficult women" in his marketing class while another enjoyed the "pleasant ladies" in his PCU class. Most of these remarks seemed tongue-in-cheek and are, in fact, a case in point!

Some students showed the type of concern that indicated real engagement with these issues, however:

"Act Sci is very male-orientated and now has various races – we have to learn how to work, understand and communicate with each other...and deal with cultural perceptions." (F/AS)

"People have different frames of reference. However, more can be done in today's multi-cultural world." (F/HR)

"Effort made in beginning of (communication) course, however, this is NB issue – more emphasis should be placed..." (M/M)

7.1.2.2 Comparison of actuarial and non-actuarial students

Of the 153 student questionnaires, approximately 48 were actuarial students. The rest were made up of mostly IS students with about twelve marketing (M) and two to four computer science (CS), organisational psychology (OP), human resources (HR) and Honours students. A handful of students did not identify their special fields. All the actuarial science students were Business Science candidates but the IS component was made up of approximately half B. Com and half Business Science students.

Everyone registering for PCU101S attended the core course described on page 8. The results of the questionnaire, however, indicate how differently the actuarial and non-actuarial students perceived the findings and rated their degrees and the

communication course in terms of 'delivering' communicative competence skills. This difference in opinion became evident through statistical tests and was significant enough to warrant attention. Appendix 5 gives more detailed information on the statistical methodology and the comparative results obtained.

The 5-point scale presented to the students ranged from "absolutely" to "somewhat" to "not at all" with two further measures in between. As a group, the actuarial science students identified with the "absolutely" category while IS students related more to the "somewhat" category (see appendix B for statistical evaluation). The saying, "in the land of the blind, the one-eyed man is king" takes on special significance. IS students seemingly participate far more 'communicatively' individually, in pairs and small teams across their degree *per se* than do actuarial science students. The more numerate actuarial science group get very little training and exposure to communication and 'people' skills elsewhere in their degree. Their communication course therefore stood out far more prominently as the only course which catered for these so-called 'soft' skills.

The significance of this is that even when teaching a so-called 'intact class' (e.g. PCU101F/S) within a given faculty, students with different specialisations (and needs) therefore have different perceptions and expectations. The PCU has always tried to select appropriate mechanisms of content and delivery within various faculties (e.g. commerce, engineering, health sciences). However, a more nuanced and customised approach to workshop division, teaching methodology and course content within the same faculty has not enjoyed the same attention. Thus, this type of statistical comparison has added a whole new dimension to the study.

The concluding chapter of this thesis will summarise some of the key implications of both phase one and two of this research.

CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSION

Chapter six evaluated the findings of phase one and drew conclusions about the implications of these findings. Chapter seven also included evaluations of phase two results. This section will draw together both phases, and comprises concluding remarks about

- the shifting educational and socio-economic background against which the entire study took place,
- the implications of various viewpoints, both at UCT and about the communication courses on offer,
- avenues for further research, based on phase one and two findings,
- limitations of the methodology and,
- overall significance of the research project.

The Introduction to this dissertation started with a quotation: “The motive of change is always some Uneasiness:...” It was this uneasiness with the status quo that prompted the formulation of the research question: What are the communicative needs of business graduates as we move into the 21st century and to what extent are existing curricula meeting these needs?

It was assumed that worldwide shifts to a global economy, the national shift in curriculum focus to an OBE standard and UCT's sincere attempts at transformation to a more inclusive, multicultural place of learning would provide the catalyst and ideal context for the investigation. It was further assumed that the answer to the research question would emerge, in the main, from the business arena itself; who better than graduates in the workplace to advise us on communicative needs for the new economy?

Communication programme changes – possibly as a result of the “uneasiness” mentioned – were, however, set in motion prior to the completion of this study and need to be discussed first so that implications for the future can be viewed against existing conditions.

8.1 SHIFTING VIEWPOINTS

Previous informal findings from classroom discussion, course assessment, staff feedback, discussion with colleagues from abroad and surveying the literature were instrumental in creating the initiative for a formal investigation. This study, started as early as 2000, was therefore situated upon a solid foundation of enquiry and collegial goodwill. Interim findings of phase one emerged during 2002 and communication staff attempted in their planning for 2003 to implement certain changes, ahead of the findings of phase two.

Firstly, in-depth discussions were held with Commerce faculty staff responsible for various special fields in order to integrate more closely with their core curricula. It was felt that if the communication course was more aligned with the special needs of various streams (i.e. IS or marketing), students would view it less as an 'add-on' of only peripheral interest, seen by some as vying for their attention "at the cost of more important subjects". Instead of being seen as competition for their time and effort, communication course goals and assignments would more closely reflect core course interests and overlap with some of the subject matter for certain assignments. If, for example, students had a major IS project, they could then use the same problem or issue for their communication oral or written report, but perhaps be given the extra test of communicating this information to a different, less specialist or academic audience i.e. a real-life business audience.

It therefore made sense to group students according to their special fields as well as permit students to form their own groups within workshops so that they could utilise existing degree course group formations. Up until this point, workshops were purposely mixed. This departure was hotly debated among communication staff, commerce staff and workplace professionals, some of whom acted as PCU external examiners.

Proponents of special field and self grouping felt that:

- it had already been proposed and accepted for actuarial science students who, from 2003, would have their own course code (PCU102S) and would be specially trained for the communicative challenges of their profession.

This in turn would exempt these students from doing the British-based communication examination, a requirement for international registration and practice. The British professional actuarial science body had scrutinised the proposed UCT communication course and examination procedures, interviewed staff and visited the university before granting UCT exemption, the only university outside the United Kingdom to be granted this privilege.

- workshop leaders could customise course material more exactly, e.g. IS or marketing based.
- communication staff could work more closely with core specialists in the various fields, creating closer ties and integrating communication within the wider curriculum.
- students would spend less time in group formation and 'getting to know' outsiders which in turn may ensure closer working ties and, as one student put it, "less hassle".
- timetable problems might be eliminated as teams would have similar free times to meet and prepare. Students could generally meet on campus during 'office hours'.

Proponents of mixing special fields within each workshop and ensuring mixed groups through staff intervention felt that:

- it was far more realistic and reflected the real world where employees do not get to choose with whom they work.
- teams within the workforce are made up of specialists from differing fields who need to understand the specialisations of others and how they 'fit' into the overall picture: sales, production, advertising, IS, organisational psychology or human resources.
- teams within the workplace are made up of 'others' who are generally not one's 'best friends' from the same culture, race, gender or language group. By having to work with others, team members may become more gender sensitive, interculturally aware and better 'global material' in terms of the 'new economy'.
- more covert interpersonal skills are being tested and practised when people are removed from their comfort zone and are faced with 'difference'. Also,

students would generally need to organise to meet after hours and would often visit in each others' residences off campus, which may help them create new relationships, attain insights as well as a sense of responsibility.

- 'group think' could be minimised which gives the team a better chance at more imaginative, innovative problem-solving and decision-making.

The reason that the latter system had held sway until 2003 was that it was believed (and this was reinforced by professional opinion) that the advantages outweighed the disadvantages. There is no doubt, however, that this 'mixed' system is more time-consuming and 'difficult' and given the ever-growing demands of the degree curriculum, lack of free time and timetable clashes, students felt they were being faced with 'extra' stress which was taking its toll. Demands to simplify the course administratively and academically were thus heeded, lest the advantages of this approach be eroded by resentment and ill-feeling, poor application and outcomes, resulting in more harm than good.

8.2 IMPLICATIONS OF STUDY AND AVENUES FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Beside streamlining workload, assignment hand-in and administrative procedures, it was also decided that 2003 (ahead of phase two results) would be the first year that the undergraduate communication course workshops would be divided into special fields with little mixing between the groups. Student and staff reactions will need to be gauged at a later stage to determine impact of these changes on attitudes, teaching and classroom interaction as well as results.

Another debate worth pursuing is whether a more inclusive system can emerge, optimistically including the best of both scenarios. It does seem possible that the two approaches discussed above are not entirely mutually exclusive and judging by phase two

- 'communicative competence' definitions,
- results of whether the students feel they are 'getting' these skills and where/from whom (PCU/degree), and
- course feedback,

'mixing' and gender/intercultural issues seem to require more, not less intervention.

This is especially important in a country with a complex cultural profile comprising elements from Africa, Europe and Asia – labelled by Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1998) as “one of the most pluralist societies in the world” (p. 218), a “microcosm of the world” (p. 219).

These authors contend that there is as yet no “female culture” *per se* in corporate life as women are so “outnumbered” by men (*ibid*). The dearth of women in senior and influential positions was also discussed in introductory chapters. One of the working assumptions listed in chapter two, however, was that the increase in female graduates would ensure shifts in corporate culture and assist in feminizing the workplace. Unfortunately, five years on, the findings evinced in this study have upheld and verified Trompenaars’s and Hampden-Turner’s contentions.

Although tough masculine rules of engagement may be admired and emulated in a competitive global market, what is needed in times of change, transformation and reconciliation is a more intuitive, compassionate and “nurturing” ethos (*ibid*). Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1998) claim that “the importance of women in the workforce is that, provided they are not exploited, they are capable of revealing values different yet complementary to those of men, thereby creating a synthesis of values” (p 229). Both dimensions need to be valued, not one hegemonically at the cost of the other. I do not doubt for a moment that gender and intercultural issues receive more attention today but research seems to suggest that more than consciousness raising is required. Attitudes are important but deep seated (and often invisible) institutional, structural, political, judicial and societal changes need to work in concert for any real and meaningful shifts to occur. Further research specifically in these areas is therefore worth pursuing, especially during this time of transformation within the university and the country as a whole.

The scope of this project did not include:

- existing duration of courses on offer (e.g. typically one-off semester programme),
- when/where offered (e.g. senior undergraduate or post-graduate, within faculty or PCU designated),

- who teaches and how many (specialist communication practitioners, commerce faculty staff or combination; individual or co-teaching).

These questions will further impact on the 'separate' or integrated approach, discussed in introductory chapters. There are many champions both locally and abroad who advocate WAC/CAC¹ approaches believing that inculcation of these skills from within the faculty across all teaching and courses is sounder epistemologically as well as pedagogically. It certainly makes sense not to view communication as an 'add-on' or 'extra'. However, critics of integration feel that if communication theory and skills training was left up to all lecturing staff, it would simply not happen. Over the years, many staff themselves have admitted they lack the expertise, interest or time to "take care of this themselves" and feel the passion and knowledge must come from those with suitable qualifications. Even those who recognise that they should be 'doing' it anyway – irrespective of whether there is a separate course or not – feel that good intentions will fall by the wayside given time pressures and curriculum demands, i.e. communication and other 'soft' skills training would be the first to be sacrificed. These findings have been borne out by overseas studies (Knight, 1999; Wardrope, 2002) as well as phase two results of this investigation. It became quite evident that communication skills, especially in courses such as actuarial science, were not being taught in any other course in their four-year curriculum. These contentions warrant further in-depth study locally.

There is also the concern that if communication training became fully integrated into the curriculum and was not vigorously flagged, it might become too covert to be noticed and noted. Critics feel that it would simply become a taken-for-granted skill that some staff and students (usually first-language) assume they have. "I can talk and write, ergo, I can communicate." Furthermore, communication courses are all too often viewed as language and grammar teaching (e.g. English). The fact that many first language communicators could be labelled 'communicatively incompetent' or perhaps less competent than a more conscientious and aware second-language

¹ Writing across the curriculum/communication across the curriculum

speaker, is hard for many students (and staff) to comprehend yet this has been borne out by personal teaching experience. These areas may provide fruitful research avenues, especially given the narrow definitions of communicative competence and shallow understanding of workplace literacies evinced in this study.

In course assessments over the years, a number of students have recognised that the perceived quality of teaching and the impression created by the lecturer go hand in hand. The more the teacher is perceived as expert, the greater the impression made on the student (Aldridge, Fraser and Huang, 1993). Teachers with credibility are generally more respected (if not necessarily liked) and may be accorded higher status, irrespective of position. Judging by course assessments, analysed in chapter seven (phase two), perceptions of staff status affected how seriously the students viewed the subject and the course. Some students obviously compared their experiences and claimed how “lucky” or “advantaged” they were to have been taught by a particular staff member and not one of the ‘newer’ or perceived ‘less experienced’ staff members. A way of dealing with staff shortages has been to use senior students (e.g. Engineering Masters students who have previously done a PCU course in their undergraduate degree) to tutor on certain of the communication programmes. The question remains how much regard students would have for the subject if a) taught by a commerce faculty member on an integrated programme or b) a senior student or ‘junior’ on an existing PCU programme i.e. someone other than a qualified communication practitioner. More in-depth research will be valuable to determine impacts of growing student numbers, declining resources and the very real possibility of using non-practitioners as teachers.

The above issues also inform other questions and possible avenues of research such as where and in what guise the PCU is located. Faculty transformation during the late nineties at UCT held changes for the PCU as well. An independent inter-faculty unit gave way in 2000 to the unit as a sub-set of the Career Development Programme (CDP) within the Centre for Higher Education Development (CHED). Any future developments within service faculties such as Commerce and Engineering could lead to a different type of ‘integration’. This may affect how courses are perceived and this too could be investigated.

Finally, the point of departure for this study was to determine what communicative skills are valued in the workplace (phase one) and then to ascertain whether existing programmes are fulfilling these objectives and outcomes (phase two). Conclusions were drawn in chapter six about the working assumptions listed in chapter two. Although students and staff outlined their perceptions and expectations, professional opinion became the benchmark for evaluation.

As stated in chapter six, the overall results were somewhat surprising and the working assumptions were not confirmed to the extent expected. Greater shifts in attitude and knowledge were expected in terms of modes and channels of communication, employment sectors, visual literacy, multiculturalism and gender sensitivity. Above all, a greater discrepancy in fit was assumed between what is taught and what would be demanded on the job.

The implicit assumption of 'accelerated change', based on pre-investigation debates and readings, did not materialize. The so-called complexity of modern-day demands, the tremendous paradigm shift, as spelt out (albeit highly contested) in the literature, was – if not entirely absent – then certainly sluggish. Overall, in both phases of the study, I also found a superficial engagement with the various issues raised and no great sophistication of opinion regarding educational perspectives, communicative competence, the role of face-time in the knowledge economy and the impact of technology and CMC. Nostalgia, mixed feelings and contradictory attitudes and beliefs coated many responses. Ironically enough, these 'mixed feelings' resonate in the literature and might be symptomatic of fear of/disdain for the cyber landscape and the media's obsession with all things technological.

Perhaps one could/should feel relieved. After all, the advice to "stick to the basics" means the communication course on offer, outlined on page 8, seems entirely adequate. One could re-enter the communication classroom with its traditional emphasis and say: "We are doing the right thing. This is what the professionals want." On the other hand, however pleased 'traditionalists' may seem (and I count myself amongst them), I do feel that such a neat response would be disappointing and not serve the field well in the long term.

Somehow, 'business as usual' does not seem good enough anymore. A broadened view of communicative competence and accountability seems required as an ethos to be understood and acknowledged across all partnerships in the public and private sector as well as academia. It is not enough that sustainable, transparent and ethical communication behaviour is recognized as important on an intellectual level but neglected in practice. Constant and conscious engagement with the issues raised in this investigation is essential if talk about transformation

- in education policy in general,
- UCT curricula in particular, and
- communication courses, specifically,

is to be translated into action. These findings, especially on intercultural communication, ethical and gender competencies have shown that what knowledge may be debated and acknowledged theoretically, does not necessary find its way into practice in the university or the workplace as a matter of course.

One could confront this tendency to conservatism in business and ask:

- How informed and enlightened is this opinion?
- Can one assume that business knows what its wider communicative needs and responsibilities are?
- Should more attempts be made to educate corporate audiences about sustainable communicative competence, to engineer change, to lead (rather than follow) opinion?
- Are on-going collaborative debates essential for the establishment of meaningful competence and accountability?

Given resistance to change, market conservatism (a desire to maintain the status quo) and a Western free market economy bias (Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, 1998; Visser and Sunter, 2002), it is incumbent on global researchers to seek out and heed other voices and to critically interrogate those which have enjoyed centuries of privilege (Steyn, 2003). This is all the more crucial at a time when corporate governance and citizenship have been shown to be wanting. Corporate greed and power – individual, national and international – have reached unprecedented heights (Visser and Sunter, 2002). Perhaps the really important

question to be asked is not how business should sustain itself globally but how the globe can sustain itself despite 'big business'! Further research in these areas could positively contribute to the understanding of the global economy and the rights and communicative responsibilities of all stakeholders.

8.3 LIMITATIONS OF STUDY

Although there are probably many more than identified, some of the more significant limitations will be mentioned here.

8.3.1 Survey Method

By its very nature, the survey methodology presents a 'snapshot' of information, presenting findings taken at one time and place (Rosier, 1988). Although the data-gathering process was spread over a two-year period, (2001/2), in an attempt to lessen this limitation, it is a characteristic of the survey approach which cannot be eliminated altogether. This may impact on the depth and quality of the information obtained, especially the quantifiable, coded and ranked questions.

A further limitation of the Likert scale format is that it permits a circumscribed choice of categories which may or may not reflect the precise feeling of the respondent. Also, to ease questionnaire completion and coding, respondents were presented with options to be ticked. The list cannot include everything and although the order of options was changed to prevent bias or 'habit ticking', it nevertheless may suggest that the options provided are the only or most important choices. Although a category 'other' was created to cater for choices not listed, this was only used by a handful of respondents. A reason for this may be that respondents could not be bothered to enter and substantiate their own choices. Loss of interest or time constraints may also cause speedy completion. This type of methodology may contribute to the perceived 'shallowness' of opinion, mentioned earlier.

8.3.2 Choice of questions

A limitation of the questionnaires was that some demographic information relating to age, home language and race, which would have proved useful, was omitted. As described in chapter four, much of this information had to be gleaned by other

means (i.e. student records) and this may have affected accuracy, although not substantially.

8.3.3 Choice of respondents

All respondents were commerce students, staff or university graduates and were thus not random but rather purposive. Although the students were a captive audience in the sense that they were asked to fill in their questionnaires during class time, commerce staff and professionals were under less pressure to complete the questionnaire and/or grant an interview. This in itself may prove to be a limitation as respondents in these categories may have felt more interested in the subject matter and thus consented to finishing what could be regarded as a time-consuming activity, especially the 7-page professional questionnaire. Certainly those respondents who granted an interview – all busy people – possibly felt more passionate or concerned about effective communication in the workplace than those who declined and/or who discarded the questionnaire. Their pre-existing mind-sets, whether positive or negative, may have introduced bias in the statistical data, but, on the other hand, provided rich qualitative data.

8.4 SIGNIFICANCE AND IMPACT OF THE STUDY

The aim of the study was to provide primary data gathered locally in order to enhance curriculum design, teaching approach and methodology. It is hoped that the findings of this study will assist the communication staff, the faculties they serve and other staff across the university to make informed comparisons with international findings and intelligent choices based on the primary data gathered. I feel confident that this type of study will promote further investigation not only within and/or across disciplines and fields within universities but also in the broader working community because of the very nature of the topic (Ramsden, 1992; Birtwhistle, 1996).

These findings should therefore interest other tertiary institutions as well as corporate employers. Over 80% of the professional questionnaire and interview respondents requested feedback on the results of the project. Commerce staff also requested feedback. Given the level of interest expressed, and assistance given, both internally and externally, the results should provide areas of debate and further

research, especially as electronic and cyber communications are so rapidly reinforcing/undermining, enhancing/hindering how people communicate, with positive and negative outcomes, depending on attitude and behaviour.

The initial impact of the research should be felt within university structures in terms of the relevance and appropriateness of teaching approach and content. To use Spitzberg's terminology (1983/9), it is hoped that conditions for the most "effective" and "appropriate" communication training will be created which will further the mission of the university to prepare graduates for the new millennium. These aims and outcomes

- align congruently with the university's and the Department of Education's mission of academic and curriculum development and research within the framework of HE policy,
- take note of the shift in curriculum focus, outlined in the NQF, adopted by SAQA, which has been described and evaluated in various White Papers on Education during the last five years,
- reinforce the principles of OBE, as discussed in the introductory chapters, and
- align well with recent 'quality assurance' in education demands.

At the same time, as educators, we should strive to

- engage critically with some of the debates surrounding the narrow emphasis on vocational, market-driven outcomes and competencies, and
- place less emphasis on concrete, short-term, easily measurable task outcomes (responsible for a great deal of OBE opposition) and far more emphasis on the institution's ability to engage and change mindsets. These changes should be based on the intellectual challenge of participating in and contributing towards more sustainable, ethical and accountable attitudes and behaviours across the entire curriculum for the benefit of all stakeholders in the longer term.

The impact should also be felt by the people who participated in this study: students, graduates, colleagues and external consultants. As convenor of the Business Science Professional Communication programme, I was assisted by a number of

post-graduate students, two of whom were from historically disadvantaged institutions and backgrounds. They also provided worthwhile insights into students' communicative needs in a multi-cultural and -lingual tertiary institution which enriched the project.

The business and academic networks I have already created proved invaluable. Working in collaboration with industry and using consultancy contacts added value to the research and assisted and enhanced the process (Conceição & Heitor, 1999; Knight, 1999). This type of work and research also provides much needed synergistic support to industry and student learning and reinforces/extends our knowledge and research base. It also provided a good testing ground for new ideas and shared experiences and related practically to what was actually happening in the field. This allowed us on a continuing basis to plough back to students real business, technological and scientific knowledge of benchmarking practices, strategies and up-to-date issues.

At the same time, this type of investigation allows practitioners the opportunity to critically scrutinize global business practices and attitudes. Given recent conduct, fraught with scandal upon scandal, an important service to all stakeholders is to hold a mirror and interrogate past business assumptions and complacent attitudes. If ethical behaviour and sustainable corporate citizenship are seen as part of an extended definition of communicative competence, then all parties should see the sense of forging dialogical partnerships (Arnett, 1992; Visser and Sunter, 2002). More than merely tolerating it, they should welcome it. It has been shown to a sobering degree that pursuing transparent transactions, good conduct and honest business disclosure is not mere academic idealism but has very real bottom-line impacts.

As I feel confident that the study and findings should prove valuable within and across disciplines, I plan to disseminate major findings as widely as possible. Beside the respondent interest mentioned earlier, the interim results of this study were presented at the 2nd International Regional Education Conference held at UCT in September 2002. The final results will be presented at 4th Asia-Pacific Association of

Business Communication Conference to be held in Auckland, New Zealand during 10 to 12 December, 2003.

The results should also provide justification to make well-substantiated curriculum changes where necessary. Significantly, as can be seen from the working assumptions and how these were upheld or refuted, research is essential so that changes are not based on hearsay or kneejerk reactions. Recent overseas studies (Knight, 1999; Wardrope, 2002) have supported the findings of this study that traditional communication skills and channels, both written and oral, are not "obsolete", to be discarded in the face of globalisation and CMC. On the other hand, technology is not the enemy and an adversarial either/or attitude seems defeatist and counter-productive. Traditional interpersonal oral and written skills are crucial and complementary requirements of the new multi-lingual and -cultural economy which can be well served by technological advances.

As mentioned above, many avenues for future research have presented themselves. The communication practitioner has a clear duty to pursue these with vigour. Equally (s)he must keep abreast of international findings, as surprising, perplexing and/or contradictory as these may be.

For example, contrary to expectation, Wardrope's (2002) investigation saw the emergence of written skills as a corporate priority, ahead of "technology-mediated skills" (p 67). He advises caution, however, and contends that "these conclusions should be balanced with data from all constituent groups... to formulate the proper balance of topics in our course. While this study provides useful guidance for pedagogical and programmatic decision making, the business communication curriculum should be driven ultimately by the decision makers who study and teach it" (p. 70).

I heartily endorse this advice, especially his emphasis on "all constituent groups". Given the complexity of intersecting realities, no single voice, no one stakeholder - be it academic, corporate or government - can be expected to have the answers (or questions) or be sanctioned with the power to act unilaterally. The true essence of

globalisation and the global economy should be global sustainability where both first and third world interests are sacrosanct in partnership; the 'common good' should be the cornerstone of competence.

As communication practitioners at tertiary institutions, especially UCT, our role in helping to shape young minds is small and of short duration. We therefore have to make an impact not only on the students we teach directly but also on the university and further a field in the private and public sector. If we wish to see the definition of communicative competence extended to include sustainable, transparent, ethical business practices, synergistic cohabitation of 'low-tech' and 'high-tech' communication practices as well as intercultural and gender sensitivity, then we seek little more than to revive the African concept of Ubuntu/Botho (Teffo, 1998; Visser and Sunter 2002). This is nothing new. Embracing a communal and humanistic morality as the foundation of responsibility, both corporate and government, has contributed to transforming many a society down the millennia.

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Appendix 1a: student questionnaire (2001)

COMMUNICATION NEEDS ANALYSIS

As senior students, many of you have worked. It's our job to assess what kind of communication skills you need for today's world of work and, to this end, I am conducting this Needs Analysis. Commerce graduates, existing students and staff will be asked for their ideas, based on opinion or job experience. This information will be used to evaluate the **curriculum and to identify changes where necessary**. Thank you for participating.

A. GENERAL:

1. Name: M / F
2. Degree and special field:
3. Any work experience? Give a brief description

B. PERSONAL DETAILS

4A. What are your individual **strengths/likes** in communication generally?

4B. What are your individual **weaknesses/dislikes** in communication generally?

5A. What do you think your favourite **channel(s) of communication** would be in the workplace?
Please rank **top three** (1 – 3)

- a. face-to-face b. telephone c. informal group d. presentation
discussion
- e. letter / f. email g. meeting h. report i. other
memo (specify)

5B. Why?

C. COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

6. Which particular aspects of communication do you think **important** in any tertiary communication curriculum? Please rate each in terms of **importance**.

Oral/Inter-Personal	Extremely Important	Fairly Important	Somewhat Important	Fairly Unimportant	Extremely Unimportant
e.g. Formal Presentations					
Visual Aids Traditional? Computer-Mediated?					
Body Language					
Listening & Perception					
Formal Interviews					
Impromptu Speaking					
Casual briefings					
Instructions					
Telephone Landline? Cellular?					
Other (Specify)					

Team/Group	Extremely Important	Fairly Important	Somewhat Important	Fairly Unimportant	Extremely Unimportant
e.g. Formal Meetings					
Informal group Discussions					
Diversity/inter-Cultural issues					
Video-Conferencing					
Other (specify)					
Written (Traditional)					
e.g. Reports					
Graphic Aids					
Correspondence					
Proposals					
Instructions					
Business Plans					
Minutes/Agenda					
Articles					
Other (specify)					
Written (Electronic)					
e.g. E-mail					
Internet/Web Applications					
Other (specify)					

7. Are there any **specific areas in communication** which you think need **special attention** in to-day's workplace? Please specify.

8. What is your opinion on the **impact of technology** on workplace communications? Discuss in the light of the following two standpoints: Tick one.

A. has added new channels & media to existing ones
(plays **ancillary/complementary** role)

B. has **fundamentally altered** the way in which we communicate

Please substantiate your standpoint:

9. What role do you believe communication plays in the success or failure of any company?

10. Any other comments?

We appreciate the time you have taken to fill in this questionnaire and hope the results will help us provide future students with relevant and appropriate communication training. Thank you!

Terri Grant
Course Convenor

Appendix 1b: staff questionnaire (2002)

COMMUNICATION NEEDS ANALYSIS

As many commerce students do Professional Communication either as a core course or an elective, it's our job to assess what kind of communication skills they will need for today's world of work and, to this end, I am conducting this Needs Analysis. Commerce graduates, existing students and staff will be asked for their ideas, based on opinion or job experience. This information will be used to evaluate the **curriculum and to identify changes where necessary**. You may answer based on your own experience or what you believe is important for commerce graduates. Thank you for participating.

A. GENERAL:

2. Name: M / F
4. Position:
5. Give a brief description of your career and work experience:

B. PERSONAL DETAILS

4A. What are your individual **strengths/likes** in communication generally?

4B. What are your individual **weaknesses/dislikes** in communication generally?

5A. What are your favourite **channel(s) of communication** in the workplace?

Please rank **top three** (1 – 3)

- a. face-to-face b. telephone c. informal group d. presentation
discussion
- e. letter / f. email g. meeting h. report i. other
memo (specify)

5B. Why?

5A. What do you believe are the most **effective channel(s) of communication** in the workplace?
Please rank **top three** (1 – 3)

- a. face-to-face b. telephone c. informal group discussion d. presentation
 e. letter / memo f. email g. meeting h. report i. other (specify)

5B. Why?

C. COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

6. Which particular aspects of communication do you think **important** in any tertiary communication curriculum? Please rate each in terms of **importance**.

Oral/Inter-Personal	Extremely Important	Fairly Important	Somewhat Important	Fairly Unimportant	Extremely Unimportant
e.g. Formal Presentations					
Visual Aids Traditional? Computer-Mediated?					
Body Language					
Listening & Perception					
Formal Interviews					
Impromptu Speaking					
Casual briefings					
Instructions					
Telephone Landline? Cellular?					
Other (Specify)					

Team/Group	Extremely Important	Fairly Important	Somewhat Important	Fairly Unimportant	Extremely Unimportant
e.g. Formal Meetings					
Informal group Discussions					
Diversity/inter-Cultural issues					
Video-Conferencing					
Other (specify)					
Written (Traditional)					
e.g. Reports					
Graphic Aids					
Correspondence					
Proposals					
Instructions					
Business Plans					
Minutes/Agenda					
Articles					
Other (specify)					
Written (Electronic)					
e.g. E-mail					
Internet/Web Applications					
Other (specify)					

7. Are there any **specific areas in communication** which you think need **special attention** in to-day's workplace? Please specify.

8. What is your opinion on the **impact of technology** on workplace communications? Discuss in the light of the following two standpoints: Tick one.

A. has added new channels & media to existing ones
(plays **ancillary/complementary** role)

B. has **fundamentally altered** the way in which we communicate

Please substantiate your standpoint:

9. What role do you believe communication plays in the success or failure of any company?

10. Any other comments?

We appreciate the time you have taken to fill in this questionnaire and hope the results will help us provide future students with relevant and appropriate communication training. Thank you!

*Terri Grant
Course Convenor*

Appendix 1c: professional questionnaire (2002)

COMMUNICATION NEEDS ANALYSIS

It is generally accepted and expected that the advent and proliferation of internet and cellular communications will impact on how people communicate and the choices they have/make. Are these new modes of communication or merely transportation media? Have they changed the nature of personal and corporate communication or merely 'added' new, speedier channels for the traditional interpersonal, group, mass and written communication genres? In other words, is e-mail a new type of communication or merely or new (quicker) way of transmitting correspondence?

The objective of this study is to find an answer to the following question. **What curriculum changes need be made in teaching effective communications in the electronic age of the Knowledge Economy?** This **Communication Needs Analysis** will attempt to identify these changes and to provide some ideas about what professional communication studies should be incorporated to equip graduates with relevant knowledge and skills.

The information you provide will help us evaluate existing curricula and syllabi so that communication programmes more accurately reflect what is needed of graduates entering the world of work in the new millennium. Thank you for participating.

A. GENERAL:

3. Name: _____ Gender: M / F (circle)
6. Qualification(s) & graduation date: _____
7. Length of time in employment: _____ years
8. Name of Company or self-employed: _____
9. Position/Situation: _____ Director/owner/partner;
Senior/middle/junior management; (please specify)
10. Length of time in present position: _____ years
11. Number of employees. Tick appropriate box.

0-10	11-50	51-100	101-500	501-2000	2001-10000

Previous position(s)/employment history

12. Contact details: Tel: _____

Cell: _____

Fax: _____

Email: _____

COMMUNICATION CHANNELS (INTERNAL) (Answer where applicable)

9A. What is the main **direction of your communication flow within the firm?** (Tick one)

- a. upward (to your boss)? b. horizontal/lateral (to colleagues)
 c. downward (to subordinates)

9B. Which form (s) of **communication** do you most commonly use? Please rank (1 – 3)

- a. face to face b. telephone c. memos d. meetings e. e-mail f. reports g. proposals
 h. presentations i. interviews j. other (please specify)

9C. How effective/successful do you feel this communication to be? Tick appropriate box.

Always	Mostly	Sometimes	Seldom	Never
1.	2.	3.	4.	5.

10. In which areas of **written communication** are you involved in your daily work life? **Rank first three (1 – 3) and hours spent per week**

	Rank importance (1-)	Time spent (hours per week)
Reports		
Instructions		
Agenda/Minutes		
Letters/Memos		
E-mail		
Other Internet Applications		
Company Policy documents		
Interpreting legal and other documents		
Other (specify)		

11. In which of the following areas of **oral/interpersonal communication** are you involved?
Rank top three (1 – 3) and hours spent per week

Rank importance (1-3) Hours spent per week

One to one (in person)		
Telephone		
- Landline		
- Cellular		
Interviews		
Meetings		
- Formal		
- Informal		
Instructions		
Presentations		
- Formal		
- Informal		
- Impromptu		
Other (specify)		

C. COMMUNICATION CHANNELS (EXTERNAL)

12. With which **work-related parties** do you communicate outside your workplace? Rate importance from 1 = most important to 5 = least important, and average hours spent per week.

	Rank Importance (1 – 5)	Time spent (hours per week)
Customers/ Clients		
Suppliers		
Financial		
Legal		
Media		
Other (specify)		

13. Which form of **external communication** do you use most. (Please rank **top three**)

- a. face to face b. telephone c. letters d. meetings e. e-mail f. reports g. proposals
-
- h. presentations i. interviews j. other (please specify)
-

D. SPECIFIC DETAILS(Answer where applicable)

Thinking about your reporting activities (oral and/or written), please answer the following:

14. Who **mainly** commissions/requests these reports? You may rank if more than one (1 -)

a. superior b. colleague c. customer d. government e. financial institution f. other (specify)

15A. Do **graphic aids** (tables, figures, illustrations, etc.) form part of your written reports? Tick box.

Always	Mostly	Sometimes	Seldom	Never
1.	2.	3.	4.	5.

15B. If so, please rank the following **graphic aids** according to use (1 most used to 5 least used)

a. tables b. line graphs c. bar charts d. diagrams/flowcharts
 e. photographs f. illustrations/drawings g. other (please specify)

15C. Do **visual aids** (flipchart, overhead projector, etc.) form part of your oral presentations? Tick.

Always	Mostly	Sometimes	Seldom	Never
1.	2.	3.	4.	5.

15D. If so, please rank the following **visual aids** (equipment) according to use (1 most used to 5 least used)

a. Overhead Projector b. Laptop with data projector c. multimedia
 d. white/green board e. flipchart f. models g. other (specify)

16A. When you prepare a report, how is responsibility **usually** allocated?

Written: a. solely responsible b. partnership effort c. team effort

Oral: d. solely responsible e. partnership effort f. team effort

16B. If more than one person is involved, **how are contributions integrated and controlled?**

Written: a. mutually agree at various preparation stages (joint control)
 b. tasks are simply allocated (single control)
 c. other (please specify)

Oral? d. mutually agree at various preparation stages (joint control)
 e. tasks are simply allocated (single control)
 f. other (please specify)

17. **Electronic mail** is a frequently used mode of **business correspondence**. Please comment on **Strengths?**

Weaknesses?

18A. Apart from e-mail what other types of **Internet communications** do you use? Describe **which** Web applications play a role in your job and how.

18B. Also comment on:
Strengths?

Weaknesses?

19A. In terms of **telephonic communications**, what percentage of your calls is traditional landline as opposed to cellular?

Two years ago? % Current usage? % Two years time? %

19B. Also comment on:
Strengths: (landline – cellular)?

Weaknesses: (landline – cellular)?

E. PERSONAL DETAILS

20A. What are your individual **strengths/likes** in communication generally?

20B. What are your individual **weaknesses/dislikes** in communication generally?

21A. What is/are your **favourite channel(s) of communication**? Please rank **top three** (1 – 3)

a. face-to-face b. telephone c. small group d. presentation
e. letter f. memo g. email h. report i. other (specify)

21B. Why?

22. Judging by your workplace experience, which particular aspects of communication do you think **important** in any tertiary communication curriculum? Please rate each in terms of **importance**.

	Extremely Important	Fairly Important	Somewhat Important	Fairly Unimportant	Extremely Unimportant
Oral/Inter-Personal e.g. Formal Presentations Visual Aids Body Language Listening & Perception Formal Interviews Impromptu Speaking Casual briefings Instructions Telephone Other (specify)					
Team/Group e.g. Formal Meetings Informal group Discussions Diversity/inter-Cultural issues Video-Conferencing Other (specify)					
Written (Traditional) e.g. Reports Graphic Aids Correspondence Proposals Instructions Business Plans Articles Other (specify)					
Written (Electronic) e.g. E-mail Internet Applications Other (specify)					

23. In which areas within your employment situation, if any, do you feel **communication forms and channels** could be **improved**? Please specify.
24. Are there any **specific areas in communication** which you think need **special attention** in to-day's workplace? Please specify.
25. What is your opinion on the **impact of technology** on workplace communications?
Discuss in the light of the following two standpoints: Tick and then substantiate.
- a. has added new channels & media to existing ones
(plays ancillary/**complementary** role)
- b. has **fundamentally altered** the way in which we communicate
26. What role do you believe communication plays in the success or failure of any company?

Any other comments?

We appreciate the time you have taken to fill in this questionnaire and hope the results will help us provide students with relevant and appropriate communication training. Thank you! Would you like feedback on these results? Yes..... No.....

If you have received this questionnaire by e-mail attachment, you may return it to us on-line. If a hard copy was posted to you, please fax your completed questionnaire or return it to us in the stamped, addressed envelope provided. For further information, please contact Project Co-ordinator, Terri Grant, Professional Communication Unit, Career Development Programme, Centre for Higher Education Development, University of Cape Town, Private Bag, Rondebosch, 7701, South Africa.

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Appendix 1d Student questionnaire (2002)

PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATION UNIT Management Studies PCU101S

Summary of Results: Communication Needs Analysis in Business Course Assessment Questionnaire

Terri Grant, your course convenor, is conducting a Communication Needs Analysis in Business and Industry. Changes in higher education development, curriculum transformation and the global needs of the 'knowledge economy' are some of the key issues which inform this investigation into the communication needs of commerce graduates. Faced with growing student numbers, a diverse student population and the focus today on 'outcomes-based' learning, staff need to engage with various stakeholders – students, faculty staff and professionals in the workplace - so that decisions around curriculum design, content and approach remain informed and relevant.

The focus is on 'communicative competence': knowledge and skills that are seen and valued as contextually appropriate and effective. So far, three surveys have been conducted. In total, just over 1000 questionnaires were distributed to students, staff and graduates in the workplace. Two hundred and sixty completed questionnaires were received, just over 25%. The aim of each questionnaire was to answer the following over-riding question:

PCU101S 2001 students: what do you think you need to know?

Commerce faculty staff (2002): what do you think your students need to know?

Business professional (2002): what do you believe is actually required?

The aim of this questionnaire is to ask you: are you getting what workplace graduates believe are necessary communication skills and expertise?

Name: _____

Special Field: _____

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS (coded questions only) plus questions

1. How would you describe a 'communicatively competent' graduate?

2. **Finding:** Most 'commonly' used written communication channels are email, reports, letters/memos. Most 'commonly' used oral channels are telephone, meetings (both formal and informal small group) and face to face. The latter is the most 'popular' channel of communication.

Do you think a) your degree programme as a whole, and b) this course in particular, equips you to handle these channels effectively?

a) Degree course

Absolutely	Mostly	Somewhat	Seldom	Not at all
1.	2.	3.	4.	5.

In what way?

b) PCU

Absolutely	Mostly	Somewhat	Seldom	Not at all
1.	2.	3.	4.	5.

In what way?

3. **Finding:** Most common 'direction' of internal communication is horizontal (with colleagues) and externally with customers and clients. Most common 'source' of commissioning work (e.g. reports) is superior (internal) but customers (external) also important.

Do you think a) your degree programme as a whole, and b) this course in particular, helps you with audience analysis in terms of working with colleagues and superiors, handling differences in status and fulfilling Terms of Reference requests professionally?

a) degree programme

Absolutely	Mostly	Somewhat	Seldom	Not at all
1.	2.	3.	4.	5.

In what way?

b) PCU

Absolutely	Mostly	Somewhat	Seldom	Not at all
1.	2.	3.	4.	5.

In what way?

4. **Finding:** Most popular types of graphic aids are tables, followed by line graphs, bar charts and diagrams. Over 60% of respondents 'always' or 'mostly' use graphic aids. Visual aids also 'mostly' used in oral presentations. Most popular is laptop/data projector followed by OHP, flipchart then whiteboard.

Do you think a) your degree programme as a whole, and b) this course in particular, helps you to acquire the skills of selecting, executing and presenting graphic and visual aids in both written documents and oral presentations?

a) degree programme

Absolutely	Mostly	Somewhat	Seldom	Not at all
1.	2.	3.	4.	5.

In what way?

b) PCU

Absolutely	Mostly	Somewhat	Seldom	Not at all
1.	2.	3.	4.	5.

In what way?

5. **Finding:** Fifty-five percent of report-writing activities are ‘individual’ (sole responsibility), 45% are ‘team written’ with about a 50/50 split in sole overall editorship (the boss) as opposed to ‘joint team control’. Oral presentations: individual and group presentations both commonly used with ‘joint control’ more often used than ‘sole responsibility’.

Do you think a) your degree programme as a whole, and b) this course in particular, helps to prepare you for group work (both written and oral)?

a) degree programme

Absolutely	Mostly	Somewhat	Seldom	Not at all
1.	2.	3.	4.	5.

In what way?

b) PCU

Absolutely	Mostly	Somewhat	Seldom	Not at all
1.	2.	3.	4.	5.

In what way?

6. **Finding:** Of 26 sub-categories for ‘curriculum inclusion’, the following rank as the ‘top 5’ arenas in terms of syllabus content:

Student: report writing, presentation skills, business plans, document graphic aids and presentation visual aids;

Staff: listening, report writing, business plans, presentation skills, email

Professional: listening, presentation skills, email, report writing, body language/ informal group discussion (share 5th spot).

Do you think a) your degree programme as a whole, and b) this course in particular, helps you to ‘cover’ these arenas?

a) degree programme

Absolutely	Mostly	Somewhat	Seldom	Not at all
1.	2.	3.	4.	5.

In what way?

b) PCU

Absolutely	Mostly	Somewhat	Seldom	Not at all
1.	2.	3.	4.	5.

In what way?

7. **Finding:** Female and English second language respondents view communication as a whole and intercultural and diversity issues in particular as more important than do white male respondents. This included both verbal and non-verbal areas (e.g. listening, body language, tone, etc.)

Do you think a) your degree programme as a whole, and b) this course in particular, helps you to become aware of gender and intercultural perceptions and expectations and the discrepancies and tensions that may arise?

a) degree programme

Absolutely	Mostly	Somewhat	Seldom	Not at all
1.	2.	3.	4.	5.

In what way?

b) PCU

Absolutely	Mostly	Somewhat	Seldom	Not at all
1.	2.	3.	4.	5.

In what way?

8. **Finding:** Feelings on role/impact of technology on communication are pretty evenly divided and uninfluenced by gender with 52% of professionals believing that technology and 'new media' have not fundamentally changed the way we communicate, that human communication demands and concerns are basically unchanged and that Computer-mediated communications provide ancillary/complementary channels to communication without "altering the landscape" too much. Responses on electronic and Internet communications are highly variable invoking strong positive/negative reactions, especially e-mail.

Do you think a) your degree programme as a whole, and b) this course in particular, helps you to participate in the debates around the use/abuse of electronic and cellular communications in order to engage with these issues advantageously?

a) degree programme

Absolutely	Mostly	Somewhat	Seldom	Not at all
1.	2.	3.	4.	5.

In what way?

b) PCU

Absolutely	Mostly	Somewhat	Seldom	Not at all
1.	2.	3.	4.	5.

In what way?

9. **Finding:** Organisational health: Over 90% of respondents feel that effective communication plays a critical role in the economic well-being of any company and is crucially relevant to its long-term success.

Given the above findings and your initial description/definition of a communicatively competent graduate, do you think a) your degree programme as a whole, and b) this course in particular, has helped/is helping you to reach that goal?

a) degree programme

Absolutely	Mostly	Somewhat	Seldom	Not at all
1.	2.	3.	4.	5.

In what way?

b) PCU

Absolutely	Mostly	Somewhat	Seldom	Not at all
1.	2.	3.	4.	5.

In what way?

10. Any other comments?

The following questions relate more directly to the PCU course you have just finished. Your comments should be made in the light of what you learnt (personally/as a group) as well as whether you believe the course has practical value in your degree and future career. Your honest and constructive feedback will help shape future courses.

- What aspects of the course (content & approach) in written/oral/group communication were
 - Most helpful to you?

 - Least helpful to you?
- What comments can you offer about the way the course was structured (input lectures in week 1 until groups organised, then workshops)?
- What comments can you offer about the way the course was organised and run?
- How did you experience the course convenor's/workshop leader's attitude to you, the course atmosphere and the relationship with the group and class?
- Comment on the quality of course and teaching material (pink timetable/notes/ exercise manual and new PCU handbook, Communicating @ Work).
- Comment on the practical exercises and oral, group and written assignments.

Terri Grant, Course Convenor

Thank you for you time – your input is gratefully received!

Good luck with your exams

Appendix 2: Business Communication Needs Analysis: Themes and angles for coding purposes and final correlation. Open-ended questionnaire and interview questions will be correlated separately.

A. Student questionnaire:

Overall question:

- What do they think they need to know? (based on vacation work and/or expectation/perception)

Specific questions:

- Ratio of male to female respondents?
- Number who have had work experience: Y/N
- Any gender associations with work experience?
- Top 3 'favourite' channels versus gender, i.e. do females/males list different channels?
- What are considered most important overall areas for tertiary curriculum inclusion (Oral; Interpersonal; Group; written (traditional); written (electronic)?
- Of 26 sub-categories, what are top 5 (by total)?
- Any gender trends in what is considered important?
- Role of technology: Y/N (fundamental versus ancillary). Again, any link to gender?
- Rating of communication as factor in success/failure of company? Yes/Somewhat/No.

B. Staff questionnaire:

Overall question:

- What do they think students need to know? (based on own prior job experience or expectation/perception)

Specific questions:

- Male/female ratio?
- Work experience: academic only or commercial experience?
- Favourite channels? Any link to gender? (see above)
- Effective channels? Any correlation to favourite? Gender?
- What are considered most important overall areas for tertiary curriculum inclusion (Oral/Interpersonal; Group; written (traditional); written (electronic)?
- Of 26 sub-categories, what are top 5 (by total)?
- Any gender trends in what is considered important?
- Role of technology: Y/N (fundamental versus ancillary). Again, any link to gender?
- Rating of communication to success/failure of company (Y/S/N?)

C. Professional Questionnaire:

Overall question:

- What do they think is actually required in the workplace? (based on own job experience)

Specific questions:

- Male/female ratio?
- Average work experience and average time in current position?
- Employed or self-employed? Job status?
- Size of organization? (Any link to gender for above?)

- Main directions of communication (up/down/lateral)?
- Perceived success with channels?
- Most commonly used written and oral/interpersonal channels of communication?
- Preferred/favourite channels? Effective channels?
- Any correlation to favourite? (Any link to gender for above?)

- External communication: Target? Common channels? Gender association?

- Source of work (i.e. who commissions tasks)? Gender association?

- Use of graphic and visual aids: Frequency? Type? Equipment? Gender association?

- Allocation of work responsibility: Written/Oral? Preparation/Execution? Individual/Partnership/Team? Gender association?

- Telephone use (landline versus cellular)? Gender association?

- What are considered most important overall areas for tertiary curriculum inclusion (Oral/Interpersonal; Group; written (traditional); written (electronic)?
- Of 26 sub-categories, what are top 5 (by total)?
- Any gender trends in what is considered important?

- Role of technology: Y/N (fundamental versus ancillary). Again, any link to gender?

- Rating of communication to success/failure of company (Y/S/N?)

(Any correlations to student and staff questionnaire results?)

Appendix 3: Statistical methodology: Phase one

A brief description of the statistical methodology employed

The type of questions answered took the following form:

1. What are the characteristics of certain variables of interest?
2. Are two variables of interest associated with one another?
3. Does the average level of a variable of interest differ between two groups?

The methodology employed in answering these questions depends on the nature of the variables of interest. Different methodologies are employed depending on whether the variable is measured on a categorical scale (i.e. responses may be one of a discrete number of categories, for example 'male/female') or an interval scale (i.e. responses may be any number in a specific interval, for example 'size or organisation'). All statistical analyses were performed in Statistica, with graphics subsequently produced in Microsoft Excel.

Data Manipulation

Many of the questions asked the respondent to choose three alternatives from the set of options and to rank them according to the nature of the question (favourite, most effective, etc). Where this occurred, each rank was firstly treated separately i.e. an analysis on the first rank, second rank and third rank was performed independently. However, in order to get a more balanced view of the results, a constructed 'vote index' was subsequently analysed (on 7-page questionnaire for professionals). This index was constructed by allocating 3 votes to an option selected as best, 2 votes to an alternative selected as second-best, and 1 vote to an alternative selected as third-best. The number of votes for each option was then computed by summing across the three rank positions.

Data Analysis

Part 1: Descriptive Statistics

The first question was easily considered using basic descriptive statistics. Where the questions demanded categorical rather than continuous responses, the descriptive statistics took the form of frequency tables. Where the responses were continuous (i.e. number of years working, etc) means and standard deviations were computed. The mean is a measure of the average value within a group, while the standard deviation is a measure of the variability around that mean i.e. how similar the values obtained from a group are.

Part 2: Tests of Association

Two categorical variables

In order to test whether two categorical variables are related to one another, the chi-squared test of association was used. If variable A has m categories and variable B has n categories, the chi-squared test of association sets up an $m \times n$ frequency table on which the following hypothesis is tested:

H_0 : The two variables are independent i.e. no relationship exists
 H_1 : There exists a significant relationship between the two variables

A p-value less than 0.05 therefore implies a rejection of the null hypothesis H_0 and the conclusion that a significant relationship exists. Once a significant relationship has been established, the frequency table can be scrutinised to establish the nature of the relationship (i.e. senior managers tend to be male, females prefer telephone communication, etc).

Two continuous variables

The correlation statistic is a number between -1 and $+1$ indicating the degree of association between two continuous variables. A correlation of -1 indicates a perfect negative relationship between the two variables (an increase of x units in variable A will cause a decrease of y units in variable B). A correlation of $+1$ indicates a perfect positive relationship between the two variables (an increase of x units in variable A will cause an increase of y units in variable B). A correlation of 0 implies that there is absolutely no relationship between the two variables.

In the context of social research, one cannot expect extremely high correlations (± 0.9 or even closer to ± 1) because the concepts tested are by nature fuzzier and more difficult to measure. A correlation of above 0.4 could be considered enough to warrant comment or further attention. It is, however, important to remember that correlation is a sliding scale, and that there is no definitive cut-off. Interesting relationships may be noted even if they do not have a great strength. It is extremely important to note that correlation implies only the existence of an association, not any direction of causality.

The most widely-used type of correlation coefficient is Pearson's r , which determines the extent to which values of the two variables are "proportional" to each other. Proportional means linearly related; that is, the correlation is high if it can be "summarized" by a straight line (sloped upwards or downwards).

The hypothesis can be tested:

H_0 : The correlation is zero (i.e. no relationship exists)
 H_1 : The correlation is significantly different from zero (i.e. some relationship exists)

An associated p-value of less than 0.05 therefore indicates that the correlation is statistically significantly different from zero. It does not mean that the correlation is strong – a correlation of as little as 0.1 can be considered different from zero with even a smallish sample size. It

just means that there is enough evidence to conclusively say that there is *some* degree of association.

Part 3: Comparing two groups

One categorical variable (the groups) and one continuous variable

When comparing the means of two groups (the average number of years in employment, levels of seniority, anything, the formal hypothesis that is tested is:

H_0 : The averages in group 1 and group 2 are equal.

H_1 : The averages in group 1 and group 2 are not equal.

If the p-value associated with the t-test is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis H_0 is rejected and it can be stated that the averages are significantly different from one another. It is then necessary to inspect the average to conclude which group is in fact higher than the other.

For the purposes of this analysis the rating of various communication areas across groups was compared (almost exclusively male/female groups, but also actuarial/non-actuarial students in the 2002 student questionnaire). Although the communication areas were rated on a 5-point categorical scale (1-5), the variables were treated as continuous, so that it was possible to obtain a mean rating and associated standard deviation for each communication area. On the basis of these values, it was possible to test the hypotheses above.

Initially, the 26 communication areas were divided into four categories for closer evaluation: oral/interpersonal, group/team, written (traditional), written (electronic). For each category, an average rating was computed by taking the average of all the communication areas making up the category. The categories were then tested for group-specific behaviour in the manner outlined above. Following these initial t-tests, each communication area was treated individually in order to see which, if any, had elicited different reactions from males and females.

Some extra information I: confirmatory analyses

Much of statistical analysis is phrased in terms of hypothesis testing: testing certain preconceived notions that one has about relationships against the sample data that has been collected. This is known as a confirmatory analysis: correlations, chi-squared tests of association, and t-tests are all confirmatory analyses. As such it is important to know precisely *what* hypotheses are being tested. The actual way that the hypothesis is phrased for the statistical test might not be exactly the same as the qualitative hypothesis that reflects reality.

For example, if one wants to compare the average length of time males and females have been in senior positions, the actual statistical hypothesis tested is *always*:

The average length of time of males and females in senior positions is equal.

This hypothesis is tested using a t-test. If the test returns a p-level (probability level or significance level) of MORE THAN 0.05 then the hypothesis is accepted as true. If the test returns a p-level (probability level or significance level) of LESS THAN 0.05 then the hypothesis is rejected and the opposite is true: in this case that males and females have DIFFERENT average time periods. There would then have to be some further investigation to say which group was higher/longer (by looking at the averages, for example). Most confirmatory analyses will proceed in this way i.e. (1) formulate hypothesis (2) test hypothesis (3) investigate implications.

Some extra information II: significance levels

Statistics concerns making statements or inferences about a broad population (business graduates in South Africa, perhaps) based on a small sample of that population (102 UCT graduates). As such there is always going to be some uncertainty as to whether the statements that are made about the sample group apply to the greater population. The significance level quantifies this uncertainty, with increasing uncertainty being reflected in higher significance percentages (which is termed 'lower significance' i.e. a 1% significance level is higher (has less uncertainty) than a 10% significance level. For whatever reasons a 5% significance level has been almost universally accepted as the cut off for a significant relationship. For this reason all the tests looked at in this study drew their conclusions based on whether or not the p-value was less than 0.05. However, it must be emphasised that the 5% significance level has no real importance on its own. The level of significance exhibited by a result is a sliding scale of its 'importance' – in this sense a result with a p-value of 0.08 (as in the case of fairness in the regression model) is 'less significant' than a result with a p-value of 0.02, but should not be ignored purely on the basis that it is greater than 0.05. A better approach would be to consider those effects that are significant at the 5% level (as the major focus of attention), and then to consider those that are between 5% and 10% significance. Results with p-values greater than 0.10 are probably not worth mentioning

Appendix 4: Extra questions (for interview/general discussion):

1. As the (add title/position of person being interviewed), what, in your opinion, are the most important communication principles for any business and/or business person to adhere to, given the so-called 'new', 'knowledge' or 'global' economy?
2. What are the key communicative opportunities in business at this time?
3. What are the major communicative challenges and risks to business at this time?
4. There is an unprecedented growth of information volumes in today's world. Global inequality and disparity, however, make access problematic, especially on this continent. What are your thoughts on:
 - Obstacles/challenges/opportunities?
 - Role of business (large and small)?
5. How do you feel about governance issues and transnational accountability when it comes to global communications. How does this relate to business ethics, codes of conduct/legislation, etc?
6. There is a move afoot to privatise the electromagnetic spectrum (EMS) which could lead to (Western) corporate control over media, Internet and cellular communications. What implications could this hold for content prevalence and bias, intercultural issues, language policy, censorship? (Link questions to Internet/cellular use, issues around electronic 'democracy' and gatekeeping)
7. In the final analysis, what should we be telling/teaching our students about business communications? Internally? Externally? Globally? As employees of SMME or large multinationals?
8. Any other thoughts?

Appendix 5: Statistical Comparison between actuarial and non-actuarial students (2002) – Phase two

Results of the 2002 Student Questionnaires

1 Basic Responses

- Question 2: PCU favourably evaluated (77% in absolutely or mostly categories), Degree averagely (46%)
- Question 3: PCU favourably evaluated (65% in absolutely or mostly categories), Degree averagely (42%)
- Question 4: PCU favourably evaluated (73% in absolutely or mostly categories), Degree averagely (50%)
- Question 5: PCU favourably evaluated (71% in absolutely or mostly categories), Degree averagely (54%)
- Question 6: PCU favourably evaluated (77% in absolutely or mostly categories), Degree fairly poorly evaluated (40%)
- Question 7: PCU poorly evaluated (25% in absolutely or mostly categories), Degree also poor (13%)
- Question 8: PCU poorly evaluated (18% in absolutely or mostly categories), Degree averagely (44%)
- Question 9: PCU favourably evaluated (68% in absolutely or mostly categories), Degree averagely (49%)

2 Differences between Actuarial and Non-actuarial students

- Actuarial students rated the covering of question 2 in their degree significantly worse than non-actuarial students
- Actuarial students rated the covering of question 3 in the PCU course significantly **better** than non-actuarial students
- Actuarial students rated the covering of question 4 in their degree significantly worse than non-actuarial students
- Actuarial students rated the covering of question 4 in the PCU course significantly **better** than non-actuarial students
- Actuarial students rated the covering of question 5 in their degree significantly worse than non-actuarial students
- Actuarial students rated the covering of question 6 in their degree significantly worse than non-actuarial students
- Actuarial students rated the covering of question 8 in their degree significantly worse than non-actuarial students
- Actuarial students rated the covering of question 8 in the PCU course significantly **better** than non-actuarial students
- Actuarial students rated the covering of question 9 in their degree significantly worse than non-actuarial students

Generally then, it is quite clear that actuarial science students have more negative perceptions of the communicative components of their degree (specifically those components relating to question 2, 4, 5, 8 and 9) relative to other students in the group. Other than their PCU course,

these students receive very little exposure to communicative competence issues elsewhere in their degree curriculum. Their ratings of PCU were therefore very favourable.

Three Associations between Degree Rating and PCU Rating

This analysis was undertaken to test the idea that if a student receives good training within his or her degree with respect to an aspect of communication then they would perceive PCU to be **less** successful in teaching that aspect, whereas if they receive little or no training in that aspect, they would rate the PCU provision of that aspect as **good** or **excellent**. This would imply a **negative** association or a **negative correlation** between degree score and PCU score for each question i.e. a high degree score implies a low PCU score, and a low degree score implies a high PCU score.

A brief explanation of the correlation statistic

The correlation statistic tests to what extent two variables are associated. It varies between -1 (indicating a perfect negative association i.e. variable 1 goes **up** by x implies variable 2 goes **down** by y) to $+1$ (indicating a perfect positive correlation i.e. variable 1 goes **up** by x implies variable 2 goes **up** by y). A correlation of 0 indicates that there is absolutely no association between the two variables. The strength of the association increases as one moves from 0 to the extremes of the scale (-1 or $+1$). For social research a correlation of greater than 0.4 or less than -0.4 is indicative of a reasonably strong relationship. Correlations between -0.2 and $+0.2$ are not strong enough to be of any interest.

The correlation statistics indicating the degree of association between the degree and PCU coverage of each question are presented in the table below.

	Everyone	ACT	NON-ACT
Question 2	0.14	0.07	0.21
Question 3	0.11	0.14	0.13
Question 4	-0.03	-0.06	0.02
Question 5	0.19	0.13	0.27
Question 6	0.13	0.00	0.18
Question 7	0.61	0.52	0.65
Question 8	0.28	0.68	0.23
Question 9	0.29	0.17	0.38

If the previously outlined hypothesis of negative association were true, there would be many more negative correlations. This is not the case – in fact most of the correlations are definitively positive, indicating a positive relationship i.e. the student who rates the degree highly will also tend to rate PCU highly and vice versa. This positive relationship is particularly strong for question 7 (cultural issues). There is only real difference between the actuarial and non-actuarial students for question 8 (technology issues) where there is a **stronger positive association** between perceptions of degree and PCU in the actuarial group than in the non-actuarial group.