Impact of Communication Skills on Professional Effectiveness at the Top Level of Hierarchy

Sandeep Atre, Sangeeta Jain and Vivek Sharma

Sandeep Atre, Director, CH EdgeMakers and Research Scholar, 
1IMS, DAVV, Indore.
2/2, South Tukoganj, Behind Silver Mall, RNT Marg, Indore, Sangeeta Jain. 
2Professor, Institute of Management Studies (IMS, DAVV) Indore. 
DAVV Takshshila Campus, Khandwa Road, Indore.
3Faculty, Institute of Management Studies (IMS, DAVV) Indore 
DAVV Takshshila Campus, Khandwa Road, Indore

Abstract

With evolving organizational structures, growing professionalism at workplace, ever-rising intervention of technology and increasing specialization in the definition of ‘job’, the contemporary corporate, in order to measure effectiveness, requires a holistic concept, namely ‘Professional Effectiveness’, which lays at the intersection of ‘Managerial Effectiveness’ and ‘Executive Effectiveness’. On the other hand, in almost every list that enumerates the qualities solicited in an effective professional, ‘Communication Skills’ indubitably features in the top ones. This term ‘Communication Skills’ has outgrown the vague notion in the layman terms and has felicitously taken shape of an integrated concept with each of its constituent elements – verbal, nonverbal and interpersonal. The paper makes a case for the ‘revived attention towards’ and ‘further delving into’ ‘Professional Effectiveness’ and conducts an inquiry into the impact of ‘Communication Skills’ on it, specifically at the top level of the hierarchy. This inquiry becomes even more important in the backdrop of unique complexities and multidimensional nature of the contemporary corporate, as today there are very few absolute advantages available in the market place, and the effectiveness is progressively becoming a function of the ability of the ‘people at the top’ to create an empowering ecosystem that enables the professionals throughout the organizational structure to render themselves effective.
It is needless to say that in such pursuit, ‘communication skills’ play a pivotal role and studying its impact is of utmost significance.

**Keywords:** Communication Skills, Professional Effectiveness and ‘Effectiveness at Top level of hierarchy’

1. **Introduction**

   In profession, eventually everything stands to serve the purpose of bringing efficiency and effectiveness. And with growing mechanization and technology evolving at the rate of the thought, the efficiency can be ‘taken care of’ only if the entity in charge – the professional – is effective enough. We can reach an operational concept of professional effectiveness as “It is the ability to manage both tasks as well as relationships. It includes both core-skills and soft-skills. Moreover, it means ability to successfully deal with all the aspects of one’s current responsibilities at workplace while still being progressive in approach. It covers one’s contributiveness both as an individual and as a member of the team and the organization”.

   In this context of ‘Effectiveness’, traditionally the focus of professional-world had been on the so-called "hard" skills - the technical skills necessary to effectively perform within the organization. Today however, profession craves people with the critical soft skills. These are skills key to effective performance across all job categories. One soft skill that features towards the top of all the lists required in effective professional is ‘Communication Skills’. Communication Skills’ is the ability to convey a message along with the feeling behind it, for purpose of the desired effect. Thus, it includes various aspects of conveying - verbal, nonverbal and interpersonal.

   With this increased focus on ‘effectiveness’, it is only logical that to earn its rightful place as the key member of a professional’s repertoire, the set of skills known as ‘Communication Skills’ has to prove its impacting relationship with ‘effectiveness’. Although a generic acknowledgement exists on their being immensely symbiotic at the front level and middle level of the hierarchy, there is clearly a definite need of a formal study of “The impact of Communication-Skills on Professional-Effectiveness at the Top Level of Hierarchy”.

2. **Research Methodology**

   The sample comprised of 57 professionals from the top level of hierarchy, selected randomly from the organizations in and around Indore in MP. The primary data required for the purpose of study was collected through two instruments developed by the researchers, one each for Communication Skills and Professional Effectiveness. The items/statements were employed on five-point Likert Scale ranging from ‘Rarely (1)’ to ‘Always (5)’ to come up with the final instruments. In the scale of ‘Communication Skills’, items were present for each of its components viz. Nonverbal, Verbal and Interpersonal Communication Skills. The instruments were bilingual, i.e.
developed in both English as well as Hindi, treating the term ‘communication skills’ as a variable much beyond just ‘English language’; and to cater to the targeted respondents, coming from varied industries and strata of society.

The reliability for the ‘Communication Skills’ scale was found to be 0.844 and the reliability for the ‘Professional Effectiveness’ scale was found to be 0.893. The content validity of the scales was high as the scales were developed on the basis of thorough review of literature and with the help of a panel of 30 experts. The data collected from 57 respondents for both the scales was entered in the MS Excel Sheet 2007. The analysis was carried out by applying the statistical tool ANOVA, using Windows-based Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). In the light of the objective of the study, following hypotheses were formulated:

**H01:** There is no significant impact of ‘Communication Skills’ on ‘Professional Effectiveness’ at Top level of hierarchy.

**H02:** There is no significant impact of ‘Verbal Communication Skills’ on ‘Professional Effectiveness’ at Top level of hierarchy.

**H03:** There is no significant impact of ‘Nonverbal Communication Skills’ on ‘Professional Effectiveness’ at Top level of hierarchy.

**H04:** There is no significant impact of ‘Interpersonal Communication Skills’ on ‘Professional Effectiveness’ at Top level of hierarchy.

### 3. Results & Discussion

The hypotheses that were formulated (enumerated in previous section) have been tested and the following results were found:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regression</td>
<td>2481.065</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2481.065</td>
<td>20.462</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residual</td>
<td>6668.935</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>121.253</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>9150.000</td>
<td>56</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On the basis of the results of statistical analysis, the null hypothesis **H01 stands rejected**. It means that there is a significant impact of ‘Communication Skills’ on ‘Professional Effectiveness’, in terms of Top level of hierarchy.
Table 1.2: Output for statistical analysis for $H_{02}$

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regression</td>
<td>1746.241</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1746.241</td>
<td>12.972</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residual</td>
<td>7403.759</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>134.614</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>9150.000</td>
<td>56</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On the basis of the results of statistical analysis, the null hypothesis $H_{02}$ stands rejected. It means that there is a significant impact of ‘Verbal Communication Skills’ on ‘Professional Effectiveness’, in terms of Top level of hierarchy.

Table 1.3: Output for statistical analysis for $H_{03}$

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regression</td>
<td>1475.517</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1475.517</td>
<td>10.574</td>
<td>.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residual</td>
<td>7674.483</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>139.536</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>9150.000</td>
<td>56</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On the basis of the results of statistical analysis, the null hypothesis $H_{03}$ stands rejected. It means that there is a significant impact of ‘Nonverbal Communication Skills’ on ‘Professional Effectiveness’, in terms of Top level of hierarchy.

Table 1.4: Output for statistical analysis for $H_{04}$

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regression</td>
<td>1738.412</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1738.412</td>
<td>12.900</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residual</td>
<td>7411.588</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>134.756</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>9150.000</td>
<td>56</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On the basis of the results of statistical analysis, the null hypothesis $H_{04}$ stands rejected. It means that there is a significant impact of ‘Interpersonal Communication Skills’ on ‘Professional Effectiveness’, in terms of Top level of hierarchy.

The results seem to be in line with the expectations from the profile of this level which includes more strategizing and one-way communication. It is in tune with spirit of the previous researchers but does vary a bit in terms of extent & intensity. For instance, Squazzo (2007) who, in his paper on “Becoming a leader in the C-Suite: How to develop the necessary skills”, quotes that the interpersonal communication skills are
Impact of Communication Skills on Professional Effectiveness

mandatory. Leaders must have this skill set so they can deal with a variety of different personalities, including those of the staff and the community. In addition, Squazzo (2007) opines that one has to learn to lead the multigenerational work force we have today. The ability to relate with people and communicate messages—both good and bad—is critical. You have to be able to do it in a way that people think you are doing it with sincerity and integrity. You have to be able to communicate your organizations mission and vision and get people to buy into it. In a way, communication skills are integrally tied to your ability to develop trust.

Jablin (1979) in his research on communication patterns at various levels of management found out that 1) Higher-level managers spend more time communicating than do lower-level managers. 2) Higher-level managers employ staff conferences more than do lower-level managers. 3) Higher-level managers use face-to-face communication and the telephone more frequently than do lower-level managers. 4) Higher-level managers communicate externally more than do lower-level managers. According to Jablin (1979), Lower-, middle-, and upper-level managers also communicated for significantly different purposes. The lower the level of management, the more episodes in which the purpose was to send or receive information! Second, middle-level managers communicated more often for the purposes of controlling and socializing, but less often for the purpose of organizing. Last, upper-level managers did more planning but less socializing than did the other two levels of management.

Many studies have concluded that higher levels of management communicate more frequently than lower levels (Davis, 1953; Hinrichs, 1964; Lee, 1971). These managers may not be capable of processing all information received during this communication and, thus, are susceptible to information overload. According to Hawkins and Preston (1981), overload is a function of the organization structure. Numerous subordinates send messages to a limited number of superiors Oral Communication in Banks causing upper management to be the main sufferers of information overload. Thus, it is important for these managers to be thoughtful and skillful in communication. Moreover, upper-level managers tended to communicate most frequently from their offices. The demands of their jobs may not allow them to leave their offices except to attend scheduled meetings held elsewhere. However, Peters and Waterman (1982) stated that effective companies used a management style called "management by wandering around." According to these two authors, by frequently walking through their own and other departments and by stopping to talk with various employees, managers are able to stay informed and can handle problems as they occur. A second advantage of this practice is that it provides workers with the opportunity for upward communication which has been found to be related to worker loyalty and effectiveness (Planty & Machaver, 1952). It also gives the workers a chance to know and understand top management better. Improved employee perceptions of top management should result in improved performance (Pincus, 1986).
4. Conclusion
People at the top level of hierarchy have a complex set of KRAs (Key Result Areas) and Deliverables. Thus, they need to demonstrate professional effectiveness - a concept that incorporates both the fiercely ‘individual perspective’ of executive effectiveness and the ‘holistic nature’ of managerial effectiveness. ‘Communication Skills’, with its components viz. verbal, nonverbal and interpersonal, play an important role in this regard as it is the most crucial element in their pursuit of being the flag-bearers, role-models and conscience-keepers. The current study, in spite of its obvious limitations in terms of setting, scale and orbit, goes on to prove through statistical analysis that there is a significant impact of Communication Skills on Professional Effectiveness at Top Level of hierarchy.

References