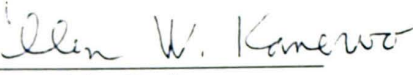


BUSINESS STUDENTS' RATINGS OF CIVIL COMMUNICATIONS
IN THE WORKPLACE

SARAH E. WALLACE WHEELER

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I am submitting herewith a Thesis written by Sarah E. Wallace Wheeler entitled "Business Students' Ratings of Civil Communication in the Workplace." I have examined the final copy of this Thesis for form and content, and I recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in Communication Arts.



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Business Students' Ratings of Civil Communication in the Workplace

A Thesis

Presented to the
Graduate and Research Council of
Austin Peay State University

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

By
Sarah E. Wallace Wheeler

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ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to examine what opinions current students had about the importance of civil communication in the workplace. A questionnaire was administered to 183 undergraduate upper classmen business students at Austin Peay State University. This sample was chosen because these students would have had introductory speech and communication classes and upper division business courses. The results of the survey concluded these students viewed civil communication as more important for career advancement over job related skills and assertiveness. Also, the results indicated these students perceived assertiveness to be more essential in the work place as opposed to job related skills.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
LIST OF TABLES	v
CHAPTER	
1. INTRODUCTION	1
2. LITERATURE REVIEW	7
3. METHODOLOGY	21
4. RESULTS	24
5. CONCLUSION	31
REFERENCES	35
APPENDIX A	41
APPENDIX B	44

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE		PAGE
1.	Responses to Individual Survey Questions	25
2.	Comparing Mean Results of Preferences for Civility, Assertiveness, and Job Related Skills	30

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Communication is used in all professional, social, and personal relationships (Rubin, Rubin, and Piele, 1996). “Although communication has been defined in a variety of ways, when we define it as the process through which meaning and social reality are created, many things become communication events” (Rubin, et al., 1996, p. 6).

Communication is essential for establishing, building, and maintaining contact with other individuals (Rubin, et al., 1996). Communication is an essential link to connect oneself with others. Being able to communicate with others is one of the most valuable tools individuals can possess and practice.

In the past few years, there has been discussion about how our society has moved from a civil to an uncivil society and how it is affecting how people relate to others (Marks, 1996). Current literature suggests that people are not acting civilly towards one another. Civility is a crucial element people need to understand and incorporate into their communication practices and conversations.

Some scholars and journalists argue that our nation is experiencing a decline in civility (Marty, 1997). Civility is a skill individuals need to use when communicating with others (Gurstein, 1998). Kennedy (1998) describes civility as “courtesy, respectability, self-control, regard for others—a willingness to conduct oneself according to socially approved rules even when one would like to do otherwise” (p. 24).

Marty (1997) stated that citizens in our nation do not act civilly towards one another. Some critics claim that this decline in civility is a backlash from the social and

political changes that took place in the 1960s (Kennedy, 1998). Carvell (1996) suggests Miss Manners, Judith Martin, has observed the effects of deteriorating business etiquette, which is contributing to various problems in the workplace. Martin says that employees tend to act according to how they feel instead of what is socially acceptable (Carvell, 1996).

The purpose for this research is to examine whether future business leaders believe civil communication is an essential skill individuals should possess to aid them in advancing in their careers. Does a link exist between their perceptions of the importance of civility and assertiveness for career advancement? This thesis will empirically test to see if business school students agree that acting civilly in business situations is more important for career advancement than assertiveness or job related skills.

Research Questions

Three research questions will be investigated in this study.

RQ1: Do business students view civil communication as more important than job related skills for career advancement?

RQ2: Do business students view civil communication as more important than assertiveness for career advancement?

RQ3: Do business students view assertiveness as more important than job related skills for career advancement?

The following is a definition of terms. These words will be used throughout the content of this paper. Civility is “a courteous act or utterance” (Webster, 1984, p. 266). Baby Boomers are individuals who were born between the years of 1946 to 1964

(Dunn-Cane, Gonzalez, and Stewart, 1999). Generation Xers are individuals who were born between the years of 1965 to 1975 (Dunn-Cane, et al., 1999). Civil communication is being able to communicate with others in a civil and polite manner. Courtesy is “a polite gesture or remark” (Webster, 1984, p. 320). Business etiquette is “the use of basic good manners for treating people, interacting with them, and putting strangers at ease” (Andrica, 1999, p. 63). Aggression is “the application of pressure on another person” (Littlejohn, 1996, p. 109). Assertiveness “involves putting one’s rights forward without hampering other individuals’ rights” (Littlejohn, 1996, p. 109).

Connelly (1994) argues that Generation Xers are not equipped with the essential tools to survive in the workplace because they have been reared in homes that focused on self-centeredness and self-expression. Kidd (1996) made a similar correlation between the current lack of business etiquette and “baby boomers.” Kidd (1996) believes baby boomers ignore the need to observe etiquette and are deficient when it comes to acting and communicating appropriately in some business situations.

Mausehund, Dortch, Brown, and Bridges (1995) stated that professional protocol has not improved much within the last ten years. As cited in Joinson (1997), Sandy Anglin explained how the present make-up of our society encourages people to avoid contact with other people; therefore, people are not interacting and socializing, and civil communication is declining. When civil communication decreases, manners and etiquette naturally follow suit (Kennedy, 1998).

Civility is essential and should be incorporated into all facets of the business environment (Schaffer, Kelley, and Goette, 1993). Civility and courtesy are two things

Connelly (1994) believes are essential elements, which need to remain in business settings. Civility has to be practiced in the workplace (Connelly, 1994). The importance of business etiquette must be considered because of today's politically correct working conditions. As Connelly (1994) observes in our society, people who have the ability to openly hold fast to their opinions without regard for other people's feelings are aggressive people who are rewarded in the end. However, research is showing how business students and corporate employees are beginning to become interested in rejuvenating civility and putting civil communication back into corporate America (Mausehund et al., 1995).

If employees are not treating each other in a civil and professional manner, they may not be treating customers and clients any better (Carvell, 1996). As cited in Joinson (1997), C. Brady Wilson explained how the rules for appropriate business behavior are being enforced because of current laws and policies governing proper social behavior in the office.

Recent college graduates are entering the workforce with the academic credentials to perform various jobs; however, these same college graduates have basically no formal training in how to handle themselves in many business and social settings (Mausehund et al., 1995). Because more business students are entering the workforce socially unprepared to compete and perform, unnecessary social mishaps will occur in the workplace (Mausehund et al., 1995). Baldrige (1985) suggested that young managers are educated, motivated, and intelligent; however, young managers lack the social skills needed to handle various situations in the workplace.

Mausehund et al. (1995) conducted a survey to assess what knowledge and questions currently enrolled business communications majors possessed on the issue of business etiquette. The survey revealed that the students had the most questions and concerns about job interviewing, interpersonal relationships in the workplace, and social issues pertaining to the workplace (Mausehund et al., 1995). The findings of the survey argue for incorporating various practical applications skills into business curriculums pertaining to interviewing, interpersonal skills, and protocol to help the students gain the confidence to successfully compete in the workplace (Mausehund et al., 1995).

The Mausehund et al. (1995) research helps to point out that communication is a crucial skill in the workplace and that individuals are concerned and cautious of being able to communicate properly in any situation. Teaching individuals how to effectively communicate with co-workers, supervisors, and clients in a civilized manner is the most valuable skill employers need to instill in their employees and model for their employees. If individuals have been trained adequately in using appropriate oral and written communication skills, there is more time to concentrate on productivity because less time is lost due to dealing with trivial matters or situations.

In recent years, researchers have hypothesized that the societal breakthroughs of the 1960s can be associated with the decline of civility in today's society (Kennedy, 1998). Some of these societal breakthroughs included the civil rights movement and the beginning of the feminist movement. Roy (1990) stated that in the 1970s civility began to deteriorate in the business world and the practice of being civil is still neglected today. In the 1970s, there was an emphasis on asserting oneself, and assertiveness training was a

popular practice for educating individuals on how to perform in the working world (Hull and Schroeder, 1979).

As studies have shown, the 1970s and 1980s were a time of training individuals to act assertively to gain career advancement. When researchers began studying assertiveness, they realized the general public associated assertiveness and aggressiveness to mean the same type of behavior (Hull and Schroeder, 1979). By the late 1970s and 1980s, researchers were noticing problems between assertiveness and aggression. Hull and Schroeder (1979) concluded from their research that individuals should not only be trained in assertiveness, but they should also be educated in how to be considerate of others.

Over the last thirty years, many researchers believe our society has experienced a severe decline in our ability and desire to communicate civilly with one another. Marks (1996) made reference to information obtained in a recent poll conducted by U.S. News and World Report. The results of the poll concluded that the general public feels civility has seriously deteriorated even from the 1980s to the 1990s. Because some people misunderstood the meanings of assertion and aggression, this might explain the decline in civility during the last few years. Therefore, individuals began acting aggressively to obtain career success as opposed to acting civilly. However, the 1990s have been an era of showing how it is excellent communication skills, which help individuals work towards career achievements. Hence, some researchers believe we are returning to a more socially aware workplace and society.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

George Washington, an astute businessman in addition to being a military and political leader, summarized the emphasis he put on civil communication: "Every Action done in Company, ought to be with Some Sign of Respect, to those that are Present" (George Washington's Rules of Civility & Decent Behavior in Company and Conversation, 1999, p.1). "Historically, Americans have alternated cycles of ugly behavior with those of admirable decorum. George Washington was famous for his manners, displaying them both at the personal level to show respect to individuals and at the political level to demonstrate respect before the law" (Marks, 1996, p. 70). Gibeaut (1997) pointed out that there has been a recent decline in civility in our legal system. Laws shape the behavior and conduct of our society. Out of respect for our nation's laws, lawyers need to set an example for our citizens and conduct themselves in a professional and civil manner (Pollack, 1998). If individuals, who are responsible for upholding and honoring our nation's laws, are making a mockery out of acting civilly towards their colleagues and clients, what type of example are they setting for the general public?

A recent U.S. News and Bozell Worldwide poll showed that "Nine out of 10 Americans think incivility is a serious problem, and nearly half think it is extremely serious" (Marks, 1996, p. 67). Roy (1990) believed civility began to decline in our nation during the 1970s. Connelly (1994) suggested that civility has declined in our nation because we are seeing the backlash from previous generations that believed in the freedom of openly acting upon and demonstrating one's actions and feelings. Connelly

(1994) explained that organizations are mirroring our society's trend toward being very casual. This casual attitude has encouraged many individuals to focus more on themselves and disregard any notion of helping others (Connelly, 1994). Marks (1996) stated that people, who answered the poll conducted for U.S. News and Bozell Worldwide, felt our society was beginning to lack civility because of a collapsing society. As cited in Connelly (1994), a survey conducted by the Society for Human Resource Management concluded that violence in the workplace had drastically increased between 1989 to 1991, hence, supporting the belief that civility had experienced a decline in the workplace.

Stark (1997) suggested that American society had recently become interested again in acting civilly toward one another. This trend to try to return to a more respectful and civil society is reflective of the recent rebirth of Jane Austen movies and novels, which have been successfully rejuvenated (Stark, 1997). Melrose, Massachusetts, Mayor Patrick Guerriero has instituted various civic projects in his district that have positively encouraged citizens to be courteous and civil toward one another (Zipp, 1999).

People are realizing how much positive influence civility has on their businesses (Ramsey, 1997). Guidelines for social skills help people to be more productive (Roy, 1990). When people understand how to act in social situations, they will feel more relaxed and confident about their actions (Ramsey, 1997), hence, lessening the likelihood of embarrassing or humiliating themselves or others (Ramsey, 1997). Leech (1983) stated that people act politely to preserve social harmony.

In the September 1995 issue of Supervision, Andrew Denke stated politeness is essential for individuals to be able to work productively because they usually have to share equipment and working space. Since most individuals have not been trained to conduct themselves civilly in the workplace, people are inadvertently annoying and burdening one another (Roy, 1990). As cited in Carvell (1996), Judith Martin explains that employees are normally assigned to the people they will work with; therefore, initially they do not have close relationships with their co-workers. Hence, employees need guidelines for behavior (Carvell, 1996).

Why are individuals not acting civilly toward one another? Connelly (1994) explained that due to downsizing, individuals may be expected to carry a larger workload; therefore, individuals are unduly burdened and over extending themselves and do not feel they have the time to act civilly toward one another. Due to the revamping of most companies' infrastructures, individuals may not be aware of who superiors are in their organization (Connelly, 1994). Thus, individuals may not be aware of the appropriate courtesies to extend to their superiors (Connelly, 1994). When people fail to treat each other respectfully and civilly, individuals can become hostile toward one another (Connelly, 1994). Therefore, civil communication should be exercised at all times to help facilitate productive relationships in the workplace (Connelly, 1994).

Adams (1996) noted that businesses are incorporating consultants to help train and educate their employees about building better organizational and civil communication skills. Lakoff (1989) explained that politeness is used to reduce the chances of causing disputes. When employee complaints and outbursts increase,

employers should realize there is a deficiency in civil behavior in the workplace (Joinson, 1997). As cited in Carvell (1996), Judith Martin stated that employers should know how employees communicate with one another because it could be indicative of how they are communicating with clients or customers (Carvell, 1996). Joinson (1997) explained in today's workplace environment it is essential for employees to utilize and demonstrate that they are competent in a civil manner because corporations are in competition for customers; and customers will go where they are treated civilly.

Trinka (1989) conducted research to see if there was or was not a correlation between business and social communication skills. Trinka (1989) confirmed that as societal behaviors change so will the guidelines for acting appropriately in the workplace. For example, Carvell (1996) stated that within recent years there have been new issues such as sexual harassment, which needed to be dealt with in the workplace. Individuals who know how to conduct themselves socially and professionally will be the ones who will advance in their careers (Adams, 1996).

In August 1998, the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) administered a survey to 1,660 NACE employer members. Results were published in the NACE's Job Outlook yearly publication, which tries to predict which jobs employers will be seeking to fill (NACE, 1998). The results of the survey concluded that employers are seeking individuals who have well trained communication skills (NACE, 1998). These NACE survey results were ranked from one to ten. Other qualifications employers were also looking for included "work experience, motivation/initiative, teamwork skills, leadership abilities, GPA/academic credentials, technical skills, interpersonal skills,

analytical skills, and ethics” (NACE, 1998, p. 1) The NACE research also showed what employers viewed as desirable abilities for employees. On a scale from one to five “interpersonal skills received a 4.66, teamwork skills 4.59, verbal communication skills 4.48, analytical skills 4.30, computer skills 4.15, written communication skills, 4.10, and leadership skills 4.00” (NACE, 1998, p.1).

A study conducted by Adkins in 1982 of business professionals rated being able to communicate with diverse individuals and understanding the importance of communication as essential abilities for career success. Waner (1995) conducted a comparison study to measure the opinions of teachers of business and practicing business people’s opinions about the usefulness of knowing proper writing skills for business, using suitable communications skills, exercising correct grammar, and other various related business techniques. Waner (1995) wanted to see if teachers of business and practicing business personnel placed the same amount of emphasis on the four above categories measured. Waner’s (1995) research also examined whether teachers of business and practicing business personnel agreed on which of the four major areas measured needed the most emphasis.

Waner (1995) hypothesized those teachers of business and practicing business personnel would have similar opinions about the relevance of incorporating the four measured areas into business curriculums and the workplace. Communication skills were viewed as significant (Waner, 1995). However, business instructors and business personnel differed on which individual communication skills were most essential (Waner, 1995). Waner’s (1995) research revealed that business personnel evaluated using

communication technology properly and posing suitable questions, and using suitable situational oral communication skills and body language higher than business instructors. The use of proper verbal and written English grammar was seen as essential in the classroom and workplace to help facilitate good communication in the workplace (Waner, 1995).

The results of the survey supported Waner's hypotheses (Waner, 1995). Writing skills for business were deemed a significant tool (Waner, 1995). However, Waner (1995) noted that business instructors ranked "maintain(s) confidentiality, write(s) persuasively, write(s) routine letter, use(s) proper placement and format, compose(s) at the keyboard, and write(s) special types of letters" lower than business personnel did on the survey (p.53).

Business instructors and business personnel viewed character development traits and the consciousness of others' feelings as important (Waner, 1995). "Business professionals rated the following competencies higher than business faculty: applies ethics, morals, and values in business situations to determine socially responsible actions; understands personal values and shows sensitivity to the values of others; uses principles of time management to organize work efficiently; exhibits leadership by influencing and persuading; and plans, conducts, and follows up meetings effectively" (Waner, 1995, p. 54). The above findings mirror the essence of civil communications and assertiveness which need to be exhibited in the workplace to promote civility among co-workers and superiors to help aid all individuals towards career advancement and promotes a civil working environment for all.

Chaney (1991) pointed out that business professionals understand the importance of civil communications because its use or lack of usage determines the advancement of individuals and corporations. "Because business decisions are often made in social settings, corporate leaders know that employees with good social skills are assets to the organizations and are probable candidates for moving up in the firm" (Chaney, 1991, p.84).

Mausehund et al. (1995) conducted a study to determine in what areas of workplace etiquette college students felt less competent. Mausehund et al (1995) research concluded that college students had the majority of concern about job interview techniques. Dealing with social issues and relationships tied for the second highest concerns for business students (Mausehend et al., 1995). Students were also interested in how to present themselves assertively (Mausehund et al., 1995). This research helped point out that individuals were interested in learning about and improving their communication skills.

To help promote and instill appropriate and pertinent business practices, business instructors and business personnel should cooperate with one another to evaluate which areas are essential and which of these are deficient in the workplace (Waner, 1995). Graduates have acquired the technical skills to perform their jobs; however, employers have noticed a decline in civil communication techniques (Chaney, 1991). Schaffer et al. (1991) concluded from their research that professionals in the field of marketing felt business etiquette had not improved over the last ten years. For individuals to be considered for career advancement, they must be able to incorporate and model excellent

civil communication skills (Chaney, 1991). Results from a questionnaire administered to personnel managers concluded that being able to communicate properly was a fundamental skill individuals needed to possess before being moved into a management position (Chaney, 1991).

Orpen (1996) believed promoting oneself and ingratiation would diversely impact people's career advancement. Ingratiation may influence an individual's career achievement; however, promoting oneself did not influence career achievement (Orpen, 1996). Orpen (1998) hypothesized and concluded self-promotion is more weakly related to career success for employees in jobs with specific guidelines for assessing employee job performance than for those in jobs with less clear cut guidelines. While these two concepts of assertiveness and self-promotion are not the same, it seems logical that someone who will promote himself will also be assertive in conversations. Likewise, ingratiation and civility are not necessarily the same concepts, but they do seem to have similar characteristics.

Mausehund et al. (1995) stated that job related skills may help individuals obtain jobs; however, knowing how to properly conduct oneself socially will help foster the communication process needed for career advancement.

Research conducted by Schaffer et al. (1993) revealed that individuals in the marketing profession determined that from examining seven business scenarios respondents viewed business communications as the top skill employees needed to possess. During this study, subjects were asked to write examples of proper and improper examples of business etiquette they had observed. Out of the responses,

“courtesy, business communications, and social skills were used the most as proper and improper examples” (p. 332). The researchers defined business etiquette as “the behavior, manners, and protocol established by conventions as acceptable or required in a business profession” (p. 331).

When people communicate, there are understood social behaviors and conduct that need to be followed (Fraser, 1990). Fraser (1990) explained that organized groups of people have specific customs or “social norms” which are expected to be followed in various situations (p. 220). Fraser (1990) pointed out “a positive evaluation (politeness) arises when an action is in congruence with the norm, a negative evaluation (impoliteness=rudeness) when the action is to the contrary” (p. 220).

Fraser (1990) provided an overview of the “four major perspectives in the treatment of politeness: the social-norm view; the conversational-maxim view; the face-saving view; and the conversational-contrast view” (p.220). Fraser explained that a “social-norm view” (p. 220) is when an organized group of people establishes specific guidelines pertaining to what is considered to be appropriate behavior in public. Fraser explained his “social-norm view” (p. 220) as it applies to politeness theory. Social-norm view is when “a positive evaluation (politeness) arises when an action is in congruence with the norm, a negative evaluation (impoliteness=rudeness) when action is to the contrary” (p. 220). As cited in Fraser, he combined the works of Grice, Leech, Lakoff, and Kasher to explain the concept of “conversational-maxim view” (p. 222-227). The conversational-maxim view explains that individuals should cautiously choose their

words in conversations because receivers of the message could interpret the message in a different manner (Fraser, 1990).

Fraser explained Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory principles. Fraser explained that Brown and Levinson suggested, "each group of language users develops politeness principles from which they derive certain linguistic strategies. It is by the use of these so-called politeness strategies that speakers succeed in communicating both their primary message(s) as well as their intentions to be polite in doing so" (p. 229).

Fraser (1990) explained his work on "the conversational-contact view" (p. 232). He stated that participants in a discussion enter into a conversation with understood obligations to politely and effectively communicate with each other. As cited in Culpepper (1996), Brown and Levinson stated that, if individuals do not express a politeness attitude in their actions and conversation, impoliteness could be implied.

As cited in Culpepper (1996), Fraser and Nolan stated that actual communication is neither impolite nor polite; however, it is the situation the comment was made in that decides if it is polite or impolite. Hagge and Kostelnick (1989) suggested that Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory practices could be incorporated into written communication as well as verbal communication. Adams (1996) stated that employees needed to be cautious of their behavior when communicating on the computer and in all verbal and written communication in order to not inadvertently offend someone else.

"It is unlikely that lay people distinguish assertion and aggression as do professionals" (Hull and Schroeder, 1979, p. 27). Does a link exist between assertiveness and career advancement? What is the distinction between assertive and aggressive

behavior? Gallois, Callan, and McKenzie Palmer (1992) noted that confusion exists between assertive and aggressive behaviors. They “define assertion as standing up for one’s rights and expressing one’s beliefs and feelings in a direct and honest way, but without violating the rights of others” (p.1042). Gallois et al. (1992) noted “assertion is seen to elicit respect from other people, aggressive behavior is associated more with people responding angrily, and with negative outcomes for interpersonal relationships” (p.1042). Alberti (1977) cautioned researchers to carefully distinguish between assertion and aggression. Individuals may believe they are acting in an assertive manner; however, their message may be perceived as nonassertive or aggressive (Alberti, 1977).

Lazarus (1973) defined assertive behaviors as “the ability to say ‘no’; the ability to ask for favors or to make requests; the ability to express positive and negative feelings; the ability to initiate, continue, and terminate general conversations” (p. 697). For individuals to be able to communicate effectively with others, individuals must be able to interpret the above characteristics of assertiveness as more of a positive trait as opposed to a negative trait. Lazarus (1973) felt more effort should be given to teaching individuals to assert themselves and to act more civilly towards each other.

Hollandsworth (1977) defined “an assertive response as the direct, verbal, and nonverbal expression of one’s feelings, needs, preferences, or opinions” (p. 348). “The expression of one’s needs, feelings, preferences, or opinions in a nonthreatening, nonpunitive manner will more probably be seen as assertive than aggressive” (Hollandsworth, 1977, p. 351).

Aggression may help individuals fill immediate requests; however, aggression damages the ability to foster relationships (Hollandsworth, 1977). "The more closely assertiveness is linked to aggressiveness, the more likely an assertive response may be viewed as unreasonable and in turn inhibited" (Hollandsworth, 1977, p. 348).

Determining if someone is aggressive or assertive depends on how the message is interpreted by the receiver (Hollandsworth, 1977).

St. Lawrence, Hansen, Cutts, Tisdelle, and Irish (1985) explained that assertiveness could be viewed as being able and pleasant when people are trained to incorporate praise and noncomplying techniques when interacting with others. St. Lawrence et al. (1985) conducted a study to observe the reactions of individuals who viewed videotapes of individuals portraying assertive and nonassertive behaviors in praiseworthy and noncomplying situations. After viewing the behaviors and actions on the videotapes, subjects responded to a questionnaire, and were asked if the assertive or nonassertive act viewed was "assertive, appropriate, tactful, offensive, truthful, educated, friendly, agreeable, pleasant, likeable, intelligent, thoughtful, socially skilled, warm, and superior" (St. Lawrence et al., 1985, p. 54). St. Lawrence et al. (1985) subjects also were asked to what measure they would enjoy working with or becoming acquainted with the assertive or unassertive person portrayed on the videotape. "The four factors underlying the questionnaire responses appear to reflect dimensions of likeability, competence, honesty, and interpersonal sensitivity" (St. Lawrence, et al., 1985, p. 55).

St. Lawrence et al. (1985) concluded from their research that individuals who demonstrated assertive behavior in noncomplying situations were seen as able and

trustworthy and in praiseworthy situations as able and acceptable. In praiseworthy and noncomplying situations, assertive actors were seen as more able and pleasant in regards to their interpersonal skill. Unassertive actors were judged inferior on ability and pleasantness. St. Lawrence et al's (1985) research concluded that by associating praise and assertive statements together it could help alleviate some contrary opinions about assertive behavior.

In praiseworthy and disagreeing scenarios, assertive actors were scored more favorably as opposed to noncomplying actors (St. Lawrence et al., 1985). Individuals who exhibited unassertive behavior in noncomplying situations were seen as pleasant and aware of others' feelings; however, they were viewed as less able and less straightforward (St. Lawrence et al., 1985). Nevertheless, when unassertive actors were observed in praiseworthy or in disagreeing situations and exhibited these submissive behaviors, they were scored lower for likeability (St. Lawrence et al., 1985).

In regards to assertiveness training St. Lawrence et al. (1985) suggested that people be educated in praiseworthy techniques and then educated in handling disagreements. "In this way clients can be trained sequentially and minimize adverse perceptions of assertion without compromising the ultimate goal of improved social behavior" (p.61).

Gallois et al. (1992) hypothesized that assertive people are more likely to be hired for a job over nonassertive or aggressive individuals. Gallois et al. (1992) also hypothesized interviewers in the study would observe assertive individuals as "more likeable, more similar to themselves, and more suitable for the job" (p.1044). As

predicted, assertive individuals were better liked by the interviewers, related better to the interviewers, and were considered to be better individuals to hire for the job (Gallois et al., 1992). “Aggressive candidates were described as incompetent, but were seen as overconfident, unapproachable, inflexible, and self-interested” (Gallois et al., 1992, p. 1056). Hull and Schroeder (1979) concluded in their research “assertion is evaluated and responded to more positively than aggression” (p.27). Hull and Schroeder (1979) stated individuals should not only learn assertive communication techniques but also ways to accept and incorporate negotiation tactics with other individuals.

Baxter (1984) studied the effects of gender, relationships and politeness and found that females employed more politeness strategies. Baxter (1984) concluded that the amount of authority an individual is perceived to have affects politeness strategies.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Students enrolled in the 1999 first summer session of business classes at Austin Peay State University in Clarksville, Tennessee, completed the 20-item questionnaire. After the research plan was approved by the Austin Peay State University committee on research involving human subjects (Appendix A), permission was granted by the seven first session professors to conduct the research before or after their designated class session. One hundred and eighty three questionnaires were completed and tallied for this research project.

The same proctor administered the questionnaire to each class. The proctor explained that responses to the questionnaire were confidential. By filling out the survey, the respondents were giving their consent for their confidential responses to be used in a graduate study. Participation was voluntary. The students were allowed to stop answering questions at any time.

The questionnaire was composed of 20 questions (Appendix B). The response choices were arranged in an ordinal Likert scale. The subjects were to circle on their questionnaire which response best agreed with their opinion. The ordinal response scale ranged from four to one. Four being strongly agree, three being agree, two being disagree, and one being strongly disagree.

The questions on the survey were arranged and worded to examine the respondents' opinions concerning whether they believed assertiveness is more important than job related skills for career advancement, or whether they viewed civil

communications as more important than assertiveness for career advancement; or whether business students viewed civil communications as more important than job related skills for advancement. The three types of questions were randomly arranged on the questionnaire. Civil communications and assertive communication were used as the two communication variables.

Respondents' attitudes were evaluated by their answers to five questions concerning the importance of civil communication in regards to career advancement: "Being polite and courteous can help someone less competent in job related skills to be successful in a corporation," "I would rather hire someone who is courteous and treats others civilly even if he doesn't have the best skills to do the job," "Courtesy is essential for career advancement," "Courtesy is important to be successful in corporate America," and "Courteous people are seen as weak and less effective in the business world." The index of civil communication was based on this five-item Likert scale. The index has a reliability rating of .5770 using Cronbach's Alpha. Cronbach's Alpha is "a reliability estimate based on interitem correlation and the contribution of each item to the overall reliability of a measurement" (Singletary, 1994, p. 454). Wimmer and Dominick (2000) pointed out that researchers want a .7 or better with an alpha statement.

The relationship between assertive communication and civil communication was judged based on the respondents' responses to the five following questions: "I would rather hire someone who is assertive and forceful even if he is not always thoughtful of other employees," "Assertiveness is the only way to achieve success in today's competitive corporations," "If someone is assertive enough, he can get by with less well-

23

developed job related skills,” “Assertive employees sometimes offend clients by coming on too strong,” and “People with forceful personalities will succeed even if they don’t perform as well as others with more specific job related skills.” The index of assertive communication was based on a five-item Likert scale. The index has a reliability rating of .5424 using Cronbach’s Alpha.

The respondents’ opinions on job related skills as they pertain to career advancement were measured based on the responses to the following five questions: “To successfully deal with clients, employees need only to be well versed in how to accomplish the job,” “I would rather hire someone with excellent technical skills even if he doesn’t related well to others,” “A competent employee who fails to act courteously towards other employees still deserves to be promoted,” “ In today’s fast-paced world it is more important to get the job done than to waste time on little courtesies,” and “When promoting an employee, mastery of technical job skills should be the only quality considered.” The index of job related skills and civil communications were measured by a five-item Likert scale. The index has a reliability rating of .5318 using Cronbach’s alpha.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

There were 183-recorded responses. The respondents' median age was 24. The modal age was 22. The percentage of males participating in the survey was 31.7 %. The percentage of females participating in the survey was 66.7 %. Numerous majors were presented in the study. The two most frequently occurring majors were accounting (25.7 % of respondents) and business (13.7 % of respondents). The percentage of respondents that currently hold or have held, full time jobs was 79.8 %. The percentage of respondents that did not hold or had never held, a full time job was 20.2 %. The majority of respondents had between five and 10 years of work experience.

The results of the respondents' surveys are presented in Table 1.

On the survey, there were nine situational questions, which compared civil communication, assertiveness, and job related skills against each other. These three types of questions were examined to see which criteria the respondents believed would greatly affect an individuals' chances of being hired or promoted.

Research question one investigated if business students viewed civil communication as more important than job related skills for career advancement. The survey compared the significance of civil communication in comparison to job related skills.

Table 1
Responses to Individual Survey Question

Survey Question	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Question 1 Being polite and courteous can help someone less competent in job related skills to be successful in a corporation?	2.2%	20.3%	54.4%	23.1%
Question 2 I would rather hire someone who is assertive and forceful even if he is not always thoughtful of other employees.	12.0%	76.0%	11.5%	.5%
Question 3 To successfully deal with clients, employees need only to be well versed in how to accomplish the job.	27.9%	43.7%	21.3%	7.1%
Question 4 I would rather hire someone who is courteous and treats others civilly even if he doesn't have the best skills to do the job.	6.0%	38.8%	48.6%	6.6%
Question 5 Assertiveness is the only way to achieve success in today's competitive corporations.	4.4%	59.3%	30.8%	5.5%
Question 6 If someone is assertive enough, he can get by with less well-developed job related skills.	7.7%	45.9%	42.6%	3.8%
Question 7 Assertive employees sometimes offend clients by coming on too strong.	.5%	8.8%	74.7%	15.9%
Question 8 Courteous people are seen as weak and less effective in the business world.	15.9%	64.8%	17.6%	1.6%
Question 9 I would rather hire someone with excellent technical skills even if he doesn't relate well to others.	7.1%	66.7%	26.2%	0.0%
Question 10 Courtesy is essential for career advancement.	1.1%	13.2%	64.3%	21.4%

N=183

Table 1 continued
Responses to Individual Survey Results

Survey Question	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Question 11 Courtesy is important to be successful in corporate America	.5%	14.8%	65.6%	19.1%
Question 12 A competent employee who fails to act courteously towards other employees still deserves to be promoted.	5.5%	60.4%	34.1%	0.0%
Question 13 People with forceful personalities will succeed even if they don't perform as well as others with more specific job related skills.	4.4%	60.8%	32.6%	2.2%
Question 14 Assertive employees are more likely to be rewarded by their bosses.	24.7%	69.8%	5.5%	0.0%
Question 15 In today's fast-paced world it is more important to get the job done than to waste time on little courtesies.	8.8%	63.5%	22.7%	5.0%
Question 16 Assertive people are difficult to work with.	2.2%	61.9%	31.5%	4.4%
Question 17 If employees are pleasant and cooperative, they can get by even when they lack technical knowledge about the industry.	3.8%	50.8%	42.1%	3.3%
Question 18 Clients are attracted to assertive business representatives who will represent them forcefully.	24.4%	65.6%	10.0%	0.0%
Question 19 When promoting and employee, mastery of technical job skills should be the only quality considered.	16.0%	73.5%	9.4%	1.1%
Question 20 Prospective clients want to deal with employees who know the industry and have strong technical skills.	2.7%	66.5%	30.8%	0.0%

N=183

According to the respondents' replies to survey questions one, four, nine, twelve, fifteen, and seventeen, respondents viewed civil communication as more important than job related skills for career advancement. In question one, 78% agreed or strongly agreed "being polite and courteous can help someone less competent in job-related skills to be successful in a corporation." In question four, 55% agreed that they "would rather hire someone who is courteous and treats others civilly even if he doesn't have the best skills to do the job." In question nine, 74% disagreed that they "would rather hire someone with excellent technical skills even if he doesn't relate well to others." According to question twelve, only 34% agreed they would promote "a competent employee who fails to act courteously towards other employees." In question fifteen, 72% strongly said "little courtesies" are not a waste of time. However, respondents were split in how they responded to seventeen. Forty-five percent of the respondents felt "if employees are pleasant and cooperative, they can get by even when they lack technical knowledge about the industry," but 55% disagreed with this statement. Overall, respondents felt civil communication skills were more important than technical skills in corporate America.

Research question two examined whether business students viewed civil communication as more important than assertiveness for career advancement. The responses on the survey indicated that respondents perceived civil communication as more essential for hiring and career advancement as opposed to acting assertively. Survey question two showed that 88% of the respondents indicated they would not "hire someone who is assertive and forceful even if he is not always thoughtful of other employees." Therefore, they felt it was better to be civil than to be assertive.

Research question three investigated whether business students viewed assertiveness as more important than job related skills for career advancement. Survey question six pointed out that respondents' opinions were divided. Fifty-three percent strongly disagreed or disagreed that "if someone is assertive enough, he could get by with less well-developed job related skills," while 46% agreed or strongly agreed. Survey question thirteen showed that 65% of the respondents strongly disagreed or disagreed that "people with forceful personalities will succeed even if they don't perform as well as others with more specific job related skills." Therefore, these direct comparison questions indicated respondents believed job related skills were more beneficial for individuals as opposed to being assertive.

In addition to looking at responses to individual questions, the questions were combined into indices measuring civil communication (Q1, Q4, Q8, Q10, and Q11) assertive communication (Q2, Q5, Q6, Q7, and Q13) and technical skills (Q3, Q9, Q12, Q15, and Q19). Table two summarizes the means and standard deviations for each of these variables.

A t-test was run to test if there was a statistically significant difference in how students rated the importance of civil communication as compared to assertiveness as a contributor to success in business. Singletary (1994, p. 213) stated that a t-test is used to "calculate(s) whether a sample mean is different from a population mean, or from zero, or from another sample mean." T-tests are used to examine the probability of chance in the measures and to see if any statistically significant difference exists between the measures

(Singletary, 1994). To be significant, the probability of this difference occurring by chance should be .05 and below (Singletary, 1994).

The t-test comparing civil communication and job related skills shows that students rated civil communication skills as significantly more important to job success than they rated job related skills ($p = .000$). Also, on the survey, respondents chose civil communication as more important than job related skills.

The t-test comparing civil and assertive communication showed that students rated civil communication skills as significantly more important to job success than they rated assertive communication skills ($p = .000$). This is in agreement with the individual survey results. Individuals viewed politeness as more important than assertiveness on the survey results.

The t-test comparing assertiveness and technical skills showed that students did not rate assertiveness as significantly more important to job success than they rated technical skills ($p = .059$). On the survey results, individuals were split (53% strongly disagreed or disagreed and 46% agreed or strongly agreed) that one can act assertively and get by with less job related skills.

Table 2
Comparing Mean Results of Preferences for Civility, Assertiveness, and Job Related Skills in the Workplace

Variable	Mean	SD	T-Value	df	2-tail significance
Civil Communication	14.57	2.02	17.42	174	.000
Job Related Skills	10.71	1.92			
Civil Communication	14.57	2.01	16.33	175	.000
Assertiveness	11.04	1.77			
Assertiveness	11.07	1.79	1.90	175	.059
Job Related Skills	10.76	1.95			

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Based on the study conducted, the respondents who were surveyed believed civil communication is significantly more important to job success than either assertiveness or job-related skills. The majority of respondents were or had been employed full time for at least five years; therefore, they were familiar with the protocol that is practiced in the work place.

RQ1: Do business students view civil communication as more important than job related skills for career advancement? Civil communication was seen to be a more significant tool to possess as opposed to job related skills in the work place. Respondents implied that individuals who could act civilly would have a better chance for career advancement instead of individuals who only had job related skills.

RQ2: Do business students view civil communication as more important than assertiveness for career advancement? Respondents felt it was more important for employees to be considerate and take the time to act civilly towards one another in the work place than to act assertively. Civil communication was viewed as a more valuable asset towards career advancement as opposed to only acting assertively. Respondents expressed they would not hire someone who acted assertively and forcefully and did not consider the feelings of others in the work place.

RQ3: Do business students view assertiveness as more important than job related skills for career advancement? There was not a statistically significant difference between

assertiveness and job related skills. Respondents indicated that assertiveness was a more fundamental element than job related skills in the work place.

The reliability coefficient was lower than a .07 on the measures of civil communication, assertiveness, and job related skills. The index of politeness and civil communications had a reliability rating of .5770. The index of assertive communication had a reliability rating of .5424, and the index of job related skills and civil communications had a .5318. Possibly, if the questions had been phrased differently the reliability of the measures could have been rated higher.

The NACE (1998) survey showed that employers were interested in hiring individuals who were able to effectively communicate in small and large group settings. Waner's (1995) research concluded that business professionals wanted employees who took others' feelings into consideration and knew how to handle themselves socially and respectfully in business situations. Based on their responses, the individuals who participated in this study also acknowledged that today employers are looking for employees who have the ability to communicate civilly and effectively in the work place.

The research gathered here showed that students believed civil communications was more important for career advancement than assertiveness and job related skills. Is civil communications the only essential element that will get an individual hired or promoted? This one isolated study should be used in further research to examine other areas that affect individuals' chances for employment and career advancement. However, further research needs to be conducted to examine if this is accurate.

Firstly, research should be conducted to investigate if a link exists between females' and males' perceptions of civil communications in regards to career advancement. The high population of female business students in this study could have possibly altered the results of the survey.

Secondly, researchers could administer the same survey (Appendix B) to human resource managers in different regions of the United States to measure their opinions of the importance of civil communication. The current study was given to students in a southern university. These students could have been conditioned based on regional stereotypes and rearing practices. These respondents could believe acting politely will be a determining factor in an individual's career advancement. By studying different regions of the country, it would help to examine if different geographical locations do influence individuals' perceptions about the significance of civil communications. The results from that study could be compared to see if their opinions are the same or different in regards to measuring if civil communications is more essential for career advancement than assertiveness or job related skills.

Thirdly, a good way to measure what elements play the most crucial role in deciding who is chosen for hiring or advancement would be to actually observe the inner workings of an actual business setting. Then, interview who did the hiring or promoting and ask the justification behind it.

Further study needs to be conducted because civil communications, office politics, current hiring guidelines and regulations, and job related skills all play a significant part in deciding who is elected for various jobs.

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Appendix A

AUSTIN PEAY STATE UNIVERSITY
CHECKLIST FOR RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS
April 2, 1999
Page 1

Project Title: Is the ability to communicate civilly an essential skill for career advancement?

Funding Source: Sarah Wallace Wheeler

Principal Investigator: Sarah Wallace Wheeler
Department: Speech, Communication and Theatre

Sponsor (if student research): Dr. Ellen Kanervo

1. Give a brief description or outline of your research procedures as they relate to the use of human subjects. This should include:
 - a) a description of who the subjects will be;
 - b) instructions given to the subjects;
 - c) activities in which the subjects will engage;
 - d) special incentives;
 - e) tests and questionnaires to be administered

If new or non-standard tests or questionnaires are used, copies must be attached to this form. Note if the subjects are minors or otherwise "vulnerable" (e.g. children, prisoners, mentally or physically infirm, etc.).

The researcher will survey students in the twelve business classes offered the first session of summer school at Austin Peay in June 1999. The researcher will administer the survey to the students during their classes. A copy of the directions and survey is attached. Students who fill out the survey will receive candy for filling out the survey. The subjects are not minors.

2. Does this research entail possible risk to psychic, legal, physical, or social harm to the subjects? Please explain. What steps have been taken to minimize these risks? What provisions have been made to insure that appropriate facilities and professional attention necessary for the health and safety of the subjects are available and will be utilized?

This research entails no risks to psychic, legal, physical, or social harm to subjects.

3. The potential benefits of this activity to the subjects and to mankind in general outweigh any possible risks. This opinion is justified by the following reasons:
No risks are involved.

Austin Peay State University
 Checklist for Research Involving Human Subjects
 April 2, 1999
 Page 2

4. Will legally effective, informed consent be obtained from all subjects or their legally authorized representative? Describe consent procedures and attach a copy of consent documents.

The survey is voluntary. By filling out the survey, students will be giving their consent.

5. Will the confidentiality/anonymity of all subjects be maintained? How is this accomplished? (If not, has a formal release been obtained? Attach.)
- a) If data will be stored by electronic media, what steps will be taken to assure confidentiality/anonymity?
 - b) If data will be stored by non-electric media, what steps will be taken to assure confidentiality/anonymity?

Confidentiality/anonymity of all subjects will be maintained. No names will be attached to questionnaires.

6. Do the data to be collected relate to illegal activities? If yes, explain.

The data do not relate to illegal activities.

7. Are all subjects protected from the future potentially harmful use of the data collected in this investigation? How is this accomplished?

No names will be attached to questionnaires; no subjects will be identified in data.

INVESTIGATOR'S CERTIFICATION

I have read the Austin Peay State University Policies and procedures on Human Research and agree to abide by them. I also agree to report to the Human Research Review Committee any significant and relevant changes in procedures and instruments as they relate to subjects.

Sarah E. Wallace Wheeler
 Instigator's Signature

4-26-99
 Date

Ellen W. Konervo
 Faculty Supervisor Signature

5-12-99
 Date

APPENDIX B

**Austin Peay State University
Thesis Survey**

Name of Class Surveyed _____
Date Survey Was Taken _____

Your responses to this survey are confidential. By filling out this survey, you are giving consent for your confidential responses to be used in a graduate study. Participation is voluntary. You may stop answering questions at any time.

Circle the response that most accurately represents your opinion.

1. Being polite and courteous can help someone less competent in job related skills to be successful in a corporation?

4. Strongly Agree 3. Agree 2. Disagree 1. Strongly Disagree

2. I would rather hire someone who is assertive and forceful even if he is not always thoughtful of other employees.

4. Strongly Agree 3. Agree 2. Disagree 1. Strongly Disagree

3. To successfully deal with clients, employees need only to be well versed in how to accomplish the job.

4. Strongly Agree 3. Agree 2. Disagree 1. Strongly Disagree

4. I would rather hire someone who is courteous and treats others civilly even if he doesn't have the best skills to do the job.

4. Strongly Agree 3. Agree 2. Disagree 1. Strongly Disagree

5. Assertiveness is the only way to achieve success in today's competitive corporations.

4. Strongly Agree 3. Agree 2. Disagree 1. Strongly Disagree

6. If someone is assertive enough, he can get by with less well-developed job related skills.

4. Strongly Agree 3. Agree 2. Disagree 1. Strongly Disagree

7. Assertive employees sometimes offend clients by coming on too strong.
4. Strongly Agree 3. Agree 2. Disagree 1. Strongly Disagree
8. Courteous people are seen as weak and less effective in the business world.
4. Strongly Agree 3. Agree 2. Disagree 1. Strongly Disagree
9. I would rather hire someone with excellent technical skills even if he doesn't relate well to others.
4. Strongly Agree 3. Agree 2. Disagree 1. Strongly Disagree
10. Courtesy is essential for career advancement.
4. Strongly Agree 3. Agree 2. Disagree 1. Strongly Disagree
11. Courtesy is important to be successful in corporate America.
4. Strongly Agree 3. Agree 2. Disagree 1. Strongly Disagree
12. A competent employee who fails to act courteously towards other employees still deserves to be promoted.
4. Strongly Agree 3. Agree 2. Disagree 1. Strongly Disagree
13. People with forceful personalities will succeed even if they don't perform as well as others with more specific job related skills.
4. Strongly Agree 3. Agree 2. Disagree 1. Strongly Disagree
14. Assertive employees are more likely to be rewarded by their bosses.
4. Strongly Agree 3. Agree 2. Disagree 1. Strongly Disagree
15. In today's fast-paced world it is more important to get the job done than to waste time on little courtesies.
4. Strongly Agree 3. Agree 2. Disagree 1. Strongly Disagree

16. Assertive people are difficult to work with.

4. Strongly Agree 3. Agree 2. Disagree 1. Strongly Disagree

17. If employees are pleasant and cooperative, they can get by even when they lack technical knowledge about the industry.

4. Strongly Agree 3. Agree 2. Disagree 1. Strongly Disagree

18. Clients are attracted to assertive business representatives who will represent them forcefully.

4. Strongly Agree 3. Agree 2. Disagree 1. Strongly Disagree

19. When promoting an employee, mastery of technical job skills should be the only quality considered.

4. Strongly Agree 3. Agree 2. Disagree 1. Strongly Disagree

20. Prospective clients want to deal with employees who know the industry and have strong technical skills.

4. Strongly Agree 3. Agree 2. Disagree 1. Strongly Disagree

Are you a male or female?

1. Male 2. Female

What is your major? _____

What is your age? _____

Do you currently hold, or have you ever held, a full-time job?

1. Yes 2. No

If yes, for how many years? _____