Communication Skills Training in Workplaces:
Workshop Programs in Industrial Environments

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Communication processes in business environments are crucial for organizations to survive. However, these processes must be highly professional, which is difficult within structures with various academic and cultural backgrounds. Thus, many organizations often develop educational programs that help employees to increase their communicative performance, following literature recommendations on the positive effect of communication skills training in workplace environments. Nevertheless, the body of knowledge on these learning settings has not evolved within the communication sciences literature. Taking this into account, a program of workshops on communication skills was implemented in a factory of the multinational Bosch company in Portugal. Afterwards, a study was developed to answer a research question: What is the most suitable training model for the acquisition of communication skills in a workplace environment? The authors point out that the most appropriate model implies human communication knowledge and motivation for change, but also practical strategic communication skills.

INTRODUCTION

Communication processes in business environments are continuous and essential for the existence of both companies and institutions. However, these processes must be able to self-regenerate enabling companies to face highly competitive markets, better informed publics and strategic management models which are minutely planned (Aaker, 1989). In this kind of settings, organizational communication

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must be highly professional and skilled, which has proved to be difficult within structures made up of people with various educational levels or different academic and cultural backgrounds – such a context is hardly controlled by the work of a communication office, unable to manage all the daily communication interactions happening in business environments.

In the face of these demands, many organizations currently feel the need to establish communication skills training programs that help their employees to achieve the high levels of performance that the market demands and that the modern world interoperability allows (Ammentorp et al., 2014). Such is the case with consultancy companies, as Deloitte that offers communication training programs to internal stakeholders with the purpose of reinforcing their employees' communication skills. Moreover, developing communication skills seems to improve not only the employees' communicative performance, but also their confidence levels, leadership skills, or their creative and innovative intelligence. And in the past 30 years, a significant number of publications has shown the positive effect of these trainings on communication skills in workplace environments in the business sector, but also in the public one, such as healthcare and science (Brown & Bylund, 2008; Bylund et al., 2008; Burns, 2020; Cegala & Lenzmeier Broz, 2002; Charoensap-Kelly et al., 2016; Coffelt et al., 2019; Ditton-Phare et al., 2017; Fallowfield et al., 2003; Kerr et al., 2020; Mata et al., 2021; Reinsch Jr, 1996; Rodgers et al., 2018; Sensenbaugh, 1993; Tavakoly Sany et al., 2020; among others).

… practitioners consistently recognize strong communication skills as important contributors to personal and organizational performance (Reinsch Jr, 1996, p. 40).

Nevertheless, the body of knowledge regarding the approach to communication learning in workplace environments has not developed that much, namely when applied to industry (except for some reference works, as Johnson & Pettit Jr, 1985; Moore, 1993), and within the Communication Sciences literature. Therefore, there is a lack of basic information about how often these training programs should be held, who should get involved or their target objectives/goals (Cegala & Lenzmeier Broz, 2002).

Taking this into account, a program of workshops on communication skills was implemented in a factory of the multinational Bosch company in Portugal in the context of a research consortium between the University of Minho and Bosch Car Multimedia (CM). A study was developed after, to deepen the comprehension of this teaching-learning model by analyzing the Bosch case, with the following goals: (1st) to assess the training model used in the program, by considering the best practices mentioned in related literature; and (2sd) to check the results regarding the acquisition of communication skills with the target audience.

As the main guideline to the study, the research question was defined as follows: *what is the most suitable training model for the acquisition of communication skills in a workplace environment?* Aiming to answer this concern, a two-steps case study was carried out: the first one included a qualitative analysis of the training program, by comparing it with the best practices referred in the literature; and the second one consisted of a post-training survey undertaken by the participants, in order to evaluate its effectiveness. This case study looks to urge communication professionals to reason on a better use of communication training programs within organizations and to share with academics a broader understanding of training processes in work contexts, suggesting to young researchers new paths of enquiry on applied knowledge to real life environments