

COMMUNICATION AND SOFT SKILLS OF HYBRID SPORTS SCIENCE DISTANCE LEARNING MODE STUDENTS

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Abstract: Communication skills are desired by business and industry. Sports science students will certainly seek their job within sports business and industry, whether as personal trainers, gym owners or headmasters in schools. Oral and written communication proficiencies are consistently ranked in the top ten desirable skills by employer surveys year after year. According to the National Association of Colleges and Employers, following are the top five personal qualities or skills potential employers seek: 1. Communication skills (verbal and written), 2. Strong work ethic, 3. Teamwork skills (works well with others, group communication), 4. Initiative, 5. Analytical skills.

Key Words: Communication skills, Sports science students, Soft skills, Moodle distance learning mode, Employers

1. INTRODUCTION

Communication skills are desired by business and industry. Sports science students will certainly seek their job within sports business and industry, whether as personal trainers, gym owners or headmasters in schools. Oral and written communication proficiencies are consistently ranked in the top ten desirable skills by employer surveys year after year. This is something tangible which can be corroborated by survey pools of most frequent sports graduates employers which are published at the end of each academic year and serves as a signpost in study programs design. In fact, high-powered business executives sometimes hire consultants to coach them in sharpening their communication skills as part of their social competence and soft skills.

According to the National Association of Colleges and Employers, following are the top five personal qualities or skills potential employers seek: 1. Communication skills (verbal and written), 2. Strong work ethic, 3. Teamwork skills (works well with others, group communication), 4. Initiative, 5. Analytical skills. Surprisingly, or not, our sports graduates are ranked very high in their domain specific knowledge and competence but communication skills are always emphasised as most desired contributing to the overall good and efficient employee profile. Delivering study programs in sports sciences through the Moodle distance learning mode Faculty of sport and physical education in Nis pays special attention to the acquisition and maintaining of the soft skills of its students so that they cope with the volatile labour market.

Eight Essential Components of Communication are: 1. Source, 2. Message, 3. Channel, 4. Receiver, 5. Feedback, 6. Environment, 7. Context and 8. Interference. As the future efficient communicator's first responsibility, preparation includes several facets which we will examine in this paper: organization, clarity, and foremost being concise and punctual. Being prepared means that you have selected a topic appropriate to your audience, gathered enough information to cover the topic well, put your information into a logical sequence, and considered how best to present it.

More specifically, if your communication is a written one, you have written an outline and at least one rough draft, read it over to improve your writing and correct errors, and sought feedback where appropriate. If your communication is oral, you have practiced several times before your actual performance. Being confronted with the e-environment audience, mainly their peers on the Moodle courses, sports students need to know how to communicate their ideas, both to their peers and teachers as well. They will also have to present their ideas during their oral examinations since they have to be present in person, at the Faculty when they take their exams. Students are additionally motivated by the knowledge that their overall grade depends on both pre and during exam executed communication.

2. DOMAIN-SPECIFIC FUNCTIONAL COMPETENCIES

The prepared communicator is organized. Aristotle called this *logos*, or logic, and it involves the steps or points that lead your communication to a conclusion. Once you've invested time in researching your topic, you will want to narrow your focus to a few key points and consider how you'll present them. On any given topic there is a wealth of information; your job is to narrow that content down to a manageable level, serving the role of gatekeeper by selecting some information and "de-selecting," or choosing to not include other points or ideas. You also need to consider how to link your main points together for your audience. Use transitions to provide signposts or cues for

your audience to follow along. "Now that we've examined X, let's consider Y" is a transitional statement that provides a cue that you are moving from topic to topic. Your listeners or readers will appreciate your being well organized so that they can follow your message from point to point.

Today nobody doubts that communication skills as part of the broader concept of soft skills are an important part of doing business. In today's hyper-connected and increasingly competitive market, the ability to negotiate meaning effectively is more highly valued than ever before. Even more so that according to a study in the UK, it was estimated that UK businesses lose around £9 million per hour due to poor negotiating skills. The sample comprised 1,000 companies as representative of UK Plc as a whole, with approximately 750 of those classified as small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). That study also concluded that UK businesses could increase their overall profitability by as much as 7% annually if they had better negotiation skills. In terms of money making the abovementioned study proves that negotiating skills which actually embrace the whole range of soft skills are important in business.

Our central research questions thus are: "In which way do domain-specific functional competencies emerge on the basis of individual prerequisites for learning in formal and non-formal settings (and learning communication skills) throughout educational stages in specific distance learning mode study?" and "What is the significance of social competencies, throughout the life span?" These questions imply the correlation between competence development and other "pillars" such as family education, education in and outside of institutions, educational decisions, migration and educational returns.

They also require analysis of developmental relationships between the acquisition of basic domain- and demand-specific functional competencies, domain-general individual abilities/capacities, and the construction of content-related knowledge and procedural skills. From a life-span perspective development of basic competencies is changing across educational stages. In addition, developmental psychology and research into the acquisition of general and soft skills expertise support the view that the interrelations between domain-general psychological capacities and the acquisition of domain-specific competencies may vary systematically by age, educational stage, and expert status (Ericsson et al. 2006; Weinert 2000, 2007a).

In information society, the ability to search and handle information and communication technologies (ICT) competently is indispensable for coping with a host of demands during studies and subsequent various life domains. Social competences involve Empathy - the ability to understand someone else's feelings and re-experience them so one can actively listen to what others say, 2. Appreciation- One can understand and appreciate others' views, 3. Focus on attaining the goal or task without conflict, 4. Understanding emotional boundaries. Organizational awareness implies knowing how to do things within the organization, 3. Understand client and vendor organizations, 4. Act with the client's best interest in mind.

3. SOFT SKILLS DEFINITIONS - DEFINITION OF COMMUNICATION

What is communication? A list of soft skills includes more than communication, but good communication skills are typically connected to all areas of soft skills training, such as providing good customer service. Therefore, communication is a continuous process in time, is interactive between people, transmits facts, thoughts, ideas, interpretations, desires and emotions. This giving and receiving information seems simple but information is the "life-blood" and connecting tissue in organizations. The successful flow of information is a perpetual challenge in most organizations, whether large or small. In recent leadership surveys, the number one leadership challenge cited by participants was developing management and people skills in technically-oriented people. Although many professionals possess domain specific they might have difficulty communicating this to others and motivating employees to achieve best results. Many things can create communication "gaps."

Effective interpersonal communication involves a lot more than just the words we use. When we are face-to-face, nonverbal communication is the source of much of the information transmitted. In different types of communication, such as in customer service call centers, the non-verbal gives way to more importance in verbal communication - how we compose our words. That is even more critical in written communication, including email composing. Effective communication is but one category of soft skills. We usually apply Soft Skills List - with important sub-elements: Communication Styles, Teamwork, Leadership Skills, Effective & Excellent Customer Service, Decision Making & Problem Solving, Managing Time and Pressures, Self-Management & Attitude.

Soft Skills

The term Soft Skills is a broad topic. Below are some sample categories that might be applicable for any team and any profession, sports jobs not being an exception.

1. Communication

- Presentation skills
- Spoken communication
- Difficult conversations
- Professional writing
- Effective email writing

2. **Teamwork**
 - Inter-team cooperation
 - Intra-team cooperation
 - Diversity
 - Productivity
 - Goal setting and action

3. **Leadership Skills**
 - Empowerment
 - Planning
 - Confidence in leaders
 - Vision & direction
 - Supervision
 - Coaching and/or mentoring

4. **Effective & Excellent Customer Service**
 - Communication with the customer, including challenging conversations
 - Setting and resetting customer expectations
 - Delighting the customer
 - Building customer confidence
 - A consistently winning customer experience
 - Growing the customer relationship
 - Opportunity management
 - A Team approach to meeting the customer's needs

5. **Decision Making & Problem Solving**
 - Creativity
 - Flexibility
 - Team problem solving

6. **Managing Time and Pressures**
 - Change
 - Time management
 - Effective meetings

7. **Self Management & Attitude**
 - Stress management
 - Positive attitude and influence
 - Initiative
 - Concern and compassion for others

We have to rely on the feedback of employers in the area of sport business. There was a comprehensive survey assessing the opinions of the region wide employers in sports business, posted on a web site of the Faculty of sport in Nis, showing overall satisfaction with our graduate students scoring high 81% satisfaction with their competence and domain specific knowledge in sport and physical education. However, they emphasised the need to install more and brush up their existing soft skills, since, it turned out our graduates are most frequently elected in the managers position in primary and secondary schools, university settings and local community authorities. Thus our graduates refer back to the faculty citing necessary requirements for better and more successful job finding in our still transitive economy. This is vital since the teachers when passing down specific knowledge and competencies also have to adapt learning communication skills throughout educational stages in specific distance learning mode study.

It was obvious that complex job of Moodle based study programs in sports implementation requires the management attention in that (sport) students need to fulfil different web based tasks and communicate them between their peers and teachers as well. All the more important aspect of creating fully communicative persons in their respective profiles of studies turned to be interesting for further studies since students have to pass their final exams not web based but direct in person at the premises of the faculty. Thus whatever content was posted on the Moodle platform now has to be communicated in real life situations, face to face with respective course teachers.

Our second research question about the significance of social competencies throughout life span was also validated through a survey within students both in bachelor applied and master sports and physical education study programs. A list of attributes or characteristic traits for prospective employees was drawn up and it starts with empathy - the ability to understand someone else's feelings and re-experience them so one can actively listen to what others say, the second ranked was appreciation- one can understand and appreciate others' views, the third ranked

was focus on attaining the goal or task without conflict, and the fourth ranked was understanding emotional boundaries. Organizational awareness implies knowing how to do things within the organization, understand client and vendor organizations, and act with the client's best interest in mind.

4. CONCLUSION

The knowledge-workers of the twenty-first century require the ability to jump between fields of technical specialization and capture the key issues quickly. A base-level of familiarity with scientific concepts and processes reduces the time taken to master new areas where emerging tasks and work processes occur. Communicative skills are not just restricted to their usefulness in the prospective workplace of the social sciences students such as sports areas, but are equally required across the spectrum of living experience in today's world. Emerging work place described above demands a set of new generic skills for maintaining employability.

Finally, what is it that we can expect from the students and the teachers as well, in the area of soft skills to be applied in social sciences, particular in sports sciences? If all goes well, if students acquire knowledge and if this knowledge is properly valued by the competent teaching staff, then our mutual goal of creating competent, highly organized, highly motivated students, ready to competently strive for his job positions in the labor market, is going to be realized.

This is also a good opportunity for a higher education institution in a country such as Serbia, to widen its horizons, to present itself in the vast labor market as a prospective country to offer higher education degrees to the local but also to the international social sciences students in the areas of sports and physical education, through hybrid distance learning mode. This holism of soft (generic) skills and the requisite capacity to deploy them seamlessly in the appropriate ways in changing conditions and contexts means that in a significant sense one's soft skills capacity is a reflection of the kind of person the labor market requires.

Thus, having well-developed soft skills as part of generic skills have the effect of improving self esteem and self-confidence. In other words, graduates may be more likely to see themselves as competent prospective workers and be perceived as competent by others (including prospective employers). For example, there is evidence of a demand amongst graduates themselves for a greater emphasis on a broader general education in those skills areas which can be seen to make for a "competent person". It has also been written about moving from academic competence to operational competence. Development of generic skills (or practice knowledge) is important because a student may thus be considered competent for job selection and initial work finding better prospects.

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