Course Overview

Communication effectiveness is crucial for leaders in today’s complex business climate. Research spanning several decades consistently has shown that leaders with strong communication skills are more likely to receive job offers and promotions. Further, they are more successful when faced with a wide range of leadership challenges, including working in teams, coaching others, resolving conflicts, and negotiating. Interestingly, research also has shown that communication is a major concern for most leaders. This course is taught from a leadership perspective and is designed to improve your ability to communicate in high performance workplaces.

The objectives of the course are:

1. To increase your understanding of your strengths and weaknesses as a communicator.
2. To enhance your proficiency as a communicator, regardless of your current skill level.
3. To improve your ability to help others evaluate and improve their communication effectiveness.

We will focus on four aspects of communication: interpersonal communication, oral presentations, discussion facilitation, and written communication.

Interpersonal communication skills. In this part of the course we will focus on communicating clearly, directly, and persuasively in one-on-one conversations. Topics include giving feedback, listening, and interpersonal problem solving. We will use videotaped role plays and peer feedback; this will allow you to practice, observe, and improve your ability to have a productive problem-solving conversation with another person.

Oral presentation skills. In this segment of the class, we will focus on delivering professional formal presentations. You will prepare a short presentation and deliver it in front of the entire class. Again, we will use videotaping and peer feedback that will enable you to observe, analyze, and improve your presentation skills.
Discussion facilitation skills. Discussion facilitation is an increasingly important skill due to the growing use of teams and problem-solving groups in organizations. In this segment of the class, you will have several opportunities to practice and hone this set of skills as you solve problems and facilitate decision making in groups. Videotaping and feedback will again be used to enable you to evaluate and analyze your discussion facilitation skills.

Writing skills. Having the ability to write effectively and efficiently is critical for success in the workplace. We will focus on developing persuasive writing skills; topics include: 1) argument, credibility, emotional appeal; 2) direct vs. problem-solving patterns; 3) persuasive e-mail messages; 4) report writing; 5) creating goodwill using you-attitude, positive emphasis, and bias-free language.

Teaching Methods

During the class, we will use several teaching methods to ensure that you have many opportunities to learn and practice new skills, receive peer feedback, and give feedback to others.

Learning teams. We will assign you to a team for the duration of the course. Because learning from peers is such an important part of this course, most of our exercises will be conducted within teams, and you will be asked to observe and provide feedback to your teammates frequently. The feedback you receive from your teammates will act as a primary source of data when you evaluate your communication skills at the end of the course.

Reading. Your reading consists of two short books, several articles, and a reference manual. You are required to read Guide to Presentations, Guide to Meetings, and the Harvard Business Review articles before we discuss them in class. It is important that you come to class with the reading completed and that you understand the material in sufficient depth to discuss it knowledgeably.

Lecture/Discussion. Each week we will spend the first hour or so of class discussing the day’s material. Again, it is important that you come to class having read the material so you can participate meaningfully in the discussion.

Skill practice, videotaping, and feedback. During every class, you will practice and then demonstrate specific communication skills, using a set of instructions that we will distribute on the first day of class. We will videotape the skill demonstrations within your teams, after which you will receive verbal and written feedback from your teammates. We will discuss each of the exercises in detail during class, and we will provide sufficient time in class to prepare for and conduct each skill demonstration.

In-Class Exercises

Interpersonal problem solving role-play. For this exercise you will conduct a five-minute role play with a partner on your team. You will play the role of a manager who is concerned about a specific aspect of an employee’s behavior, and your goal is to raise the issue with the person and resolve the problem. Your partner will play the role of the peer or subordinate. During the role play you should use the supportive communication principles and the descriptive communication structure outlined in your reading and discussed more specifically in class.

During class we will provide you with sufficient time to prepare for the role play, rehearse it at least once, and then videotape the role play while the rest of your team observes. A list of suggested situations for this exercise is attached to the syllabus, but if you prefer to role play a situation you are actually experiencing at work, that is fine too. Again, you will be given time in class to prepare and rehearse this exercise before the videotaping.
Facilitation/Discussion exercise. In this exercise you will facilitate a discussion with your team. Each facilitator is asked to lead the group in solving a problem or making a decision, and each team member will have an opportunity to serve as discussion facilitator. These discussions are videotaped, and after each discussion your teammates will provide verbal and written feedback. Again, you should use the facilitation techniques outlined in the reading and discussed in class as you lead the team’s discussion.

Evaluation
Your grade in the course is based on your performance in four areas: class participation, an individual presentation, a written recommendation, and a communication skills self-assessment. You will receive more detailed information on each assignment during class.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Graded Assignment</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class Participation</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Written Recommendation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Individual Presentation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Communication Skills Self-Assessment</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
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Grades are determined in accordance with DESB and U of U policies. The grading objective of the DESB is to certify, at various levels, that students have acquired the skills and knowledge covered in the course. We will compute your grade by calculating the points for each assignment and then summing the results for all assignments. The cutoff points for grading purposes are as follows: A=94, A-=90, B+=87, B=83, B-=80, C+=77, C=73, C-=70, D+=65, D=62, D-=60.

U of U Policies
Scholastic behavior. All students are expected to uphold standards of academic honesty. Failure to do so (plagiarism, cheating, etc.) may result in failure of or expulsion from the class.

Americans with Disability Act. The University of Utah David Eccles School of Business seeks to provide equal access to its programs, services, and activities to people with disabilities. If you will need accommodations in this class, reasonable prior notice needs to be given to the instructor and to the Center for Disability Services (http://disability.utah.edu/) 160 Olpin Union Building, 581-5020 (V/TDD) to make arrangements for accommodations. All written information in this course can be made available in an alternative format with prior notification to the Center for Disability Services.