

Research on Attitudes about Courses for Improving Communication Competencies

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Abstract: Starting from the ubiquity of training in the business world and the increasing popularity of communication training and transversal-integrative competencies, the authors conducted an extensive survey of employee attitudes about communication. Companies and organizations tend to commercially support the need of modern man for a comprehensive, personal and professional development and his quest for self-understanding, that leads to better performance of employees. The survey was conducted during 2017 on the territory of the Republic of Serbia and included government organizations, companies and international corporations. 1, 281 respondents participated in the survey. Based on initial research hypotheses, it was concluded that trainings have a positive impact on the professional development of their users, as well as personal ones in terms of creative thinking and the speed and manner of processing information. Also, training is associated with reducing resistance to changes in companies and better adapting to changes.

Key words: Training • Employees • Communications • Professional Competences • Personal Competences

INTRODUCTION

Today companies are more interested in human capital investments as a way to gain an edge over competition. With the advent of modern technology, employees have become the most important value of the company. One of the most important aspects that has to be taken into account is the current tendency of companies to rely on intensive knowledge of employees and to use their new ideas and proactivity leading to innovation. Training and development can help a company's competitiveness because they can directly increase a company's value through its contribution to intangible assets. The reality is that the main reason for investing in people is often a competitive advantage, not the well-being of employees, but this is not the subject of this paper. Intangible assets have been shown to have a determinant effect on a company's competitive advantage, as they are difficult to copy or imitate. Employees with a positive attitude towards the company are more likely to be emotionally and intellectually committed to the success of the company and more willing to put in the extra effort, more willing to stay longer

in the company and act as their ambassadors open to develop / maintain positive customer experiences and are more satisfied with their private and business life if their personal values match those of the company [1].

A well-known survey conducted in 2000 by the American Society for Training and Development (ASDT), with more than 500 U.S. companies participating, found that the companies that invested most in employee training had a shareholder yield that was 86% higher than in the lower half of the ranked companies and 46% higher than the market average [2]. Training and development have a direct impact on human and social capital, as they affect education, know-how, competence and working relationships [3]. It is important to understand that the term human resources means not only people, but also their result, ability, quality, value, their competences and skills, their knowledge, capabilities and every potential they possess. We can define it as a comprehensive psycho-physical and socio-intellectual energy that is able to further develop through the achievement of organizational goals, because these potentials are crucial for the success of the organization.

The role of education and training in organizations has significantly changed from previous decades when it concerned only the development of vocational and technical skills. In the 21st century, educators should manage learning activities in an innovative way, supporting teams of students in researching and acquiring new skills that will prepare them for future. They need to be well aligned with current curriculum changes and other key performance indicators [4].

Regarding professional competencies the formal educational system assumes the role of qualifications and through training additional qualifications are carried out. Faced with the high cost of education and the demands of employers, students also insist that their education should result in measurable skills and abilities. Modern educational institutions have already installed on-the-job internship and training programs for their students; thus, students have a greater choice of employment.

This actually makes the difference in the definition of a modern university, because before enrolling in university studies, the first thing students will look for when choosing a college is the type of practice offered and companies offered by universities during their education [5].

With the increasing complexity of work due to technological development, globalization, increasing intercultural connectivity and increased competition, formal education is beginning to lag behind real needs and because of the cumbersome system, changes cannot be rapid, so training in organizations takes on the function of developing human resources. Education alone cannot produce the desired effects, but only as part of a system in which all elements must be harmonized. Employees need to see in education their chance for advancement, better earnings, greater job security, more respect and appreciation among colleagues and a greater efficiency in the business and overall flexibility for changes in the market and environment [6]. In addition to encouraging the development of their employees, organizations today are looking for successful methods that will have strong motivational and identification effects on employees. Development is about acquiring new knowledge, skills and abilities that enable an individual to take on more complex tasks, new jobs and positions and prepare him for the future-the demands that are to come, i.e. increase his overall individual potential and prepare for future challenges and jobs [7].

Education and training are key functions in the development of human resources today and a correction of the discrepancy between existing and required staff potentials. The competencies of employees and their use

in the organization are strongly dependent on this function, which is extremely important for the use of resources of the organization and its competitiveness. Furthermore, trainings are always more effective when combined with coaching that enhances corporate culture and supports managing the application of experiential knowledge. Company-organized trainings to strengthen leadership skills are based on various concepts such as emotional intelligence, coaching and others, where as a result participants changes behavior, develops and implements ideas, thinks about risk-taking and problem-solving option and collaborations with other organizations [8]. And the coaching style of managers and leaders has a positive impact on the motivation and self-confidence of employees, their creative and creative dimension, which makes the company more competitive in the turbulent market [9].

Pilbeam and Corbridge emphasize in particular the role of education and training in the use of employee competencies [10]. They quote the results of the Heffernan and Flood survey of a sample of 500 organizations in Ireland, where the results showed that training and development were valued at 87%, employee performance management at 82%, personal development planning, careers with also 82%, recruitment and selection methods with 77%, etc. [11]. In this paper, Authors have focused on exploring employee attitudes about training and increasing competencies in communications because they are one of the most common training courses being conducted today and because good communication accelerates adaptation to change, increases flexibility and knowledge sharing between employees [12].

Research: The survey was conducted in business organizations operating on the territory of the Republic of Serbia: from public companies, through joint stock companies, to international corporations. A total of 1, 281 participants were surveyed. The survey was anonymous and was conducted through an online survey from December of 2015 throughout next year. The data processing survey was completed at December of 2017.

Using a five-step Likert scale the research measured the attitudes of company representatives on communication training, i.e. on the importance of interpersonal competences and communication skills, the expected and perceived effects of enhancing interpersonal competencies on professional development and development of a stable and complete identity, the effects of training on motivation and cognitive efficiency and also the impact of the supporting organization on employee commitment and contribution.

Considering age structure, participants in the survey were divided as follows: 8.8% of participants are age 21 to 30, 29.2% are age 31 to 40 years, 41.9% from 41 to 50 years and 20.1% of respondents are over 51 years old. Most employees are between 41 and 51 years of age. 55% of the respondents were female and 45% were male. This kind of segmentation was done considering that employees in Serbia are rarely 18 years old (which is legal minimum) and that majority of employees retires at age of 60+.

According to the level of education, the respondents are divided into: 28% of those who graduated from high school, 39.2% of them with a high vocational school degree, 16% of employees with a university degree, 15.8% with a master's degree and 1% with a doctoral degree.

From the perspective of work experience, 10.1% of respondents have up to 5 years of service, 31% of employees from 6 to 15 years of service, while 32.6% are between 16 and 25 years of service. Over 25 years of service has 26.3%.

From the perspective of the work position and at the suggestion of the work organizations in which the survey was conducted, only two options in the survey were given, namely "manager" and "employee". In this case, executives are classified from senior management to top management of the organization and there are 22.8% and employees are classified from middle management,

through lower management to the first group of employees and, in this survey, there are 77, 2% of the pool.

The following individual research hypotheses were put forward:

H1: The more communication training focused on enhancing interpersonal competences, as transversal-integrative competencies, the greater is the impact on the personal and professional development of their users.

H2: A more efficient and effective internal communication for employees is expanding creative thinking, improving information management and the application of newly acquired competencies.

H3: The more interpersonal competencies and communication skills a person has, the greater are his / her cognitive effectiveness, adaptation to changes and creative thinking.

RESULTS

When Asked: *Modern trainings in the field of communication skills should be designed to equally affect personal and professional development*, the largest number of respondents, 48.2% said that they fully agree, while 44.4% said that mostly agree. This number represents over 90% of the respondents, which was a significant figure for the survey itself and its flow.

L1. Modern training in the field of communication skills should be designed to affect personal and professional development alike.		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Strongly disagree	1.1%	9
Somewhat disagree	2.8%	22
Neither agree nor disagree	3.5%	28
Somewhat agree	44.4%	350
Strongly agree	48.2%	380
answered question		789
skipped question		492

When Asked: *Contemporary training programs should be engaging and interactive*, with the largest number of respondents, 71.7% of them said that they fully agree and 24.7% of them mostly agree. Here too, a high percentage of agreement is observed.

L2. Modern training programs should be engaging and interactive.		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Strongly disagree	0.6%	5
Somewhat disagree	0.5%	4
Neither agree nor disagree	2.4%	19
Somewhat agree	24.7%	194
Strongly agree	71.7%	562
answered question		784
skipped question		497

For the Statement: *I apply the competencies that I have improved in training in private life*, the largest number of respondents, 52.8% said that they mostly agree, while 23.1% stated that they completely agree.

L3. I apply competencies that I have improved by training in private life		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Strongly disagree	3.1%	24
Somewhat disagree	7.1%	55
Neither agree nor disagree	13.9%	108
Somewhat agree	52.8%	409
Strongly agree	23.1%	179
answered question		775
skipped question		506

To the Assertion: *I apply the competencies that I have improved in training in professional life*, the largest number of respondents, 55.4% of them mostly agree with the statement, while 30% are followed by those who completely agree.

L4. apply competencies that I have improved by training in professional life		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Strongly disagree	1.7%	13
Somewhat disagree	4.3%	33
Neither agree nor disagree	8.3%	64
Somewhat agree	55.4%	427
Strongly agree	30.4%	234
answered question		771
skipped question		510

The following question was asked to check the consistency of the respondents' attitude. It is: My opinion is that the effects of modern training models are overestimated and the largest number of respondents said they were "hesitant" with 29.8% and behind them were "generally disagree" with 29.5%. 10.6% of them say they do not agree at all what we might conclude from the answers to most of the questions so far. However, we can say that the biggest surprise is the result of 22.8% of respondents who generally agree with the given statement, as well as 7.2% who completely agree, which in total is 30% of those who believe that the effects of modern training models are overestimated. Perhaps this could also be interpreted by the meaning given by the respondents to the adjective "overrated". If they have met purely commercial and superficial approaches in the training itself, as well as high expectations and inadequate preparation and impact of the training itself, then it is understandable that they agree with the claim that it is overrated to the phenomenon. However, this does not mean that they reject modern models of education as such, as the majority answers to other questions prove.

L5. In my opinion, the effects of modern training models are overrated.		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Strongly disagree	10.6%	82
Somewhat disagree	29.5%	229
Neither agree nor disagree	29.8%	231
Somewhat agree	22.8%	177
Strongly agree	7.2%	56
answered question		775
skipped question		506

For the Claim: *The ability to communicate more successfully with others gives me a sense of strength and confidence*, the largest number of respondents-49.1% of them mostly agree, while 42.1% completely agree. In total this is very high percentage-over 90% of the respondents, which is a significant result.

L6. The ability to communicate more successfully with others gives me a sense of strength and confidence.		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Strongly disagree	1.6%	12
Somewhat disagree	2.2%	17
Neither agree nor disagree	5.1%	39
Somewhat agree	49.1%	379
Strongly agree	42.1%	325
answered question		772
skipped question		509

For the Statement: *My environment has noticed the positive effects of training on my communication competencies*, 39.4% of the respondents mostly agree, but also a large number of respondents, 35.6% are undecided.

L7. My environment has noticed the positive effects of training on my communication competencies.		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Strongly disagree	4.2%	32
Somewhat disagree	7.9%	60
Neither agree nor disagree	35.6%	271
Somewhat agree	39.4%	300
Strongly agree	13.0%	99
answered question		762
skipped question		519

For the Statement: *Trainings in the field of communication skills should help in detecting the problems and solutions I am looking for*, the largest number of respondents, 49.3% of them mostly agree and 31.9% completely agree with the statement. With this result, the respondents showed confidence in the beneficial effects that the said programs should have.

L8. Trainings in the field of communication skills should help in detecting the problems and solutions I am looking for.		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Strongly disagree	2.8%	22
Somewhat disagree	5.2%	40
Neither agree nor disagree	10.8%	84
Somewhat agree	49.3%	382
Strongly agree	31.9%	247
answered question		775
skipped question		506

Based on the results presented above, we can say that the attitudes of the beneficiaries of the training training programs in the field of communications are extremely positive with some inconsistency. In the question of overestimation of the subject trainings, as many as 30% of the respondents said that they thought they were overestimated, but below that result we suggested an interpretation, as well as the question of how many other people notice changes in the respondents, where we can say that the respondents are not sure that others they notice a change in them, or at least they haven't noticed it. On the other hand, the respondents' insecurity about this issue may be the result of the assumption that they did not pay attention to the reactions of people in their environment or did not give them their specific impressions.

For the Claim: *Poor communication impedes learning and creative thinking*, the largest number of respondents-64.8% completely agreed, while 29.4% of respondents generally agree.

L9. Poor communication impedes learning and creative thinking.		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Strongly disagree	0.8%	6
Somewhat disagree	2.3%	18
Neither agree nor disagree	2.7%	21
Somewhat agree	29.4%	228
Strongly agree	64.8%	502
answered question		775
skipped question		506

Regarding the Statement: *The education I have received so far has helped me to find a better internal balance*, the largest number of respondents, 43.9% of them mostly agree, while 13.8% agree completely. However, 27.3% of respondents stated that they were undecided, indicating that they may need more education, or perceived self-awareness of the need to continue to work on themselves and develop their professional and personal competences. However, good trainings for the development of communication skills are certainly effective (depending on the leaders and users), but they are not almighty and they cannot replace other personal and social factors that affect the internal balance.

L10. The education I have received so far has helped me to find a better internal balance.		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Strongly disagree	5.4%	41
Somewhat disagree	9.7%	74
Neither agree nor disagree	27.3%	209
Somewhat agree	43.9%	336
Strongly agree	13.8%	106
answered question		766
skipped question		515

For the Claim: *Adopting the principles of good communication helped me to better understand myself and others*, the largest number of respondents, 52.2% of them mostly agree, while 19.7% completely agree. 20.2% of respondents were left undecided.

L11. Adopting the principles of good communication helped me to better understand myself and others.		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Strongly disagree	3.0%	23
Somewhat disagree	5.0%	38
Neither agree nor disagree	20.2%	154
Somewhat agree	52.2%	398
Strongly agree	19.7%	150
answered question		763
skipped question		518

For the Statement: *Educations for interpersonal competences and communication skills do not reach the goal unless the trainee is not personally motivated*, the largest number of respondents, 47.9% mostly agree and 40.3% completely agree.

L12. Educations for interpersonal competences and communication skills do not reach the goal unless the trainee is not personally motivated.		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Strongly disagree	0.9%	7
Somewhat disagree	2.0%	15
Neither agree nor disagree	8.9%	68
Somewhat agree	47.9%	366
Strongly agree	40.3%	308
answered question		764
skipped question		517

For the Statement: *I have attended training in the field of communication skills in the company only because it is required of me*, the largest number of respondents, 30.3% of them generally disagree, while strongly 29% disagree with this statement. We can also understand the result obtained through the previous question, because they are in good correlation. It is interesting, however, that 18% generally agree with this statement and 8.5% completely agree. When we add 14.3% of undecided respondents, the result indicates that many people go to training because they are expected to do so. This number may be higher than expected compared to other claims made so far, but the fact is that there is a much higher number of respondents who willingly attend this type of training. Also, it is often case that people do not know in advance whether something is useful and valuable to them until they are given the opportunity to become acquainted with it. It is possible that some respondents who have attended this type of training may develop an interest and personal motivation to pursue this path.

L13. I have attended training in the field of communication skills in the company only because it is required of me.		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Strongly disagree	29.0%	221
Somewhat disagree	30.3%	231
Neither agree nor disagree	14.3%	109
Somewhat agree	18.0%	137
Strongly agree	8.5%	65
answered question		763
skipped question		518

For the Assertion: *I would recommend communication training for the development of competencies to friends and acquaintances*, the largest number of respondents, 47.8% of them generally agree with the statement and 29.5% completely agree.

L14. I would recommend communication training for the development of competencies to friends and acquaintances.		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Strongly disagree	2.5%	19
Somewhat disagree	3.4%	26
Neither agree nor disagree	16.8%	128
Somewhat agree	47.8%	365
Strongly agree	29.5%	225
answered question		763
skipped question		518

For the Statement: *After attending the training, I am more aware of what I need to do in order for my messages to be successfully received*, the largest number of respondents, 51.3% mostly agree, 21.8% completely agree, while 20.2% - are undecided.

L15. After attending the training, I am more aware of what I need to do in order for my messages to be successfully received.		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Strongly disagree	2.5%	19
Somewhat disagree	4.2%	32
Neither agree nor disagree	20.2%	153
Somewhat agree	51.3%	389
Strongly agree	21.8%	165
answered question		758
skipped question		523

The views of the leaders and beneficiaries of the training programs on the importance of improving interpersonal competences and communication skills for personal and professional development, according to the results of this part of the research, support the programs themselves. Respondents are most aware of the importance of enhancing interpersonal competences and communication skills for professional and personal development, as well as motivation, self-motivation for the same, although there is a number of them who go for this type of training because they are expected to do so.

For the Statement: *Good communication with co-workers allows me to process new information more successfully*, the largest number of respondents, 50.7% of them mostly agree and 41.3% completely agree with this statement. The percentage of over 90% of respondents only speaks in favor of the positive effects of communication, as in previous research results. In this case, the focus is on organizational effects.

L16. Good communication with co-workers allows me to process new information more successfully.		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Strongly disagree	0.7%	5
Somewhat disagree	0.8%	6
Neither agree nor disagree	6.6%	50
Somewhat agree	50.7%	386
Strongly agree	41.3%	314
answered question		761
skipped question		520

For the Claim: *Developed interpersonal competencies and communication skills strengthen the ability to adapt to change*, The largest number of respondents, 53% of them mostly agree with this statement and 31.7% of them completely agree. 11.4% are undecided.

L17. Developed interpersonal competencies and communication skills strengthen the ability to adapt to change.		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Strongly disagree	1.4%	11
Somewhat disagree	2.4%	18
Neither agree nor disagree	11.4%	87
Somewhat agree	53.0%	403
Strongly agree	31.7%	241
answered question		760
skipped question		521

For the Statement: *Better communication with others liberates creative thinking*, the largest number of respondents, 47.3% mostly agree and 38.1% agree completely. This makes more than 85% of the respondents that agree.

L18. Better communication with others liberates creative thinking.		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Strongly disagree	1.3%	10
Somewhat disagree	2.9%	22
Neither agree nor disagree	10.4%	79
Somewhat agree	47.3%	360
Strongly agree	38.1%	290
answered question		761
skipped question		520

For the Statement: *Good internal communication in an organization is an extremely important and irreplaceable factor of satisfaction and successful work*, the highest percentage of respondents, 52.9% agree completely, 40.2% mostly agree, which indicates that over 90% of respondents highly value good internal communication. 5.4% are undecided and those who disagree are less than 2%.

L19. Good internal communication in an organization is an extremely important and irreplaceable factor of satisfaction and successful work.		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Strongly disagree	0.3%	2
Somewhat disagree	1.3%	10
Neither agree nor disagree	5.4%	41
Somewhat agree	40.2%	306
Strongly agree	52.9%	403
answered question		762
skipped question		519

For the Claim: *Modern models of education and communication reduce the resistance of employees to change*, the largest number of respondents, 49% of them mostly agree and 22.9% of them completely agree. 17.7% of the respondents are undecided.

L20. Modern models of education and communication reduce the resistance of employees to change.		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Strongly disagree	3.4%	26
Somewhat disagree	6.9%	53
Neither agree nor disagree	17.7%	135
Somewhat agree	49.0%	374
Strongly agree	22.9%	175
answered question		763
skipped question		518

For the Claim: *By organizing training to develop interpersonal communication competencies, the organization motivates employees to work for themselves and to develop their potential*. The majority of respondents, 48.3% of them mostly agree and 30.5% completely agree with this statement. 15.2% of respondents are undecided. We believe that the percentage of 78.8% affirmative answers to this claim is high if we know that there is an inevitable, less or greater tension between management and employees in organizations, that is, some internally organized training can be perceived as an additional obligation, a burden that will only increase their work responsibilities and number of tasks.

L21. By organizing training to develop interpersonal communication competencies the organization motivates employees to work for themselves and to develop their potential.		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Strongly disagree	1.7%	13
Somewhat disagree	4.3%	33
Neither agree nor disagree	15.2%	116
Somewhat agree	48.3%	369
Strongly agree	30.5%	233
answered question		764
skipped question		517

For the Stateemnt: *Internal communication training for developing personal and professional potentials motivate employees to place newly acquired competencies in the service of the organization*, the largest number of respondents, 53.7% of them mostly agree and 28.2% completely agree. The 81.9% affirmative response rate is, in this case, unexpectedly high, given the inevitable tension between individual and employee interests and management interests and goals. This result should be important information and guidance for executives.

L22. Internal communication training for developing personal and professional potentials motivate employees to place newly acquired competencies in the service of the organization.		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Strongly disagree	1.6%	12
Somewhat disagree	2.3%	18
Neither agree nor disagree	14.2%	109
Somewhat agree	53.7%	411
Strongly agree	28.2%	216
answered question		766
skipped question		515

Analysis of Results and Hypotheses: The attitudes of the beneficiaries of training in the field of communication according to the results of the research are mostly very positive. In their answers, respondents emphasize that good communication enables them to work more successfully with co-workers, to reduce their resistance to change, that many are more willing to accept them. They also agree that by organizing this type of training and education, the organization influences, encourages and motivates employees to work for themselves and develop their potential. Of course, they put the products of their work, apart from themselves, into the service of their organization for mutual benefit and satisfaction.

The results of the whole research reflects the respondents' aspiration to further improve their transversal (at the same time personal and professional) competences, which they associate with the overall development of their personality. That was the basic premise that gave impetus to the research.

Confirmation of Research Hypotheses:

H1: The more communication training focused on enhancing interpersonal competences, as transversal-integrative competencies, the greater is the impact on the personal and professional development of their users. The questions that correspond to this hypothesis are: L3 (about 76%), L4 (about 86%), L6 (over 91%), L8 (over 81%) and L11 (about 82%).

H2: A more efficient and effective internal communication for employees is expanding creative thinking, improving information management and the application of newly acquired competencies. The questions that correspond to this hypothesis are: L9 (over 93%), L15 (over 73%), L16 (92%), L18 (over 85%), L19 (over 92%) and L22 (over 81%).

H3: The more interpersonal competencies and communication skills a person has, the greater his / her cognitive effectiveness, adaptation to change and creative thinking. The questions that correspond to this hypothesis are: L17 (over 84%), L18 (over 85%), L20 (over 71%).

CONCLUSION

Effective communication is one of the basis of effective teamwork. Employees should continuously develop their competencies in the field of communication and should not delay the acquisition and improvement of these competencies. By using different types of training in communication, the employee not only enhances the employee, but develops the developed skills and thus contributes to the development of the organization.

This research confirms the assumption that when an individual improvea interpersonal competences, then he / she develops greater self-confidence and self-efficacy. Then this, by feedback effect, reflects on even better and

more efficient communication with co-workers and the environment and more efficient and effective communication with employees expands the space for creative thinking, better information management and the application of newly acquired competencies. All this further enables greater employee satisfaction.

The more interpersonal competences and communication skills are developed in an individual, the greater his / her cognitive efficiency is ability to learn, adapt to change and think creatively. All of these employee characteristics make their company more competitive in the market, which is why firms should have clear training plans for their employees in the field of communications and implement them continuously.

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