

Summary of Impact Assessment: Collaborative Communication Training

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Findings from Merck, Inc., supported by research conducted by the Center for Collaborative Communication, document significant benefits of listening skill training in the workplace.

In a two-part study jointly conducted by Merck Inc. and the Center for Collaborative Communication, significant results were found as a result of workplace communication training, including greater efficiency, effectiveness, motivation and team work. These preliminary findings were presented at the Psychologists for Social Responsibility 30th Anniversary Conference on July 13, 2012 in Washington, D.C. A more detailed peer-reviewed report is in preparation.

Overview of CC Model

Collaborative Communication (CC) is an integrated system of concepts and skills that foster high quality relationships, a positive work environment and effective communication in the service of achieving shared purposes. CC can be taught in person or asynchronously to individuals or groups.

Overview of Training

Participants in the CC training program included four teams working on a joint project (three internal and one external partner). The customized six-month program included pre-training interviews, a five-day immersion, monthly one-day integration trainings, twice-monthly peer and executive coaching, and printed materials.

Overview of Study

The purpose of this research was to evaluate whether CC training of a group of executives at Merck, Inc. did, in fact, improve the efficiency, effectiveness, and quality of relationships and communication among team members and between teams, both for team members directly receiving training and teams as a whole managed by executives who received training.

Overview of Results

Results showed statistically significant changes on 31 of 33 quantitative measures which included: variables reflecting changes in skills related to the accomplishment of tasks, the quality of interpersonal interactions, and the effectiveness and motivation of individuals. Executives reported that conversations and meetings were notably more efficient. A mathematical model of the executive data indicated both that estimates of the impact of this greater efficiency indicated a probable payback period to Merck of 2-10 months for all expenses incurred by the training, including the executives' time, as well as a perceived sense that executive's overall efficiency increased up to 80%, and minimally 10%.

Specific Results of CC Training

Qualitative results showed executives valued the impact of CC training on their ability to communicate clearly, make requests that solve problems, understand where others are coming from, speak openly and directly, mediate conflicts among team members, and facilitate effective meetings. Trust, engagement and other work-culture factors were reported as improved.

In particular, the study found that:

- 100% of participants report increases in their and others' efficiency.
- A 67-90% estimated reduction of time to resolve issues, with problem-solving time estimated as cut by 10-33%.
- Overall efficiency increased up to 80%, and minimally by 10%.
- A reduction in the number of meetings needed to address an issue was estimated at 50-80%. Staff meeting time was estimated to be cut in half.

Overall, participants reported:

- a reduction in software user errors,
- a reduction in off-shore production costs,
- accelerated development cycle,
- quicker resolution of issues involving fewer people,
- greater confidence in addressing diversity,
- increased safety in taking risks,
- greater enjoyment of work,
- greater trust, clarity, alignment and accountability (with decisions “sticking”),
- and a change from some issues never being resolved to resolution.”

Method of Data Collection

Quantitative data measuring the executives’ perceptions of the work environment, the quality of interpersonal interactions, and communication effectiveness were collected before training, midway through the training and after training. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the executives seven months after the training was completed to gain qualitative information about the nature of the long-term benefits of the training that the executives observed.

Implications of Study

Collaborative Communication (CC) is based in part on the understanding that much of what we have been taught regarding how to think about and interact with others is rooted, albeit subtly, in a *control* paradigm. In this paradigm, people are pressured to conform to agendas not wholly of their own choosing, and those who appear to have different agendas are viewed as adversaries. Operating out of this paradigm can lead to guardedness and people acting at cross-purposes, subtle alienation, and reduced individual and collective thriving. Yet practices based on this *control* paradigm are pervasive, and so much the norm, as to be nearly invisible. People aren’t usually aware of how these practices contribute to undesirable outcomes.

CC is an integrated system for thinking about and relating to people that is rooted in a *collaboration* paradigm. Its concepts and practices create a favorable climate for people experiencing one another as allies, and for working together effectively. These practices support synergy, openness, trust, bonding, full engagement, and thriving. CC is based on general principles about how human beings work, which are drawn from contemporary thinking in psychology and the social sciences. Because of the breadth and depth of these foundations, CC is applicable to improving many kinds of relationships.

Conclusion

The success of any business depends on people working together to accomplish tasks that support the organization in achieving its purpose. As documented in this study, this is most likely to occur when the quality of relationships and communication between people is high and individuals are thriving.

People working together effectively can support the right tasks getting done, greater efficiency and higher quality. Directing resources to improving these foundational aspects of business functioning has the potential for major payoffs.