

Volume 14

Management Communication

**Business Administration
Reading Lists and Course Outlines**

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Volume compiled by Mary Munter, *Dartmouth College*

Series compiled by Richard Schwindt, *Simon Fraser University*,
August 1990

NOTE TO THE USER

This is the third compilation of the Business Administration series of reading lists and course outlines. It is gratifying that acceptance of the series has warranted a new, completely revised set of volumes.

The intention is to disseminate as quickly and as efficiently as possible information on what is currently being taught, and how it is being taught in leading business schools. It is recognized that there is a trade-off between rapid diffusion and polished appearance. The former has been emphasized. I hope that users of these volumes will agree with this decision, recognizing that nearly all of the outlines and syllabi pertain to courses given within the last year.

These volumes will be useful to both individual teachers and curriculum committees when revising existing courses and creating new ones. They will also be helpful for librarians responsible for acquisitions in the business area. But, as before, there is a less modest goal. Between publication in academic journals and integration into mainstream textbooks, scholarly research passes through the transition stage of classroom exposure. Hopefully, these volumes will facilitate that transition.

From time to time this series will be updated, expanded and revised. Suggestions and submissions of new and updated materials, especially in emerging or unconventional areas, are encouraged and appreciated.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I thank Mr. Dixon Low, for his very competent research assistance, and my colleagues, Professors Barry Gibbs, Robert Rogow and Bert Schoner, for compilation assistance in their respective areas of expertise. I particularly want to thank Professor John Herzog both for help with the finance volumes and for hours of discussion on past, present and future trends in business education. The cover was designed by the Division of Audiovisual Education, Duke University, and the volumes were printed by Multiprint, Inc., New York.

Richard Schwindt, *Simon Fraser University*

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Introduction

This volume in the Business Administration Reading List and Course Outline series gives those of us teaching Management Communication to MBAs a chance to share ideas with one another--whether we have been teaching for many years and are in search of fresh ideas, or we are just starting to teach and hope to avoid reinventing the wheel. The bulk of the volume consists of reprints of course syllabi, selected to show a range of teaching approaches.

In these introductory pages, I attempt to delineate trends in the field, areas of continuing debate, an overview of the courses represented, and various resources available. The ideas in this introduction synthesize a comparison of course syllabi, interviews with 21 experts in the field, and an examination of the statistical studies quoted on the last two pages of this introduction.

Trends: Areas of Consensus

Six general areas of agreement emerged, areas I am emboldened to label "trends."

1. The field has entered a "mature" stage of development. Virtually all schools have moved out of the "start-up" stage. Everyone I interviewed felt that interest and support for Management Communication programs have been rising steadily--and are now a given. A typical statement comes from Fuqua's Bob Reinheimer: "The existence of Management Communication is no longer a controversial subject. It's part of the background, very much accepted as inherently part of the MBA portfolio."¹ In addition, over the past few years, studies sponsored by the American Assembly of Collegiate Schools of Business and by the Graduate Management Admissions Council have joined the overwhelming evidence of the field's importance. (See the last page of this introduction for a list of such studies.)

Historically, the field's start-up stage ran from the 1900s to the 1980s. The first burst of activity occurred before the 1920s when several schools (among them, Harvard, UVA's Darden, and Dartmouth's Tuck) first initiated Management Communication courses; the second burst came in the late 1970s when many schools started programs (among them, Stanford, Columbia, and UCLA); the third phase occurred in the 1980s when many schools made communication a requirement (among them, MIT and Duke's Fuqua).

Now virtually all leading MBA programs offer Management Communication in one form or another. (See the penultimate page of this introduction for a list of schools and programs.)

2. This mature stage is characterized by a growing and diverse course content. As you can see by the sample syllabi included in this volume, the Management Communication course content is certainly diverse. Also, unlike undergraduate business communication courses, many of which depend heavily on a textbook day-to-day, MBA level courses tend to use texts as a resource--with lots of original handouts, cases, and articles in every course.

Although the courses differ, three areas of common course content have become apparent.

Managerial writing and speaking: We virtually all teach writing and speaking. In the words of Rutgers' Carter Daniel, "Remember that, whatever else we do, our main objectives--helping people to write and speak well--must never for a moment drift from our sight."² A recent study comparing both MBA and

faculty rankings of the most important aspects of a Management Communication course showed remarkable consistency: written communication and oral communication were ranked #1 and #2 by both groups.³

These writing and speaking skills, however, are neither remedial nor a crutch to get through graduate school. Just as most entering MBAs understand the rudiments of economics when they enter graduate school, many of our students are practiced writers and speakers. Students with excellent college composition skills, however, still have something to learn about business writing. Most college-level writing involves analysis and reporting. Management writing is meant to go into action, to make something happen. And even students who have practiced writing and speaking on-the-job have often been doing so as specialized analysts, with very narrow audiences--not as managers, still less as general managers.

In sum, Management Communication courses teach new skills that pertain specifically to managerial activities and needs.

Communication strategy: In addition to these important managerial skills, however, we virtually all teach what our syllabi call "strategies," "processes," "theories," or "principles" of communication. This area of course content transcends basic managerial writing and speaking issues, concentrating on getting students to think strategically about management communication, to see communication as a part of a complex and interactive web rather than a single isolated act, to think of communication as a process rather than just a finished product, to analyze each situation rather than plug in a memorized formula. Course content in this area includes choices about credibility, management style, audience analysis, message structure, whether to write or to speak, organizational and environmental constraints, informational constraints, and even when, if, and with whom to communicate.

Other issues in Management Communication: Finally, in addition to these skills and strategies, a glance through the syllabi will reveal that virtually all of us teach in several other areas. The most prevalent addition to the Management Communication curriculum is that of interpersonal skills. This module includes various kinds of one-to-one communication, such as employee relations, conflict management, and negotiation.

Other issues covered in some courses include the effects of the following on communication: (1) leadership and management styles; (2) group processes and group management; (3) information technologies; (4) what is variously called internationalization, globalization, or cross-cultural influences; (5) multi-cultural communication, including geographical, ethnic, racial, and gender-based influences; (7) the organizational environment; (8) ethical considerations; (9) the corporate communication function, both internal and external to an organization; (10) corporate communication crises; and (11) media and television.⁴

3. This mature stage is also characterized by a growing, rich, and diverse research base. One of the chief signs of the field's research vitality is signalled by the addition of two major journals (*Management Communication Quarterly* and *Iowa Journal of Business and Technical Communication*) in the past two years. At the same time, the *Journal of Business Communication* and other existing journals have been improved continually. (See the Resources section of this introduction for more details about these journals.)

The research draws on many disciplines--such as rhetoric and persuasion, cognitive psychology, social psychology, sociology, linguistics, epistemology, content analysis, discourse analysis, literary theory, translation theory,

composing process theory, ontological inquiry, hermeneutics, historical perspectives, organizational behavior and design, organizational communication, nonverbal communication, document design, and various "unified field" efforts.

The following examples illustrate the breadth of current Management Communication research: a Harvard task force report on actual communication practices, a study of communication styles among professionals, a series of cases on corporate communication, the creation of theoretical models, philosophical inquiries into the nature of persuasion, psychological investigations of the composition process, etymological and inter-lingual analyses of terminology, stylistic comparisons among various forms of writing, a study of communication as a function of managerial effectiveness, a cross-cultural comparison of differences in communication styles, and an historical examination of how various technologies have affected business communication in the past and the present.

4. Institutional attitudes continue to shape Management Communication programs. "It's useful to find out what's going on at other schools," says Michigan's Priscilla Rogers. "At the same time, you have to keep in mind the unique needs of your own constituency, your school, your faculty, and your students--and to tailor your program accordingly." UCLA's Janis Forman adds: "It's extremely important to understand your own organization--its politics and organizational goals. "It's not enough to plan an internally coherent program that only addresses the needs of students. You must also be responsive to alignments and interests outside the program and to the formally espoused broader goals of the institution."⁵

Experts suggested that answers to the following questions would provide information about institutional attitudes and constraints: What is your school's general strategy or niche? How big is your school? What political or financial factors affect the structure or content of your course? How would you characterize the attitudes toward Management Communication of your students, faculty, and administration? What is the history of Management Communication at your school? How much of your school's curriculum is core versus elective? Does your school have waivers or exemption exams for other core courses? What are the faculty's and students' attitudes toward the core? What are the norms in your school regarding attendance and class participation?

5. Support for proficiency exams and for entirely integrated programs is decreasing. Five years ago, we saw four programmatic set-ups: required course, required proficiency exam, required integration, and elective courses and workshops.⁶ Now, two of those options--proficiency exams and entirely integrated programs--seem to have fallen into disfavor.

Proficiency exams: Some schools, such as MIT, dropped their proficiency exams when they moved to a required core course. Other schools still use required proficiency exams, but no one recommends in their favor. "When people ask me for information about our proficiency exam, I respond by trying to discourage them from using one," says Rutgers' Carter Daniel. "It's demoralizing, counter-productive, and costly. It's a real pain, and not an effective way to do the job." NYU's Chris Kelly agrees: "I'm not convinced the proficiency adds much; it just seems to make people unhappy. We should test its value, or drop it."

On the other hand, Michigan's Priscilla Rogers supports non-required assessment exams. "Students are expected but not required to take our exam. This subtle distinction may be the root of our success. We use assessment results to motivate and direct rather than to stipulate and require."

Integrated programs: Both Stanford and Wharton have dropped programs that were entirely integrated into other core courses. Problems with entirely integrated programs are that students may perceive communication as ancillary; that the feedback may be more of a one-shot affair than ongoing over time; that the content may be reduced to emphasis on mere skills rather than on strategic issues; and that the communication problems with students and the other instructors may be insurmountable.

On the other hand, many schools (including Tuck, MIT, and UCLA) still have integrated exercises as part of their required courses. To succeed, such exercises should be important (and be presented to the students as important) to both sets of instructors; should have high credibility and motivation; and should be well communicated among all instructors and students throughout.

6. Awareness that talented people provide the backbone of a successful program is increasing. Most experts agree that the most important component of a successful program is the people who teach in it. "If I were given carte blanche to develop a communication program," says UCLA's Janis Forman, "I would hire the best three or four people I could find and work with them to develop a program. All the pogo sticks, slides, bells, and whistles in the world won't make a great program; a great program is a result of talented instructors and researchers."

Furthermore, although it's certainly possible to have successful programs and great teachers based in the English Department, many people agree with Cornell's Charlotte Rosen: "For establishing credibility, it's important to have someone based in the business school itself, not in the English Department."

Finally, we see an increasing awareness of the extraordinary need for personal attention in Management Communication courses. Everyone agrees with MIT's JoAnne Yates: "Management Communication is an extremely labor-intensive course requiring a lot of personal attention." Adds ASU's Larry Smeltzer: "To improve the program, I'd cut the class size. We already have the smallest classes in the core, with 25 students, but I'd think we could teach even more effectively in groups of under 20." On their wish-list for a perfect program, interviewees mentioned cutting class size more often than any other single desire.

Areas of continuing debate

In addition to the areas of agreement, several areas of continuing discussion emerged from the interviews. Specifically, three questions are under debate.

1. Should Management Communication courses be required or elective?

Although this debate has strong proponents on both sides, the major difference between the two groups seems to be the school's attitude toward the required core courses in general.

Pro Required Course: On one hand, here are some opinions from faculty who support the required core course.

Harvard's MC course heads Michael Hattersley and Robert Kent support the idea of a required core course. "Management Communication--subject and practice--is core, required, integrated, and pervasive," notes Kent. "We have fought hard to gain a foothold as an integral subject area." Hattersley adds: "In our program, all the first-year curriculum is required. It would send a

negative signal if ours were not. We have experimented with formats that make MC look eccentric--breaking up our sections of 90 into groups of 30, for example--and are convinced we've paid a price for it. Currently our intention is that MC look and feel as much like other courses as possible. I haven't yet met a student who couldn't benefit from--and contribute to--MC."

"If the course were not required, it would have much less status," says Tuck's Paul Argenti. "Elective courses are just not seen as important in this environment--not to mention that every student can use some aspect of our Management Communication course."

"It should be required," agrees Krannert's Melinda Kramer, "because many of the students who need it most have spent their previous college careers self-selecting not to take communication courses. I just received a letter from an alumnus whose work I read aloud on the first day of class. It said communication was the most important class he took--and that he would not have taken it if it had not been required."

"The course should be required," says Duke's Bob Reinheimer, "because no matter what a student's skill level, Management Communication can make it better. If you offer only electives, those who need the course most will studiously avoid it. Naturally, it's easier to motivate students in an elective, but that's our job and responsibility as faculty members--to motivate students."

"Certainly it's easier to teach an elective, but communication is a basic management skill," according to MIT's JoAnne Yates. "If MBA programs are in the business of preparing managers, we must turn out graduates skilled in management communication." She adds two caveats, however: "Management Communication is an extremely labor-intensive course requiring a lot of personal attention from skilled teachers. I'd rather see schools offer a good elective than a required course having huge sections or staffed by ill-prepared graduate students. Also, I support MIT's policy of allowing waivers for all courses." (About 5% of MIT students exempt Management Communication.)

Pro Elective: Although many schools offer electives in addition to their required core, some faculty feel that Management Communication should be taught in elective courses only.

Cornell's Charlotte Rosen is a vociferous supporter of elective, as opposed to required, courses: "Students would like our course to be a full semester, required course--but I think it's best as is. First of all, many important courses here--such as Entrepreneurship and Financial Institutions--are not in the core. A lot of students see the core as 'grade school.' Second, as an elective, we can limit our sections to 15 students for writing, 10 for speaking. Three, running exemption exams for communication would be extremely time-consuming and difficult. Finally, I'm convinced we can accomplish a lot more in an elective--with adults who want to change. I can't imagine why anyone would want to be in the core--unless the course were already in the core, in which case it would send a negative signal to drop the requirement."

Columbia's Geri Henze agrees: "I'm against all requirements for adult students," she says. "Learning can't and shouldn't be shoved down people's throats. At Columbia, if Finance were not required, students would still take it. Marketing is not a required course, but most students take it. I think a communication course would be the same. All courses should be driven by the pull of the real world."

2. What should our relationship with other faculty be? Some people feel that Management Communication faculty need to communicate with other business school faculty in special ways. "Spend time finding out about communication across the curriculum, rather than staying a communications ghetto," advises Kellogg's Barbara Shwom. "We need more collaboration, more coordination among courses." "We need the blessing of the college's top management," says John Stegman, who publishes an annual report of his activities at Ohio State for all deans and department chairs. "We need faculty support," agrees Owen's Martha Nord. "And we also need to educate them."

NYU's Chris Kelly begs to differ. "We should 'stick to the knitting.' Do what we do best. Offer the best communication theory and skills courses we can. Concentrate on making the field stronger. Not integrating. Not selling to other faculty. Not apologizing. The field is strong enough on its own." Tuck's Paul Argenti adds: "What should our relationship be? Cordial and collegial. There's no need to sell anymore. But faculty in all disciplines need to understand one another; that's a problem for all core courses, not just Management Communication."

UCLA's Janis Forman also underscores this lack of understanding: "The general faculty sees Management Communication as having value in terms of practical skills. They have little or no awareness of the discipline's rich rhetorical tradition or conceptual ties to other disciplines. They don't understand what we do." Harvard's Michael Hattersley adds: "One of our most important challenges in developing the course is to make other MBA faculty aware of the range and depth of our material."

3. What should our faculty status be? Some Management Communication faculty feel that fighting for traditional tenure-track spots is crucial. "Having the opportunity for research is the most important challenge in the field right now," according to Priscilla Rogers. "At Michigan, tenure-track positions provide pressures and privileges conducive to theoretical and applied research. I believe our field benefits as the number of such tenure-track positions increases." MIT's JoAnne Yates agrees: "At research-driven schools, we will remain second-class citizens until we, too, are evaluated on our research as well as on our teaching. Of course, we must also define what research subjects and methods are appropriate to our field."

Others scorn the traditional tenure-track. "The problem," according to Columbia's Geri Henze, "is that, on one hand, we should be like everyone else on the faculty because what we do is so important and so few can do it well. On the other hand, we don't want to be judged solely on empirical, quantitative research--much of which is uninteresting and stupid." Wharton's Larry Robbins suggests: "We need to establish a new category. We are faculty members, but a different breed of faculty members: we have more individual and small group instruction and different kinds of research and publication activities."

Three solutions seem to be emerging. One group is headed down the traditional tenure-track route. A second group is opting to define themselves as non-faculty administrators, although they continue to perform faculty-like functions. The third--and by far the largest--group is redefining a different kind of faculty position--such as a clinical track (Clinical Professor of Management Communication), a "practice of" track (Professor for the Practice of Management Communication), an adjunct track (Adjunct Professor of Management Communication), or a lecturer (Senior Lecturer in Management Communication).

Overview of Courses

Now that we've looked at the broad issues, let's examine some more specific issues--both what exists and what people think *should* exist--at each of ten schools. Keep in mind that these schools were chosen on the basis of one criterion only: to represent as large a variety as possible of teaching approaches, kinds of institutions, and environments. Many other fine schools and programs (among them, Carnegie-Mellon, Georgetown, Kellogg, Minnesota, Ohio State, Purdue, Stanford, Tulane, UCLA, UNC, USC, Wharton, University of Virginia--and many others) might just as well have been included.

The schools are listed here in alphabetical order.

Arizona State University: ASU's required course, Executive Communication, became part of the required core two years ago. The course includes writing, speaking, and managerial principles (strategies about when, with whom, and through what channels to communicate). Four tenure-track professors teach all 200 entering MBAs in sections of 25.

"To improve the program," says Larry Smeltzer, "I'd cut the class size. We already have the smallest classes in the core, with 25 students, but I'd think we could teach even more effectively in groups of under 20."

Cornell (Johnson): Charlotte Rosen was hired in 1980 to develop Cornell's course. Currently, Cornell offers two half-credit elective courses: one in speaking and one in writing. About 40% of the 450 students take a course from one of the three instructors. The courses receive extremely high student ratings, in the top five courses for speaking, in the top ten courses for writing.

Rosen strongly supports the elective, not a required course. Her wish-list includes better video set-up, including video projectors.

Dartmouth (Tuck): The world's oldest graduate school of business also boasts the oldest Management Communication course precursor. Tuck has offered various forms of communication courses since its founding in 1901. The current required core course--carrying equal credit to all core courses--covers strategy, speaking, writing, cross-cultural communication, and corporate communication. Two professors teach all 165 entering students in three sections. In addition, Tuck offers two second-year electives: Advanced Management Communication and Corporate Communication.

In a perfect world, Tuck's Paul Argenti would keep the required course, but divide the students into smaller sections with an additional faculty member.

Duke (Fuqua): Since 1983, Fuqua has had a required course, covering writing and speaking. An elective in Interpersonal Communication completes what Bob Reinheimer calls "the three-legged stool of communication competence: concise writing, effective speaking, and strong interpersonal skills." All of the 330 entering students take the course from one of the three instructors.

Reinheimer strongly supports the required course. He would also like to see greater integration with other courses--but without double grading. Instead, he would prefer to issue a single grade in consultation with the other faculty member. "It's important to show the connections between communication and other areas."

Emory: In 1988, the Emory faculty approved two new required core courses in communication. In the first semester, all students take the basic writing and speaking workshop in groups of 15 students each; in the second semester, they choose among various special-focus labs, for a total of a half-semester course in the first year. In the second year, they take Strategic Communication for Managers, a full-semester course encompassing internal and external communication issues. All 120 entering students will be taught by two instructors.

"Our faculty and our dean recognize the importance of communication to the practicing manager," says Sherron Kenton. "As a result, they tripled the amount of communication course time in the core. The problem we have now is that we have no chance for an elective, since our Strategic Communication course won't be taught until the end of the second year."

Harvard: Harvard has had a required communication course since the teens. Over the years, however, the course content and pedagogy have changed significantly. In its most recent form, the MC course comprises three modules: (1) "Formulating Communication Strategies: Using Information," (2) "Designing and Implementing Plans of Action: Using Persuasion," and (3) "Creating and Changing a Corporate Image." Harvard's 800 students (1988-89) are divided into nine sections of about 90 for all core courses.

Course heads Michael Hattersley and Robert Kent would like to keep improving the required first-year course: a tighter schedule, more class sessions than the current 19, more case development, and more credit. (Five of Harvard's core courses, like MC, carry 5 credits; the other six carry 8 credits.)

Massachusetts Institute of Technology (Sloan): MIT had no program before 1979; since 1983, the school has had a required core course plus an elective. (At MIT, all courses have waiver exams; about 5% of the class exempts Management Communication.)

In the best of all worlds, JoAnne Yates would definitely keep the required core course, although she would change its format from one class a week for one-and-a-half terms to two classes a week for one term. She would also prefer tenure-track employment slots to attract research-based colleagues. In true MIT spirit, the rest of Yates' wish-list is technology based. She would like a better video set-up: (1) about six rooms off a center viewing room to run multiple presentations at once and (2) a studio where students can record and playback for themselves. She would like all students hooked up to electronic mail for assignments and for announcements (a wish that is getting close to reality). And, finally, she would like to have access to a classroom with computer projection, so that both she and each student could project writing changes onto a large screen.

Michigan: Communication courses began at Michigan over 25 years ago. When Herb Hildebrandt joined the faculty 15 years ago, existing writing courses were reorganized and a business speaking course was added. The Michigan program now includes: (1) a writing assessment which directs students to a variety of communication offerings, (2) a consultant program which allows recommended students to discuss writing projects with professional managerial writers, (3) the Management Writing series, a quarter-term seminar, (4) a course on MBA Writing for Non-Native Speakers, and (4) two Management Communication electives.

With unlimited resources, Priscilla Rogers would build a Communication Research Center for experiments as well as presentation rehearsals, construct a classroom with computer technology to display student writing on screen,