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Employee Perceptions of Collaborative Communication Skills Learned in the Informal Workplace

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This is to certify that the doctoral dissertation by

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Abstract

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by

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BS, Beaver College, now Arcadia University, 1989

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Abstract

Collaborative communication skills are often underdeveloped through higher education experiences; therefore, employees need to develop these skills while working. Current research has not focused on how employees identify collaborative communication skills developed from informal workplace learning experiences, specifically those presented as coaching, mentoring, and networking. Marsick and Watkins's informal workplace learning theory was the conceptual framework for this basic qualitative study, which used a researcher-produced interview protocol with eight United States employees who had been in their positions longer than 6 months. Data were analyzed using three rounds of hand coding. Participants described how informal coaching, mentoring, and networking encounters influenced the development of five skills: giving and receiving feedback, oral communication, listening, presenting, and crafting emails. Participants also described how the roles they played during encounters, how they sought respected individuals to model, and how the tone and timing of messages influenced collaborative communication skill development and were important in coaching and mentoring. Adults who can recognize skill development from informal workplace learning may more readily apply the skills during the workday, while employer affirmation of learning in the workplace may positively influence employee esteem. Social change may result if both the employers and employees recognize the possible effect of informal workplace learning on employee satisfaction and productivity.

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate my dissertation to my two-legged and four-legged family members. To my dad, James F. Lewis, for teaching me the purpose of pursuing an education. To my mom, Helen M. Lewis, for teaching me learning has no boundaries. To my brother, James F. Lewis II, for prodding me into this and many other adventures. To my cats, Mr. Mistoffolees, MongoJerrie, and RumpleTeazer, for showing me when it was time to walk away and play.

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I would like to thank the members of my student cohorts who have come and gone during this journey. I hope this work is worthy of the high bar which you set.

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I would like to thank my coworker Pete for being my muse, my sounding board, and my cheerleader. You will forever and always be a blurb to me.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Collaborative communication, referring to communication that allows employees to feel their input is of value to a decision process, is considered a desirable soft skill because it facilitates lifelong learning, is transferable between interactions, and affects job performance and career advancement opportunities (Gharaveis et al., 2018; Hoogeboom & Wilderom, 2020; Laapotti & Mikkola, 2019; Schaubroeck et al., 2016; Weinberg et al., 2019). Collaborative communication skill development in academic settings is emphasized as a way for potential graduates to obtain desired employment (Blakeman & Taylor, 2019; Lucas & Rawlins, 2015; Rosselot-Merritt & Bloch, 2020). In business sectors, collaborative communication skills may be reinforced through employee participation in informal learning opportunities, which include collaboration through coaching, mentoring, and networking experiences, while reflecting on work processes and experiences with coworkers (Gharaveis et al., 2018; Hoogeboom & Wilderom, 2020; Laapotti & Mikkola, 2019; Schaubroeck et al., 2016; Weinberg et al., 2019).

It is not known if employees can identify collaborative communication skill development as an outcome of informal workplace learning experiences, and what skills they perceive they develop. A review of current research, including that conducted outside the United States, revealed a lack of studies connecting collaborative communication skill development with informal workplace learning opportunities. What has been explored about collaborative communication skills is whether the responsibility to teach this skillset rests with higher education institutions or with the employer. Informal workplace learning research has studied coaching, mentoring, and networking

experiences as related to successful employee relationships but not as these experiences relate directly to collaborative communication skill development.

Both the organization and the employees may benefit if employees can recognize skill development from informal workplace learning opportunities and then apply them during the workday. As adult learners, employees could be given affirmation of their learning, which would offer avenues for further learning and development in their chosen fields. For the field of adult education, the findings of this study may add additional evidence of the value that can be placed on informal workplace learning opportunities specific to the skill set associated with increased collaborative communication skills.

Sections included in this chapter are a review of summarized research literature offered as a background to the development of collaborative communication skills in informal workplace settings, a problem statement that concludes with a researchable problem, the purpose of the study, the research question guiding the research, the conceptual framework supporting the study, the nature of the study, definitions to promote a level setting of terms, assumptions, the scope and delimitations of the study, limitations, the significance of the study, and a summary.

Background

Students learn needed industry specific tools and techniques through university curricula, but employers are increasingly discovering the need for soft skills that relate to personality and attitude (Delise & Mello, 2017; Ghazali & Bennett, 2017; Hurrell, 2016; Matsouka & Mihail, 2016). Waeraas (2018) equated hard skills to those aspects that promote efficiency, produce results, and enhance performance. Balcar (2016) and Clokie

and Fourie (2016) noted that both hard skills and soft skills are needed to remain employable.

One soft skill of interest to employers is communication, specifically how the employees interact with coworkers and customers. A search of recent research literature has revealed a debate as to how individuals should acquire the communication skills they need to be successful. Proponents of communication skill development occurring in higher education settings have performed quantitative studies in the Czech Republic (Balcar, 2016), Greece (Matsouka & Mihail, 2016; Tsitskari et al., 2017), and New Zealand (Clokie & Fourie, 2016). Qualitative studies have been completed in Malaysia (Ghazali & Bennett, 2017) and South Africa (Taylor, 2016; van Romburgh & van der Merwe, 2015), and mixed methods research has been conducted in Austria and Finland (Chydenius & Gaisch, 2016), concluding that higher education settings did not adequately equip graduates with the communication skills needed to gain meaningful employment in the students' chosen field.

Others have considered it the responsibility of the employer to develop the skills they wish their employees to possess. Qualitative studies have been conducted in Scotland (Nickson et al., 2017) and the United States (Charoensap-Kelly et al., 2016), and a mixed methods study was performed in Scotland (Hurrell, 2016), concluding that employees prefer face-to-face encounters that occur during networking experiences to hone their workplace skills.

Researchers who have focused on the development of communication skills necessary for employment have determined that this skill would aid employees in their

advancement within organizations (Coffelt et al., 2016). Few researchers studying communication skill development have used employees as their participants or research subjects, instead choosing to perform qualitative studies with employers in France (Bailley & Lene, 2015), unemployed participants in self-help groups operating in England and Wales hoping to gain the skills needed for employment (Butler, 2014), and senior managers (Coffelt et al., 2016). One skill worthy of study may be face-to-face communication. Mishra et al. (2014), who explored internal organizational communications, noted the most desired communication channel between managers and their employees was face-to-face communication because of its potential for reducing ambiguity and uncertainty.

I designed this study to fill a gap that is evident in the current research literature by examining what collaborative communication skills employees perceive they have developed from informal workplace learning opportunities. Informal workplace learning is embedded in employees' everyday work experience. Because informal learning is experiential, it is considered by employers to be unstructured and as having no definable outcomes (Beck, 2014; Kim & McLean, 2014; Ley et al., 2014; Manuti et al., 2015; Nilsson & Rubenson, 2014). Literature that is currently available includes Breunig's (2016) qualitative exploration of the use of social media to enhance informal learning experiences, Jeong et al.'s (2018) literature review that addressed antecedents of informal learning, Kim and McLean's (2014) literature review that addressed how cultural factors motivate informal learning, and Kwon and Cho's (2017) quantitative examination of how informal learning opportunities enhance other workplace learning for employees.

Few research studies are available that address informal workplace learning as coaching, mentoring, and networking experiences. Coaching, support that emphasizes immediate task improvement (Bozionelos et al., 2016; Klinge, 2015), has been explored quantitatively in the United States and Korea by Kim et al. (2014), and Parker et al. (2015) qualitatively examined the success of peer coaching relationships. Mentoring, the transfer of knowledge through role modeling, teaching, counseling, and friendship (Bozionelos et al., 2016; Klinge, 2015), has been studied for its effect on career success in Greece, Italy, and Poland (Bozionelos et al., 2016). Moreover, Dopson et al. (2017) completed a literature review to determine how employers could use mentoring techniques without creating a financial burden for organizations, and Gerpott et al. (2017) performed a 3 year study in Germany to determine what information is transferred between participants of an intergenerational mentoring cohort. Research concerning networking, the sharing of organizational knowledge (Popova-Nowak & Cseh, 2015), has been divided into two fields of interest: networking use of social media (Anders, 2016; Erhardt et al., 2016; Gibbs et al., 2015; Madsen, 2016) and networking as a learning tool (Harman, 2014; Luan et al., 2016; van der Haar et al., 2015; Wang et al., 2017; Widmann et al., 2016).

Missing from current research literature, however, is a qualitative examination of collaborative communication skill development from informal workplace learning opportunities as described by employees. To further delineate this study from others, I completed the research using participants who are residents of the United States and employed in the pharmaceutical industry.

Problem Statement

The research problem I addressed in this study was that it was not fully understood how employees identify the development of collaborative communication skills from informal workplace learning experiences, specifically those presented as coaching, mentoring, and networking. What collaborative communication skills employees perceive they have developed from informal workplace learning opportunities are largely unexplored in research literature. With the switch to service industries and market globalization, there is an increasing need to explore individuals' perceptions of when and how they build soft skills, particularly in informal settings. Researchers have studied the relationship between skill development and higher education classroom learning experiences (Balcar, 2016; Chydenius & Gaisch, 2016; Clokie & Fourie, 2016; Geithner & Menzel, 2016; Ghazali & Bennett, 2017; Matsouka & Mihail, 2016; Taylor, 2016; Tsitskari et al., 2017; van Romburgh & van der Merwe, 2015) and have explored higher education curriculum as it relates to communication skill development (Blakeman & Taylor, 2019; Lucas & Rawlins, 2015; Rosselot-Merritt & Bloch, 2020). Building skills once employed have been studied in the United States (Charoensap-Kelly et al., 2016; Waeraas, 2018) and Scotland (Hurrell, 2016; Nickson et al., 2017). Communication skills needed for employment have been studied in France (Bailley & Lene, 2015) and England and Wales (Butler, 2014), as well as through email responses (Coffelt et al., 2016) and an examination of organizational internal communications (Mishra et al., 2014). Gharaveis et al. (2018) performed a mixed methods exploration of collaborative communication skills in the workplace, while Hoogeboom and Wilderom

(2020) and Laapotti and Mikkola (2019) examined video recordings of team meetings for collaborative communication occurrences. Furthermore, Schaubroeck et al. (2016) and Weinberg et al. (2019) studied collaborative communication traits in the workplace. However, very little qualitative research exists concerning the relationship between collaborative communication skills development and informal workplace learning opportunities.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to describe what collaborative communication skills employees perceive they have developed from informal workplace learning opportunities. In this study, I employed a basic qualitative design that included interviews with employees of a large pharmaceutical company. Specifically, employees were asked to share their perceptions of collaborative communication skill development they may have experienced through coaching, mentoring, and networking activities.

Research Question

The research question guiding this study was as follows: What collaborative communication skills do employees perceive they have developed from informal workplace learning experiences?

Conceptual Framework for the Study

The concept that grounded the study was the identification of informal workplace learning experiences, which, for the purpose of this study were defined as coaching, mentoring, and networking experiences. I used the informal workplace learning theory of Marsick and Watkins (1990) to frame the study. Marsick and Watkins's (1990) informal

and incidental workplace learning theory initially supported learning as an experiential event as proposed by Dewey (1938), Lewin (1947), Lindemann (1961), and Polanyi (1967). Vygotsky's (1987) proposal that learning is a social event influenced later adaptations of the theory (Marsick et al., 2009; Marsick et al., 2017; Watkins et al., 2014). Marsick and Watkins adapted the human resource informal and incidental learning circle of McLagan (1983) and Carnevale (1984) to describe how informal learning (coaching, mentoring, and networking encounters) affects individual, group, organization, and professional learning. The individuals' effective communication supports their ability to network and to participate in professional learning.

Nature of the Study

I chose a basic qualitative study design that was based on building knowledge as people examine and make sense of an activity or experience (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 23). Other research designs were considered and rejected for not meeting the need to hear directly from the participants their experiences as related to collaborative communication skills and informal workplace learning. I considered and rejected a quantitative research design because I was seeking a deeper understanding of participants' perceptions rather than testing a relationship among variables. Because a quantitative approach was not feasible, I also rejected performing a mixed method study.

This study had one key area of interest: employee development of collaborative communication skills and how that development may occur in informal workplace settings. To gather data on this concept, I interviewed employees of an international pharmaceutical company. I produced verbatim transcripts of the interviews using a

transcription feature in otterai (see otterai, 2020) and listening to the recordings of the interviews captured using a RecJoy Model UL103A 16GB memory USB Voice Recorder. Otterai is a free download software program that offers 600 minutes of recording and the uploading of three externally sourced recordings per month. Otterai offered a student discount price, which allowed for 6,000 minutes of recording and the limitless uploading of externally sourced recordings per month. A search of Amazon led to the discovery and purchase of the RecJoy device, which resembles a thumb drive and rests in the USB port of a computer to power up and to transfer files to the computer or directly into otterai.

I performed three rounds of coding: open coding of the transcriptions with notes written of insightful comments by the participants, placing margin notes and verbatim copy and pasted responses into a Microsoft Excel table, and placing marginal notes and verbatim copy and pasted responses onto Post-It notes which were later moved around a white board until themes emerged.

Definitions

Coaching: Interaction meant to generate immediate task improvement (Bozionelos et al., 2016; Klinge, 2015); the term is used in this study to mean a workplace activity designed to produce immediate task improvement.

Collaborative communication: Open discussion that allows employees to feel they are heard, their work is seen, and they are valued by their organization (Indeed.com, 2021); the term is used in this study to mean verbal and nonverbal actions between two or more individuals in a workplace environment.

Formal workplace learning: Constrained by time and place (Breunig, 2016); the term is used in this study to mean timed, outcome driven encounters that are mandated by business needs and employer sponsored.

Hard skills: Easily trained and measured (Balcar, 2016); discipline specific skills (Ghazali & Bennett, 2017); the term is used in this study to mean work-related skills that have a measurable outcome as related to employee productivity.

Informal workplace learning: Invisible learning through unplanned interactions with people in the workplace (Breunig, 2016); does not take place through formal education or training (Snoeren et al., 2015); the term is used in this study to mean interpersonal encounters that occur during coaching, mentoring, and networking experiences that occur during a normal workday.

Mentoring: Relationship in which older employees transfer knowledge to younger employees through role modeling, teaching, counseling, and friendship (Bozionelos et al., 2016; Klinge, 2015); the term is used in this study to mean a workplace transfer of knowledge between coworkers through role modeling, teaching, counseling, and perhaps friendship.

Networking: Sharing of best practices among employees or the creation of new knowledge from the interaction of organizational individuals, organizational teams, and inter-organizational teams (Popova-Nowak & Cseh, 2015); the term is used in this study to mean workplace encounters designed to produce a workplace relationship while working on an assignment or project with coworkers.

Soft skills: Interpersonal skills (Anthony & Garner, 2016); cooperation and leadership (Balcar, 2016); confidence, courage, adaptability, interpersonal skills, work ethics, problem-solving, critical thinking (Ghazali & Bennett, 2017); team working, self-presentation (Hurrell, 2016); emotional intelligence (Lvina et al., 2015); difficult to measure (Taylor, 2016); the term is used in this study to mean verbal and nonverbal communication traits.

Assumptions

The most prevalent assumption for this study was that the interviewed participants would answer the semistructured interview questions honestly, truthfully, and completely as well as the prompts and follow-up questions generated during the interviews. The interviews were conducted with individuals who volunteered with fore knowledge that they would not receive compensation for their participation.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of this study was to describe what collaborative communication skills employees perceive they have developed from informal workplace learning experiences, not how the employees develop collaborative communication skills. Delimitations created by this scope included the examination of informal workplace learning while avoiding reference to formal workplace learning opportunities, such as any professional development opportunities offered by employers. My focus on informal workplace learning as found in coaching, mentoring, and networking experiences was an additional delimitation found in the scope of this study. I chose these experiences because they aligned with the conceptual framework offered by Marsick and Watkins (1990) and

because these experiences may be available to employees who work within a brick-and-mortar organization as well as to those who work remotely. Another delimitation to the scope of this study was created by my focus on the development of collaborative communication skills rather than all skill development that results from coaching, mentoring, and networking experiences.

The participants of this basic qualitative study were limited to employees of three business units of one international pharmaceutical company with its regional headquarters located in a large urban city on the east coast of the United States. Therefore, further delimitations of the study were the location and participant tenure in their current position. The study included participants working in the United States. The study did not include individuals who have been in their current positions less than 6 months, including those who have been employed with the organizations in other capacities and have recently moved into their current position through promotion or transition.

Additionally, I did not include Becker's (1993) human capital theory in this study as it relates to education as a conceptual theory. Becker's human capital theory for education states that the investment in a person's education needs to be examined in terms of the income potential from having undertaken the learning experience. This is true for the individual who must repay loans needed to attain a formal institutional degree, as well as for organizations that invest training dollars in their employees (Dar & Mishra, 2019; Jha & Kumar, 2017; Whatley, 2017). Return on investment for an organization concerns whether formal or informal learning hold the most value for

employees and their organization. Formal learning opportunities, often planned and intentional, are intended to create measurable take-aways from seminars, workshops, and courses offered by the organization's human resource and training department (Marsick & Watkins, 1990). Informal learning opportunities, which can be planned or intentional, are often initiated when employees recognized they are lacking knowledge to perform their job function adequately and they seek assistance from a mentor or coach (Marsick & Watkins, 1990). Informal learning is social and can take place anywhere at any time; therefore, organizations cannot control this type of learning and find the results of these encounters to be hard to define and measure. Human capital benefits of employee training are readily detected in organizational financial bottom lines (Becker, 1993). To include this theory would have required access to financial documents and personnel records that are considered confidential by the organization.

Claims of transferability to other employees, communities of practice, organizations, et cetera, are not offered from this study. Transferability in a qualitative study places the onus of trying to establish an application of the study findings on future researchers who wish to make comparisons (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This is corroborated by Patton (2015) who supported extrapolating the findings of qualitative studies to future studies that have similar contexts rather than forcing transferability on the findings of the current study.

Limitations

Due to the small sample size, a generalization to all pharmaceutical organizations, or all United States based organizations, cannot be made. I countered the small sample

size by interviewing participants until data saturation was achieved. Another limitation to this study was the recruitment of participants solely from three business units of an organization. Participants could be recruited from any organization, including those in competition with the chosen sites. Participants could also be recruited from different areas of the United States, which could possibly value informal workplace learning differently.

Biases inherent in this study were addressed proactively. I offered participants a limited review of my background as a corporate trainer, but they were not informed of my participation in informal workplace learning activities or collaborative communication skills development for myself or my coworkers. I developed the interview questions avoiding either a positive or negative view of informal learning experiences and collaborative communication skill development (Appendix). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) recommended that researchers pay attention to their personal biases. I addressed my personal biases through reflective journaling as the study progressed.

Significance

This study was unique because it added to current literature on workplace learning that is skewed heavily toward formal workplace learning opportunities and the development of soft skills for university students trying to attain positions after graduation (Delise & Mello, 2017; Geithner & Menzel, 2016; Ghazali & Bennett, 2017; Reardon & Walsh, 2017). The responses gathered during this study may add to the understanding of how development of collaborative communication skills in the United States are perceived by employees and articulated in informal workplace learning

experiences. The analysis of the responses may also assist in determining organization support for informal workplace learning experiences as valid learning opportunities for employees. Both the organization and the employees may benefit if employees can recognize skill development from informal workplace learning experiences and then apply them during the workday. As adult learners, employees could be given affirmation of their learning that could offer avenues for further learning and development in their chosen fields. For the field of adult education, the findings of this study may add additional evidence of the value that can be placed on informal workplace learning experiences, specific to the skill set associated with increased collaborative communication skills.

Summary

Collaborative communication skills are desirable because they facilitate lifelong learning and affect employment practices. Recent research has revealed a discussion between proponents of communication skill development occurring in higher education settings and proponents of skill development being the responsibility of employers. Employers offer measured formal learning experiences for their employees and unmeasurable informal workplace learning experiences. It is not fully understood how employees identify the development of collaborative communication skills from the informal workplace learning experiences. The purpose of this study was to describe what collaborative communication skills employees perceive they have developed from informal workplace learning opportunities, specifically those presented as coaching, mentoring, and networking. Participants for this study were employees of three business

units of an international pharmaceutical company with its corporate headquarters located in a large urban city on the east coast of the United States. Delimitations of this study included the focus on informal workplace learning experiences, the focus on collaborative communication skills, the location, and the tenure of the participants. Limitations of this study were the small sample size; having participants from specific business units of a specific industry; and being based on the conceptual framework of Marsick and Watkins's informal workplace learning theory, which focused on coaching, mentoring, and networking experiences. This study added to the existing literature that is skewed toward formal workplace learning experiences and the development of communication skills from higher education learning opportunities.

Following is a comprehensive examination of peer-reviewed literature concentrated within the past 5 years concerning the topics of collaborative communication skill development and informal workplace learning experiences.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The research problem addressed in this study was that it is not fully understood how employees identify the development of collaborative communication skills from informal workplace learning experiences, specifically those presented as coaching, mentoring, and networking. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to describe what collaborative communication skills employees perceive they have developed from informal workplace learning experiences. While communication skills and informal learning are intertwined, current research literature is presented as separate areas of interest. Themes evident in the communication skills literature include enhancing current higher education business class curriculum and the use of collaborative communication skills in the workplace. Informal workplace learning literature themes include how it contrasts to formal workplace learning opportunities, and how researchers have studied coaching, mentoring, and networking in the workplace. Themes evident in coaching literature include employee perceptions of managerial coaching and peer coaching relationships. Mentoring has been explored for how it affects employability, how organizations use mentoring opportunities, and peer mentoring effectiveness. Networking topics include the use of social media as a networking tool, and how organizations use networking as learning opportunities,

This chapter includes a discussion of the literature search strategy used to find peer-reviewed research articles on the topics of communication skills and informal workplace learning. Conceptual support for the study offered by Marsick and Watkins is

examined through a review of peer reviewed research articles that were based on the same literary work that supports this study. Finally, an examination of peer-reviewed research conducted on the topics of communication skills and informal workplace learning is offered.

Literature Search Strategy

In this study, I focused on collaborative communication skills identified during informal workplace learning and skills development. I conducted a search of the Walden University library to find current peer-reviewed journal literature contributing to the knowledge field since 2014. The initial literature search included EBSCO, ERIC, Google Scholar, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global, SAGE Journals (formally SAGE Premier), and Thoreau Multi-Database Search, with the search terms *workplace and learn, learn and workplace, hard skill, soft skill,* and *communication and skill*. Subsequent searches were conducted using the terms *learn, skill,* and *and organization or business or workplace*. When I determined that the journal articles returned by the database searches were repeating, keywords listed in articles included in the proposal were used with the terms *and organization or business or workplace* to complete additional literature searches. Article keyword terms included *contextual knowledge, meaning of skill, hiring practice, experiential learning, social capital, generic skill, soft skill, workplace communication, communication competencies, employability, skill gap, skill need, people skill, interpersonal skill, presentation skill, professional skill, teamwork, behavioral skill, key competencies, business and professional communication, communication, interpersonal communication, social skill, skill discourse, social*

construction of skill, oral communication, speaking at work, job and employee attitude, job or employee attitude, soft skill development, applied skill, 21st century skill, nontechnical skill, general skill, essential skill, enabling skill, core skill, necessary skill, and *hard skill*. I conducted a second literature search using the term *collaborative communication*. I used this alone, and with the terms *workplace, organization, mentor, coach,* and *network*. I conducted a third search of SAGE Journals to find current peer-reviewed journal literature contributing to the knowledge field since 2017, using *Marsick and Watkins* and *informal learning theory* for the search terms to collect recent research articles that used the theory that supported this study.

Conceptual Framework

Marsick and Watkins's (1990) work on informal workplace learning informed this study; however, the exploration of informal and incidental learning brought many individuals to the forefront while Marsick and Watkins began their research. As Marsick and Watkins were developing their theory for informal and incidental learning in the workplace, others, including Argyris (1982,1985), Schon (1983,1987), Senge (1988), Mezirow (1981), and Jarvis (1987), were exploring adult learning. These works were based on the earlier works of Dewey (1938), Lewin (1947), Lindemann (1961), and Polanyi (1967), who examined learning as an experiential process. Dewey and Lindemann determined that learning, whether for a child or an adult, is an experiential process in which individuals examine information presented to them and relate it to knowledge they already possess. The responses of the individuals to the new information are formed by how they remember reacting in the past and equating that reaction to their

current situation. Lewin, while developing a process for organizational change,

contended that all learning is a cyclical process in which a problem is identified, solutions

to the problem are tested, the person reflects on the results of the chosen solutions, and

the process continues as another problem emerges from the previous one or a new

problem arises. Polanyi insisted that the human factors of emotion and previous

experience must be included in any examination of learning as these will influence the

outcomes of the learning encounters.

Marsick and Watkins (1990) followed the trend of the time by building their

informal and incidental workplace learning theory based on individual experiences.

Marsick and Watkins drew on the works of McLagan (1983) and Carnevale (1984) to

develop their theory. Marsick and Watkins pictured their informal and incidental learning

theory as a learning cone. To the human resource wheel developed by McLagan in which

workplace learning was divided between nine human resource practices (organizational

development, organizational job design, union labor relations, employee assistance,

compensation and benefits, selection and staffing, human resource planning, personnel

research and information systems, and training and development), Marsick and Watkins,

based on estimates of the division of workplace learning as established by Carnevale,

added emphases on formal learning (17%) and informal and incidental learning (83%).

Marsick and Watkins then added levels of learning within an organization, including

individual, group, organizational, and professional.

The informal and incidental learning in the workplace theory of Marsick and

Watkins (1990) has morphed from the original published in the 1990 version in which

informal and formal learning were opposites to their 2017 version in which they

presented informal and formal learning as a cyclical process that allows informal learning

to build on and enhance the formal learning an individual experienced. Marsick and

Watkins, after acknowledging the differences between informal and incidental learning

opportunities, chose to examine the two as a single entity that they then compared to

formal workplace learning. Marsick and Watkins contended the similarities between

informal and incidental workplace learning were that both occur without being scheduled

or structured into employees' daily routines, and both result from learning through

experience. Marsick and Watkins found informal and incidental learning opportunities to

be most beneficial when an employee recognized a problem and then sought

collaboration with coworkers to develop a solution to the problem; learning opportunities

occurred at the individual, group, organizational, or professional levels.

Supported by the works of Dewey (1938) and Lewin (1947), Marsick et al. (2009)

built upon the earlier theory of Marsick and Watkins (1990). This updated theory

continued to explore workplace learning as an interaction of individuals and their

environment while still maintaining informal and formal workplace learning as opposites;

however, the levels of learning within a workplace were renamed in Poell et al.'s (2009)

description as self-managed (individual), vertical (management), horizontal (work team),

and external (professional).

Watkins et al. (2014) further updated Marsick and Watkins's (1990) theory by

adding a social dimension to their theory that was based upon Lave and Wenger's (1991)

situated learning theory and Wenger's (1998) communities of practice theory. Watkins et

al. updated their theory to propose that informal and formal learning were not opposites but occurred in a continuum.

Marsick et al. (2017) amended their thinking after completing an exploration of the social aspect of learning. Following Vygotsky's (1987) sociocultural historical theory, which contends learning is social in both form and context, Marsick et al. (2017) modified their 2014 theory by proposing that formal and informal workplace learning occurs in unity, where formal learning is completed by, and transformed by, informal learning. Marsick et al. (2009) advocated that informal workplace learning was either supported or hindered by the contextual aspects of the workplace, but Marsick et al. (2017) contended that informal workplace learning is founded on the cultural setting of the organization. Marsick et al. (2009) supported an individual's self-directed process of problem solving, to which Marsick et al. (2017) added the social dimensions of interaction and collaboration dependent on individuals supporting each other in a continuous cycle of development. Further, Watkins et al. (2014) considered social relations as one of many factors affecting informal learning, grouping social relations with workplace resources, leadership, management support, and organizational structure. Marsick et al. (2017) supported Veresv's (2010) notion of social relations being the source of informal workplace learning.

There is some recent research that used the same conceptual framework of Marsick and Watkins (1990) that supported this study. Chai et al. (2018) interviewed stakeholders concerning a Korean government initiative designed to address the gap attributed to the rapid changes in industry and the inadequacy of the educational system

to keep up with those changes, between skills new employees possess and those needed

by employers. To compensate for the difference, the Korean government had developed a

program that offered both off- and on-the-job training for individuals entering the

workforce. Chai et al. concluded that the learning was formal, informal, and incidental, as

predicted by Marsick and Watkins (1990).

Clardy (2018) examined the trend of workplaces shifting from formal structured

training to informal learning at, through, and on the job. Clardy examined five research

studies to determine if Marsick and Watkins's (1990) expectation of 70% of workplace

learning being informal held. Clardy determined that the expectation of 70% of

workplace learning being informal is fictional and is more an average of 50 to 100%

findings in the five research studies.

Jeong et al. (2018) completed a literature review of 465 current works chosen

from 2,225 articles written since 1991 related to informal learning to determine how it

has been conceptualized and identified. Jeong et al. found no common definition of

informal learning, only definitions that point out how informal learning is not formal

learning. Conceptually, informal learning is based on age or generation of the individuals;

personality and interests; and job characteristics of seniority, tenure, being full- or part-

time, and skill level.

In a narrative exploration of police education in Australia, Ryan and Ollis (2019)

found a disconnect between what the police officers learned during their formal training

and current trends in education that include lifelong, workplace, and reflective learning

practices. Ryan and Ollis concluded that there was a need to dismantle and change the

current educational offerings for police officers, such as offering mentoring programs to help the police officers cope with the stressors of their work.

Literature Review

What follows is an exploration of communication skills, with an emphasis on collaborative communication skills and informal learning experiences based on current empirical research studies published after 2014. I introduce communication skills that have been explored as an outcome of informal workplace learning experiences. Patterns found in the communication skills research include higher education skill development for employability, building skills to remain employable, and communication skills needed for employment. I narrow the focus of communication research to collaborative communication. Themes found in the available research concern enhancing current higher education business class curriculum and collaborative communication uses in the workplace. I then define informal learning and present research based on patterns found in the studies. Informal workplace learning is contrasted against formal workplace learning; presented as a standalone factor in research studies; and presented as a support function during coaching, mentoring, and networking interactions experienced by employees.

Communication Skills

Business leaders hire employees based not only on economic feasibility but on the attributes an individual can bring to the company that enhance its current worker pool. Employability is, therefore, not merely a measurement of an individual's measurable skill qualifications (Tsitskari et al., 2017). Employability needs to be understood from the

perspective of different organizations, which means it can be influenced by workplace context, the individual's personal circumstances, and external socioeconomic factors (Balcar, 2016). Researchers have demonstrated the need for employees to possess skills that will enable them to grow within their chosen fields, as well as benefit their organizations (Anthony & Garner, 2016; van Romburgh & van der Merwe, 2015).

Employers have been asked to list skills they desire in employees. Soft skills are known by many names, including 21st century skills (Frazier & Cheek, 2016), aesthetics (Nickson et al., 2017), appreciation of diversity (Clokie & Fourie, 2016), career readiness skills (Clokie & Fourie, 2016), core skills (Charoensap-Kelly et al., 2016), discipline (Ghazali & Bennett, 2017), emotional intelligence (Charoensap-Kelly et al., 2016; Lvina et al., 2015; Trejo, 2016), empathy (Chydenius & Gaisch, 2016; Hurrell, 2016), employability (Clokie & Fourie, 2016; Ghazali & Bennett, 2017; Tsitskari et al., 2017), generic skills (Matsouka & Mihail, 2016), people skills (Taylor, 2016), self-confidence (Clokie & Fourie, 2016), social skills (Charoensap-Kelly et al., 2016), transferable skills (Hurrell, 2016), and workforce readiness skills (Clokie & Fourie, 2016). Personality traits linked to soft skills include optimism, integrity, and a sense of humor, all of which demonstrate leadership, empathy, communication, and sociability (Anthony & Garner, 2016; Chydenius & Gaisch, 2016).

What remains unknown is whether employees can identify the skills they develop from workplace learning activities to be those most desired by their employers. Taylor (2016) concluded that because there is no globally accepted definition of soft skills, they are difficult to observe and challenging to measure. Clokie and Fourie (2016) proposed

that any attempt to measure soft skills is attributable to the changing nature of organizations that now rely heavily on diverse workforces, project teams, cross-functional groups, and virtual groups.

Soft skill development, as related to communication, may be hard to measure because the employees have difficulty recognizing it as an outcome of workplace encounters. This study, which was designed to directly ask employees about collaborative communication skill development as it related to coaching, mentoring, and networking experiences, may enable employees to place a value on their skills. This value may lead employees to explore additional measures needed to enhance workplace learning encounters.

The availability of research literature concerning skill development from informal workplace learning encounters is minimal when compared to the amount of research literature concerning skill development from formal learning encounters experienced in university programs. Research has concentrated on how university programs develop skills necessary to gain employment (Balcar, 2016; Chydenius & Gaisch, 2016; Clokie & Fourie, 2016; Geithner & Menzel, 2016; Ghazali & Bennett, 2017; Matsouka & Mihail, 2016; Taylor, 2016; Tsitskari et al., 2017; van Romburgh & van der Merwe, 2015), how employees build skills to remain employable once hired (Charoensap-Kelly et al., 2016; Hurrell, 2016; Nickson et al., 2017; Waeraas, 2018), and communication skills needed to remain employed (Bailley & Lene, 2015; Butler, 2014; Coffelt et al., 2016; Mishra et al., 2014), but no studies were found to explore if employees perceive collaborative

communication skill development as an outcome of coaching, mentoring, and networking experiences when examined together.

Higher Education Skill Development for Employability

Balcar (2016), with the assistance of 481 interviewers, used quota sampling of 1500 Czech Republic employees to quantitatively determine if it was still rational for educational institutions to continue to focus on hard skill development over soft skill development, particularly communication skills. Balcar sought to understand the return on investment of soft and hard skills to determine if one were more profitable than the other. Balcar studied if possession of soft skills led to a wage variation, how soft skills related to education, and if there was a gender difference in wages related to possessing soft skills. Balcar suggested that hard and soft skills were intertwined, such that productivity derived from hard skill knowledge emerges from possessing soft skills. Balcar found soft and hard skills development across the Czech education system to be similar, except as concerned secondary vocational schools which stressed hard skill development; possession of soft skills positively impacted monthly wages earned by the employees; and returns based on gender were neutral. Balcar determined that the worth of hard or soft skills is ultimately dependent on employer need and not affected by personal, job, or employer characteristics.

Chydenius and Gaisch (2016) employed a mixed-methods triangulation process to explore the gap noted between skills possessed by graduates in the information and communications technology (ICT) field and skills desired by employers in this field. Chydenius and Gaisch performed a three phased exploratory study which involved:

determining what interaction skills were required for employment by reviewing the first

20 relevant job advertisements on a job search engine on a chosen date; asking 57 first

year ICT students from Austria ($n = 25$) and Finland ($n = 32$) to define work-life

interaction skills; and interviewing Austrian and Finnish managers responsible for

recruitment of ICT professionals. Examination of job advertisements revealed both

Austrian and Finnish companies want individuals with substantial spoken and written

language skills. The students defined interaction skills as relating to supporting

relationship behaviors. The Austrian managers stated that interaction skills are not a

prerequisite for being hired and performing entry level tasks, but that advanced

communication skills were either an enabler or roadblock to advancing within their

companies. The Finnish employers stated that possessing interaction skills were pivotal

for success in any ICT position, and further included two-way interaction and listening

skills to their expectations of professional written and spoken communication skills.

Chydenius and Gaisch concluded that communication skills at work are informal yet

crucial for advancement.

Clokie and Fourie (2016) performed a two-phased examination to determine if

mandatory first year communication courses at a predominantly vocational university in

New Zealand sufficiently developed the communication skills employers expected

graduates to possess. Clokie and Fourie first surveyed 40 local, national, and international

employers who were known to hire graduates from the university to determine if there

existed a match between skills needed in tertiary education settings for class completion

and those skills desired by employers to offer employment to graduates. Participants were

given five tasks: rate a list of communication skills as they related to other employability skills; rate the importance of a list of interpersonal skills; rate a list of business communication skills for relevance to entry-level work; rate a list of technical and mechanical writing skills; and list which communication skills they found lacking in graduates. Clokie and Fourie then examined the content taught in nine mandatory communication courses (based on different degrees offered by the university) and the outcomes from the courses as they compared to the course descriptions; content was grouped in the same way as the survey sent to the employers. Clokie and Fourie found communication skills to be the highest ranked skill as related to employability, and motivation, listening, and teamwork to be desirable interpersonal skills. Clokie and Fourie discovered that properly composed emails were the most desired business communication skills, which coincided with the finding that writing accuracy was an essential skill for employees to possess because industry leaders did not have time to check every email sent from their organization. Clokie and Fourie found that entry level workers lacked communication skills associated with professionalism, the ability to communicate verbally in a confident manner, empathy to internal and external customers, and lack of urgency toward deadlines. The nine course descriptions analyzed mentioned the communication traits desired by employers, however none of the descriptions mentioned all communication traits desired by employers. Clokie and Fourie determined that classroom learning does not always transfer to the workplace.

Geithner and Menzel (2016), while stating the purpose of academic teaching is to acquire specialist knowledge and to understand theoretical concepts, determined that

traditional ways of teaching in universities and other academic settings is inadequate for the needs of employers. Geithner and Menzel administered pre- and post-game questionnaires to 47 students who participated in one of six 2 day game sessions designed to pay attention to experiential learning of real-world business problems and real-world situations. Geithner and Menzel recognized that student soft skills appeared to be developed through business simulation games which allowed for the growth of project management skills related to communication, interaction within teams, and leadership.

Ghazali and Bennett (2017) noted a need to explore graduate skillsets after Malaysia announced a national strategy that outlined desirable graduate hard and soft skills. The goal of the Malaysian initiative was for the educational system to produce individuals who would be successful in their chosen careers. Ghazali and Bennett employed purposive convenience sampling followed by chain referral to conduct semi-structured interviews of eight Malaysian music professionals to understand employability in a higher education context. The participants reported needing both hard skills as related to being technically proficient with their instruments, and soft skills as related to securing work and sustaining careers in their chosen fields.

Matsouka and Mihail (2016) were determined to bring heightened awareness to the employability of young people by finding a common ground between the skills taught at universities and those desired by employers. Matsouka and Mihail quantitatively questioned 178 graduates from Aristotle University in Thessaloniki, Greece who were seeking employment and 29 human resource managers from Greek companies for how views of university graduates and human resource managers differ on graduate

employability in terms of soft skills required by the labor market. Graduates were asked a series of questions concerning what skills they thought they had as related to their employability, what skills did they feel companies were looking for in potential employees and did they believe they attained those skills through their courses at the university, job search methods, what help had they received regarding their job search, and demographics. The company representatives were asked what skills managers wanted in their employees, what skills they believed the graduates possessed, and to detail what challenges the employers faced, what obstacles were preventing the potential employees from getting positions, and to what degree the employers supported university initiatives. Matsouka and Mihail found that companies wanted graduates with communication skills (89.6%), however the company representatives felt only a small percentage of individuals possess these skills (27.6%). Matsouka and Mihail further found the job seekers rated themselves higher for possessing desired skills than did the company representatives. Matsouka and Mihail concluded that effective cooperation was needed between universities and employers to develop individuals who will be considered employable once they finish their university studies.

Taylor (2016) qualitatively analyzed open-ended questionnaires that were emailed to 11 lecturers at a university in South Africa, 39 individuals who had recently completed their post graduate information technology studies, and 25 South African information technology companies to determine what soft skills were most needed in the information systems profession and how well higher education provided the skills to students. When asked to identify the most important soft skills required of the information technology

sector, lecturers and industry personnel identified verbal and non-verbal communication as most important; recent graduates identified both verbal and non-verbal communication skills, and multi-disciplinary thinking as most important. Lecturers and recent graduates agreed that half of the industry desired soft skills were taught during the university classes. Lecturers and industry personnel agreed soft skills were not adequately developed at universities. Taylor agreed with lecturers, recent graduates, and industry personnel that students would benefit from increased exposure to industry expectations through internship placements.

Tsitskari et al. (2017) explored graduate employability in sports and recreation sectors in Greece to determine if a gap existed between the skills taught at sports higher education institutions and those desired by employers. Placing the responsibility on the individual to attain the knowledge and skills needed for their chosen field, in addition for accounting for industry economic cycles, Tsitskari et al. believed that the higher education institutions should focus on employability skills of students, where employability skills were generic or transferable soft skills that aided in being able to function in the workplace. To help the higher education institutions in equipping the students with necessary skills, Tsitskari et al. performed a quantitative exploration in which they opportunistically sampled Greek sports and recreation employers for their perceptions of skills needed by employees to be successful. Tsitskari et al. determined that employers expected employees to be committed to continuous learning, willing to develop their skills, and to demonstrate interpersonal and personal skills centered around communication; employers also wanted hard skills of being efficient and productive, time

management and priority setting, and the ability to analyze and solve problems. Tsitskari et al. determined that higher education institutions should assist students in developing all their skills, not just hard skills, as this may lead to the students being more employable once they graduated.

van Romburgh and van der Merwe (2015) conducted an empirical investigation using a questionnaire and open-ended questions of South African senior trainee accountants, managers, and firm partners concerning skill shortages noted in first year accountant trainees in Gauteng Province, South Africa. The questionnaires consisted of nine demographic questions, 18 questions concerning skills shortages of first year trainees, and four open ended questions concerning the roles universities played in preparing first year trainees for practice. A low response rate to the questionnaire overall, and particularly from large accounting firms, caused van Romburgh and van der Merwe to analyze their results in terms of participants rather than across the entire accounting industry located in Gauteng Province. Overall, the respondents did not find universities to properly equip trainees with skills required in practices. It was noted trainees lacked appropriate communication skills, but the trainees did possess interpersonal skills related to showing respect, being courteous, and working well in a team.

Building Skills to Remain Employable

Charoensap-Kelly et al.'s (2016) case study of 1178 employees at a large southeastern Louisiana United States hospital was conducted to determine if face-to-face or online training of soft skills is more effective. Charoensap-Kelly et al. considered soft skills to be attributes that an individual possesses and uses with teams, when

communicating, in leadership situations, with customers, and when solving problems. Charoensap-Kelly et al. determined that workers preferred face-to-face encounters to develop their soft skills.

Hurrell (2016) performed a mixed methods analysis of soft skills deficits associated with employees at two hotels in Scotland (Fountainebleau and Oxygen, pseudonyms) and one geological services company in Scotland (Silex, pseudonym). Hurrell wanted to know if noted soft skills gaps related to teamwork, oral communications, and customer service were linked to dissatisfied workers withdrawing these skills or attributed to how the organizations recruited and trained their personnel. Hurrell presented all workers with a paper survey to complete, and noted a low return rate among employees, possibly due to the employees not reading English and because the employees did not have workstations at which they could complete the form; interviews with managers and interviews and focus group discussions with employees were also conducted. Hurrell discovered that workers at Fountainebleau reported skills deficits across teamwork, oral communication, and customer service, while workers at Oxygen reported issues of oral communication skills gaps associated with the kitchen staff; workers at Silex reported no skills gaps related to teamwork, oral communications, or customer service. Hurrell asked the respondents why they thought the skills gaps occurred, and the dominant answer was demotivation of the employees due to working conditions, which workers at Fountainebleau blamed on the individual workers and workers at Oxygen attributed to the nature of job. Hurrell found recruitment at Fountainebleau to follow a prescribed process, while Oxygen was more relaxed in their

process; recruitment at Silex was both rigid and relaxed depending on the position for which individuals were interviewing. Hurrell further discovered that the three companies offered training to their employees, however workers at Oxygen and Silex were given autonomy in how they used their training to interact with customers.

Nickson et al. (2017) conducted 37 interviews of managers, supervisors, and employees of high-end fashion retailing outlets in Glasgow and Edinburgh. The service workers were typically considered low skilled due to the nature of their work, however Nickson et al. found the workers to be skilled in both product knowledge and selling ability. The skills of the workers were enhanced by on- and off-the-job training offered by the employers. Off-the-job training shifted the onus of learning onto employees as it was expected that the employees would complete the training, yet the employees were unpaid for their time. Nickson et al.'s study further considered skills as those brought to the job by the employee versus those developed at and utilized during the job, finding those interviewed to possess both hard skills necessary to complete a sale and intangible emotional and aesthetic soft skills that made customers drawn to them for their knowledge.

Waeraas (2018) analyzed tangible (related to production) skills desired by 75 United States based agencies by examining the agencies' core value statements for mention of desirable soft versus hard values. Waeraas employed an electronic qualitative analysis tool called Provalis to perform a three-stage analysis of the 394 core values found in the 75 value statements. The first analysis determined three sets of values: hard values, that were equated to efficiency, performance, accountability, results, excellence,

and outputs; public sector values, that were equated to fundamental values reflecting

public interest and welfare of society; and unique or soft values, that were equated to the

identity of institution. The second analysis generated inductive labeling of groups of core

value terms: relational identity, workplace identity, and professional identity. Waeraas

then used Provalis a third time to determine which identities are reflected simultaneously

and which co-occur more often than others. Waeraas found that the most frequently

occurring values (33%) were soft values of relational and good workplace identities; less

than 25% reflected hard values. Waeraas concluded that core value statements

demonstrated agencies who desired their employees be social and efficient at the same

time.

Communication Skills Needed for Employment

Bailley and Lene (2015) explored the role of soft skill acquisition as it related to

worker and workplace autonomy. Bailley and Lene interviewed 33 employers working in

retail and distribution (supermarkets, fashion retailers, etc.) and luxury and chain hotels

and restaurants in France. The employers would employ people who possessed skills that

created enjoyable shopping experiences for the customers. As the employees

demonstrated they could interact in an appropriate manner they were allowed more

autonomy toward the decisions they made that would enhance the customers shopping

experience. Bailley and Lene found that this autonomy instilled in the worker the

expected way to handle customer experiences, which in effect subordinated the employee

to the workplace norms and the way in which the employer wished to operate their

business.

Butler (2014) conducted interviews and group discussions with 36 unemployed male participants of stammering support events and stammering self-help groups in north England, the Midlands, and south Wales to explore aesthetic skills, specifically possessing excellent communication skills as required by many employment postings. Participants reported having achieved low educational stages because school was difficult and having their career choices influenced by their inability to speak in a manner consistent with job expectations. Participants reported their experiences with job recruitment and selection as being challenging. If they reported their stammering on the application the process usually ended, and if they did complete the selection process, they felt the employers had accommodated them by offering menial positions or positions which did not require speaking as a skillset. Those individuals who did gain employment found their advancement opportunities to be stagnant as they were not thought of as knowledgeable or capable individuals. Some participants reported that increasing their hard skills to offset their diminished soft skills to appear as competent as other workers who did not stammer. Butler's work supported that individuals in the workplace are judged by what they say and how they say it.

Coffelt et al. (2016) performed a content analysis of 52 open ended email responses from industry personnel stating which communication skills were most needed for that industry. Coffelt et al. found senior managers based their promotion decisions, in part, on the candidate's oral communication abilities. Technological advancements in electronic communication have made written communication skills outdated or less important than oral communication skills, especially when considering public speaking,

leading meetings, and negotiating contracts (Coffelt et al., 2016). Coffelt et al. determined that the top ten oral communication skills most in demand by senior leaders to be: listening, asking questions, discussing, sharing information, agreeing, suggesting, getting feedback, seeking feedback, answering questions, and explaining.

Mishra et al. (2014) performed an exploratory study to examine the perceptions of public relations professionals regarding organizational internal communications. Internal communication affects trust between employees and their managers, and belief in and engagement toward their organization's success. Mishra et al. found that the professionals supported internal communication channels because they allow for improved employee engagement, they protected and managed the organizations reputation, and they encouraged dialogue between employees and internal and external stakeholders which ultimately led to the employees becoming an ambassador for the organization. Mishra et al. determined that face-to-face communication to be the most desired communication channel for employees because it had the greatest potential for resolving ambiguity and uncertainty.

Collaborative Communication Skills

The division of communication skills and collaborative communication skills is not clear cut in available research. Little research has been recorded that specifically studied collaborative communication, but what is available is presented below and falls within the designations as used in the previous communication skills section: research related to higher education curriculum changes and workplace experiences.

In Higher Education. Blakeman and Taylor (2019) analyzed a creative brief as a communication tool between account and creative teams of advertising agencies. They emailed open ended surveys to 189 account teams and 239 creative members at 24 different advertising agencies in nine different United States cities; 33 account managers and 42 art and creative directors responded. They discovered that both teams believed a strong brief centered on strategy, but the teams varied on the length of a brief. Teams also responded that collaborative communication between the teams should occur before, during, and after a brief is created. Blakeman and Taylor made suggestions to professors who teach advertising at universities to update their curriculum to include student competencies in team communications, and to cross train students between creative and account services to gain a better understanding of each team's role in an advertising agency.

Lucas and Rawlins (2015) implemented a competency-based curriculum in a business communications course to determine core competencies needed for the students to succeed in the workplace. At the beginning of the semester, Lucas and Rawlins used rubrics to assess the students' work. At the end of the semester, they reversed their process by assessing their rubrics with the work of the students. Lucas and Rawlins revealed two guiding principles for successful business communication. The first principle was that communication should be goal oriented and the sender should be cognizant of the instrumental purpose of the communication, their relationship with the receiver, and that the communication allows the receiver to form an identity of the message sender. The second principle was that workplace communications should be

receiver centric, placing emphasis on how the receiver of the message will interpret the meaning rather than on the intention of the sender. Lucas and Rawlins determined that using these two guiding principles, and the five core competencies they found in the work of successful students (professional, clear, concise, evidence driven, and persuasive) would enable students to transition successfully into a workplace setting.

To support the need for business program college students to be taught business and professional communication skills, Rosselot-Merritt and Bloch (2020) performed a case study review of the assigned mentoring relationship they began as graduate students to determine if the relationship aided in the development of their communication skills. Rosselot-Merritt and Bloch divided artifacts collected from emails, assignment descriptions, and guideline documents into type and purpose categories. Rosselot-Merritt and Bloch stated that their relationship benefitted them in collaboration, co-authorship, and the development of their scholarly identities; challenges included distance, transitioning from a formal to an informal mentoring relationship, and changes in career and research paths. Rosselot-Merritt and Bloch determined that college students should learn business and professional communication skills because they can benefit from a mentoring relationship if collaborative communication is used by the mentees to manage an open relationship with their mentors, and the mentors help the students find employment which establishes their professional identity.

Workplace Collaboration. A mixed methods exploration of the impact visibility of coworkers had on teamwork, collaborative communication, and security in an emergency department of a hospital was conducted by Gharaveis et al. (2018). Gharaveis

et al. observed the physical design of the emergency department during day and evening

hours that were established high volume times based on recorded number of patient

visits. Gharaveis et al. determined that communication between nurses was dependent on

patient load and occurred in hallways and patient rooms so the nurses could be closer to

their patients; the nurses moved to the central station only to complete charts and speak

with physicians. Gharaveis et al. interviewed three physicians and two nurses concerning

the importance of visibility to their job performance. Gharaveis et al. determined that

higher visibility of coworkers improved teamwork and collaborative communication

while decreasing security issues.

Hoogeboom and Wilderom (2020) explored workplace team interactions during

meetings for task content, information sharing, and overall effectiveness. Hoogeboom

and Wilderom videotaped regularly scheduled staff meetings of 96 teams, 1395

participants, of one large public sector organization in the Netherlands. Hoogeboom and

Wilderom coded 8194 minutes of video tape for observed behaviors during the meetings.

Hoogeboom and Wilderom determined that a high frequency of team meetings decreased

team effectiveness as individuals stopped sharing information pertinent to tasks related to

teamwork; knowledge intensive teams were more susceptible to this negative effect.

Laapotti and Mikkola (2019) qualitatively examined problem talk through video

recordings of 10 hospital management group meetings recorded at a large public hospital

in Finland. The hospital was undergoing growth processes while facing economic

challenges. Executive directors and directors, neither of which had formal power or

decision-making responsibilities, conducted meetings to share information between staff

members and to garner support for the executive directors and directors as they performed their tasks. Laapotti and Mikkola noted that the video recording effected the individuals being recorded, such that they acted more formally in the initial meetings that were recorded but relaxed as future meetings were recorded. Laapotti and Mikkola noticed that the problems being discussed were ongoing issues, however the groups did not discuss problems they had heard repeatedly. Laapotti and Mikkola determined that the meetings, designed to work on problems, were used as an organizational means to sustain organizational structures and practices but did not solve the problems being discussed.

Schaubroeck et al. (2016) focused on team leader coaching when they explored interpersonal communication patterns to determine how contentious collaborative communication affected team member performance and the willingness of team members to participate in self learning practices. Schaubroeck et al. sought to quantitatively collect data from 150 teams, but only 82 teams comprised of 338 employees from 10 service organization in Israel completed the survey. Schaubroeck et al. distributed the survey to team members and then six weeks later administered the survey to team leaders. Schaubroeck et al. determined that the team leaders who relied on contentious collaborative communication undermined team learning, team innovation, and team task performance. Schaubroeck et al. also noted that team leaders who exhibited coaching behaviors in team meetings facilitated discussions that encouraged experimentation, interpersonal feedback seeking, and problem solving.

Weinberg et al. (2019) performed a two-stage examination of gendered communication traits. Weinberg et al. defined stereotypical male communication traits as assertive, egocentric, abstract, and instrumental; stereotypical female traits were defined as egalitarian, compassionate, concrete, and relational. Stage one, determining if the male and female traits had been defined correctly, was performed with 153 undergraduate business students. Weinberg et al. chose to perform this stage with students because the students were assumed to be unbiased as they were not experienced workers. After the students confirmed the chosen definitions of the gendered communication traits were separate from their association to the biological sex of an individual Weinberg et al. performed the second stage of the study, determining if gendered communication traits affected advancement within an organization. Weinberg et al. employed Qualtrics Panels to solicit 4652 individuals employed in the United States to participate in their study; 1589 individuals received the survey, of which 705 individuals opened the survey and 637 completed the survey. Weinberg et al. determined that male communication traits were associated with number of promotions and advancement to higher managerial levels, and female communication traits were associated with higher pay compensation and increased departmental control. Weinberg et al. concluded that the advancements were evident for individuals who employed stereotypical communication traits as well as for those individuals who did not use stereotypical communication traits.

Workplace Learning

Organizations are acted upon by external and internal forces, which the members control to better their position within the marketplace (Bolman & Deal, 2013).

Organizational contexts impact members' attitude and willingness to participate in lifelong learning which enhances their knowledge and skills (Sung et al., 2016). While senior leaders have the most impact on how an organization learns and adapts to changes (Waddell & Pio, 2015), it is the workers' motivation which directs their learning (Snoeren et al., 2015). Jagasia et al. (2015) noted that adults are learners with considerable experience who know what they wish to learn, and organizations must adapt their teaching methods to meet the needs of the employees. Managers who recognize that employee work performance and job satisfaction are closely associated with workplace learning are motivated to pay attention to the learning needs of their employees (Bozionelos et al., 2016).

Tikkanen and Nissinen (2016) determined the growing concern among policy makers about the competencies required of 21st century organizations limit the employees to whom available learning funds are distributed. Organizations with limited funding available for educational opportunities focus first on the leadership of the organization when presenting workplace learning opportunities. If organizations are unable or reluctant to diversify their available learning opportunity funding, then employees are forced to create and participate in activities that further their career growth. One such methodology available is informal workplace learning experiences.

Informal Learning

Often embedded in everyday social practices, actions, and conversation informal learning opportunities are non-structured business-related activities that are not planned or organized, usually occur in a mentor situation, happen at any time of the day, and have

no measurable learning goals (Jarvis, 2010). Informal learning is arguably the most effective form of knowledge transfer because it results from reflection generated by teamwork and social interaction (Beck, 2014; Kim & McLean, 2014; Manuti et al., 2015; Nilsson & Rubenson, 2014).

Informal learning perpetuates organizational norms and cultures to new employees and newly promoted first line managers and positively correlated to worker flexibility, employability, and adaptability (Kim & McLean, 2014; Manuti et al., 2015). Informal learning opportunities allow people from different work segments to meet and work with people outside their immediate work group which fosters transformative learning in informal settings (Nilsson & Rubenson, 2014; Wilhelmson et al., 2015). Because informal learning is experiential and dependent on the intellectual curiosity and self-directedness of the worker, it is considered to be unstructured with no definable outcomes, and is negatively correlated with being difficult to measure, usefulness toward professional development, and cost (Beck, 2014; Kim & McLean, 2014; Ley et al., 2014; Manuti et al., 2015; Nilsson & Rubenson, 2014).

Primarily evolving from group problem solving, informal learning can happen anywhere on or close to the job and is not provided through educational or training institutions (Beck, 2014; Hallden, 2015; Kim & McLean, 2014; Manuti et al., 2015; Nilsson & Rubenson, 2014). During any working period, a group of individuals, perhaps as few as two (or more depending on the time of day), may be involved in coaching, mentoring, and networking endeavors. This informal learning session allows the participants to learn about other segments of the organization's society to which the

conversation participants may not be familiar. Insight offered by outsiders to the work process allows for a fresh perspective on the issues faced by the group.

Formal Versus Informal Workplace Learning

Formal workplace learning is outside the scope of the present study but contrasting formal and informal workplace learning has occurred in research to better define informal workplace learning. This is evident in the works of Clardy (2018) who performed a literature review to determine the percentage of workplace learning that can legitimately be considered informal, Manuti et al.'s (2015) literature review of how formal and informal workplace learning affected employability, and Tikkanen and Nissinen (2016) who performed a quantitative exploration of how formal and informal workplace learning enhanced learning.

Clardy (2018) performed a review of literature written between 1985 and 2000 that examined the percent of informal versus formal learning that a person experienced in the workplace. Clardy noted five literature traditions which supported 70% of learning in the workplace was informal: training publications, Bureau of Labor Statistics surveys, Center for Creative Leadership publications, academically based research literature, and Canadian studies of informal learning. Clardy stated five reasons for contesting the 70% declaration: no one had previously challenged the 70% notion, it was simply accepted; by not challenging the 70%, researchers had presented simplified workplace learning processes; what value could be placed on formalized, structured school learning if it only represented 10-30% of a person's learning experiences; human resource departments could eliminate formal learning, increase informal learning to 100%, and learning would

thereby become free for organizations; if human resource departments eliminated formal learning and training, detrimental effects could happen for organizations. Clardy traced citations to original sources to find viable support in the five literature traditions for their claims that 70% of workplace learning is informal; Clardy found none, including the work of Marsick and Watkins (1990) that cited the work of Carnevale for their explanation of 70% of workplace learning being informal. Clardy explored five reasons why the cited works were flawed in their estimates: atypical samples and improper generalizations, use of loaded open-ended interview guides, improper calculations of proportional values, problems with self-reported data, and differing definitions of informal learning. Clardy proposed several solutions to the issue of stating percentages as related to workplace learning: informal learning does not negate the need for formal, organized learning experiences; both formal and informal learning are important; and human resource departments should seek to improve the learning and development experiences of all workers, regardless if the experience be formal or informal.

Manuti et al. (2015) performed a review of recent literature concerning formal and informal learning in the workplace to clearly define the differences between formal and informal learning. Manuti et al. framed their literature search based on workplace competencies that resulted from formal and informal learning. Manuti et al. contended lifelong employability in a globally sustained marketplace was replacing the notion of lifelong learning, so much so that the boundaries that once separated formal, classroom style learning, and informal, through teamwork and social interactions, were blurred.

Manuti et al. contended that the parallel fashion in which formal and informal learning occurs builds new skills and competencies.

Tikkanen and Nissinen (2016) quantitatively examined a sample set of data collected for a large research project called Realizing the Workforce Skills Reserve financed by the Norwegian Research Council to determine motivating factors that led workers to participate in formal and informal lifelong learning opportunities. The Norwegian Research Council collected the data for the larger study with random sampling, in face-to-face computer-assisted tests and interviews of 166,000 adults aged 16-64 years from 20 countries. The subset analyzed by Tikkanen and Nissinen concerned 3383 adults with tertiary degrees, aged 45 years and older, employed, and living in Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden; these countries were chosen for their political, cultural, and historical homogeneity. Tikkanen and Nissinen found that the factors affecting why workers would be motivated to participate in adult education opportunities varied by country: workers in Denmark participated based on job sector, skills used at work, company size, and individual health; workers in Finland participated based on skills used at work; workers in Norway participated based on gender, job autonomy, income, skills used at work, and age; workers in Sweden participated based on working in a public sector job, age, and health. Tikkanen and Nissinen determined that investment in skills development by employers and employees was most profound in individuals when their skills and education qualifications for a position were already high, and that willingness to invest in lifelong learning opportunities decreased by age for both employers and employees.

Informal Workplace Learning

This study is designed to fill a gap which is evident in the current research literature about informal workplace learning by examining it in terms of coaching, mentoring, and networking opportunities presented to employees during their workday. I found no studies which explore these three opportunities together. What is available in empirical studies written since 2014 is Breunig's (2016) qualitative examination of the inclusion of social media as a tool that could enhance informal workplace learning opportunities, Jeong et al.'s (2018) literature review and Kwon and Cho's (2017) quantitative examination studies concerning how informal workplace learning opportunities enhance learning for employees, and Kim and McLean's (2014) literature review exploration of cultural factors which motivate informal workplace learning.

Breunig (2016) performed an in-depth exploratory single case study to examine how 35 dispersed individuals at a global engineering services organization used social media in the form of wikis as a learning tool. Breunig wanted to explore if the workplace learning framework as proposed by Eraut (2004) applied to social media usage in a globally positioned organization. Eraut's framework related learning and context factors of informal learning to workplace collaboration. Breunig noted incorporation of the wiki system enhanced learning which occurred as collaboration during project assignments because the wiki allowed for a low barrier to technology use which allowed for greater local and virtual knowledge sharing among project participants. Breunig further noted that the wiki system allowed for an elimination of the contextual factors which affect

local collaboration as participants were able to share expertise across time zones thus resulting in a stronger sense of organizational membership.

Jeong et al. (2018) comprehensive literature review concentrated on works which investigated the antecedents of informal learning to determine how informal learning has been conceptualized and measured and found 55 factors influence informal learning in the workplace. Despite the volume of works reviewed, Jeong et al. determined that further research was needed to find a comprehensive universal means of examining informal learning so that results can be used to improve informal learning for individuals, groups, and organizations.

Kwon and Cho (2017) studied the role of organizational training professionals as it related to the trainers feeling satisfied in their careers. Employing a cross-sectional quantitative approach, Kwon and Cho used a snowball sampling method to collect 226 self-reported questionnaires from professional trainers employed in South Korea who used informal learning opportunities to enhance their facilitation skills. Kwon and Cho discovered that the more challenging and interesting their duties, the more likely the trainers were to invest their time and efforts toward enhancing their facilitation skills and their involvement in the overall success of the organization, especially if their efforts were recognized by the organization.

Kim and McLean (2014) performed a literature review to explore how cultures influence informal learning in the workplace. They analyzed the data according to five of Hofstede's dimensions of national culture: power distance, collectivism versus individualism, femininity versus masculinity, uncertainty avoidance, and long-term

versus short-term orientation. Kim and McLean found power distance to affect informal learning activities because it related to how workers view their relationships with their managers and peers; workers in large power distance cultures expressed negative reactions to informal learning because it meant questioning a manager or sharing information with a peer. Kim and McLean expected to find informal learning to be most active when peer-to-peer collaboration was supported as with a collectivist society, however they found literature to contain conflicting information for whether a collectivist or individualistic culture best supports informal learning with neither being better than the other. Kim and McLean found literature that supported individuals from high uncertainty avoidance cultures preferred structured learning with concrete outcomes while individuals from low uncertainty avoidance cultures thrived with informal learning opportunities. Kim and McLean found informal learning in feminist cultures to be supported through group experiences, while learning in masculine cultures was supported through individual learning pursuits that emphasized learning outcomes. Kim and McLean found the benefits of informal learning to be in conflict when examining literature concerning long-term versus short-term orientation cultures: individuals in long-term orientation cultures use informal learning for self-development, but not for work performance improvements; managers from long-term orientation cultures were found to be unsupportive of informal learning to the point of inhibiting these learning opportunities; individuals in short-term orientation cultures used informal learning to enhance current work experiences but did not apply the learnings toward future development.

Coaching. Where mentoring focuses on long-term career support, coaching emphasizes immediate task improvement (Bozionelos et al., 2016; Klinge, 2015). This study explored how employees perceived coaching developed their communication skills, and while I did not find any studies with this focus, researchers have studied coaching in the workplace. Kim et al. (2014) performed a quantitative examination of the relationships between perceived managerial coaching behaviors and employee attitudes and job performance outcomes at public relations organizations in the United States and South Korea. Kim et al. emailed invitations to a survey link to two public organizations located in southwest United States ($n = 1,480$) and to a convenience sampling of working adult students in a graduate program in South Korea ($n = 410$). Respondents (United States $n = 534$; South Korea $n = 270$) answered questions concerning managerial coaching behavior, satisfaction with work, role clarity, and job performance. Kim et al. found that employees from the United States who perceived their managers provided coaching were aware of their role in the organization, were better motivated, and outperformed coworkers who did not experience managerial coaching. Kim et al. found that employees from South Korea responded the same way to managerial coaching as employees from the United States, except South Korean managers were less likely to discuss goals, responsibilities, and job-related paths during coaching sessions with their employees and therefore the employees were less certain about these areas than were their United States counterparts.

Parker et al. (2015) introduced the coordinated management of meaning models which can be used in peer coaching relationships. Through narrative presentations, Parker

et al. presented examples of effective use of the four models of coordinated management of meaning: the daisy model, the participants describe the influencing factors affecting their success; the serpentine model, the participants decide what they want next in their career/life and when they want to make the move toward that goal; the LUUUTT model, stories Lived are affected by Untold stories, Unheard stories, Unknown stories, which ultimately effects story Telling and stories Told; and the hierarchy of meaning model, which emphasizes the contexts in which communication acts occur. Parker et al. suggested that effective coordinated management of meaning models involves three steps: building the relationship and creating a positive environment, creating success, and internalizing the skills.

Mentoring. Mentoring is an example of a workplace relationship in which older employees transfer knowledge to younger employees through role modeling, teaching, counseling, and friendship (Bozionelos et al., 2016; Klinge, 2015). Intergenerational learning outside the workplace has historically referred to a unidirectional process in family life through which elders (grandparents or parents) share their knowledge with younger individuals (children) (Gerpott et al., 2017). Another method is reverse mentoring, a reciprocal relationship in which a younger employee acts as a mentor to an older colleague (Dopson et al., 2017; Klinge, 2015). To decrease corporate expenditures, many organizations have placed the responsibility of career management, including through mentoring, on the employee rather than the employer (Bozionelos et al., 2016).

This study explored how employees perceived mentoring developed their collaborative communication skills, which remains a gap in the recent research literature.

What is known through recent studies is how mentoring affects job performance and employability (Bozionelos et al., 2016), how and why mentoring is used as an organizational development tool (Dopson et al., 2017), and the effectiveness of peer mentoring (Gerpott et al., 2017).

Bozionelos et al. (2016) studied the extent to which mentoring affected career success, given the mitigating factors of employability and job performance, of 207 information technology professionals employed at small and medium sized businesses in Greece, Italy, and Poland; the mentoring was of an informal nature and outside normal work duties. The professionals were given questionnaires that measured mentoring receipt, and objective and subjective career success as self-reported by all participants; line managers were also asked questions concerning employability and job performance of their employees who participated. Bozionelos et al. found evidence of a positive link between mentoring and job performance as mentoring was directly related to employability career success.

Dopson et al. (2017) performed a literature review to identify specific work situations at public health organizations in which selected mentoring models may have been effective; of the 96 articles found for public health organization settings, six met the criteria of examining some aspect of mentoring. Dopson et al. determined that mentoring may be useful in specific workplace situations, such as role realignment, leadership development, and job issues which cannot be mediated through training. Dopson et al. found the most prevalent form of mentoring to be fellowships and noted that mentoring programs which require time and resource commitment may be beyond the financial

scope of most public health organizations. When an organization cannot financially support a long-termed mentoring relationship Dopson et al. suggested they employ focused short termed mentoring through professional organizations and alumni clubs, periodic mentoring, and employing a professional coach on an as-needed basis. Speed mentoring, work experience rotations, coaching, online mentoring, networking, and guided peer mentoring were also offered as solutions to ease the financial burdens of organizations (Dopson et al., 2017).

Gerpott et al. (2017) performed a 3 year study at a German production plant of an international car manufacturer to explore what types of knowledge employees in intergenerational training groups acquired from one another and did this learning opportunity change over time. Gerpott et al. interviewed 31 young (16-19 years old) and experienced (41-47 years old) individuals who participated in an organizational training program, and their company and vocational instructors. Plant instructors designed the training program to retrain aging assembly line workers alongside recent high school graduates in an apprenticeship program that ended with the individuals becoming tool makers; this is a less physically demanding job for the older workers which allows them to remain employed. Gerpott et al. found four distinct knowledge exchanges between the younger and older apprentices. Expert knowledge consisted of young apprentices helping the older apprentices navigate being back in a school setting, and the older apprentices sharing company specific expertise with the younger apprentices and the instructors; expert knowledge was shared through discussions, asking questions, private learning sessions, and instructor encouraged sharing (Gerpott et al., 2017). Practical knowledge

consisted of young apprentices sharing how to access information in a school setting with

the older apprentices, and the older apprentices shared familiar tool creation procedures

with the younger apprentices (Gerpott et al., 2017). Gerpott et al. found social knowledge

to be unidirectional where the older apprentices demonstrated to the younger apprentices

how to handle conflict and disagreement at work. Gerpott et al. also determined

metacognitive knowledge was demonstrated with the younger apprentices learning from

the older workers how to stay focused at work and how to cope with stressful situations

or problems, the older apprentices learned how to memorize material and monitor their

learning progresses, and the older apprentices reported being able to share their new

knowledge with their similarly aged counterparts that had not joined the apprentice

program.

 Networking. Organizational knowledge has two primary sources: the stored

memory knowledge in their systematic resources in which tenured employees share their

best practices with new employees and the creation of new knowledge from the

interaction of organizational individuals, organizational teams, and inter-organizational

teams (Popova-Nowak & Cseh, 2015). Organizations use teams as strategic instruments

because teams have an added benefit of having accumulated a variety of knowledge and

information management abilities (van der Haar et al., 2015; Widmann et al., 2016). To

solve problems, teams integrate knowledge, experiences, and values from their different

viewpoints. Through questioning a workplace problem, teams gain knowledge so they

understand the problem, learn from each other, identify the strengths and weaknesses of

team members, and suggest innovative solutions (Luan et al., 2016; van der Haar et al., 2015; Volz-Peacock et al., 2016; Wang et al., 2017).

This study explored the gap in research pertaining to how employees perceived networking developed their collaborative communication skills. Recent research is divided into two fields of interest: networking through the use of social media (Anders, 2016; Erhardt et al., 2016; Gibbs et al., 2015; Madsen, 2016) and networking as a learning tool (Harman, 2014; Luan et al., 2016; van der Haar et al., 2015; Wang et al., 2017; Widmann et al., 2016).

Social Media. Anders (2016) performed a content analysis examination of 100 blog posts that concerned individual usage of the team communications platform Slack that were self-published on personal or organizational blogs. Using cross-referencing techniques across various internet websites such as LinkedIN, Anders was able to discern the sample included small to medium sized organizations in diverse industries and included 18 different nationalities of bloggers. Anders divided the coding references into three categories: rationales for adoption of the communication platform, media capabilities, and media affordances. Anders found the organizations adopted use of the platform because it enhanced their employees' virtual collaboration. Anders discovered the media capabilities most desired by the organizations included: third-part file sharing, productivity, project management, and videoconferencing. Anders found that users liked the knowledge sharing afforded by using Slack. Anders noted that users also liked the social engagement, collaboration, and increased attention allocated to messages which increased productivity across teams.

Erhardt et al. (2016) performed a mixed-method case study examination of a cross-functional team at a large Swedish insurance company to determine how email usage influenced teams engaging in team learning experiences, and if email usage influenced when teams engage in team learning experiences. The team project manager provided Erhardt et al. 468 emails to examine that originated from team members during the time of the study. Erhardt et al. also performed 20 interviews and observed several team meetings during the study. Erhardt et al. determined that the nonlinear cycles of knowledge sharing that occurred with emails shaped how dispersed team learning occurred.

Gibbs et al. (2015) performed a mixed-methods case study examination of how enterprise social media (ESM) usage was affected across hierarchal and geographical boundaries at a retail subsidiary of a multinational telecommunications company headquartered in Russia. Gibbs et al. further explored if the ESM was used for nonwork purposes by determining the topics beings discussed. Gibbs et al. found a high percentage of top management group personnel used the ESM both within their hierarchy and across other hierarchies within the organization, as was true for other levels of the hierarchy structure at the organization; this trend decreased as time progressed, such that usage became more within hierarchies than across them. Gibbs et al. noted a strong cross regional usage of the ESM, and that both regional and cross regional usage showed a spike in usage following a mandate to use the ESM from the management hierarchies. Gibbs et al. found initial usage of the ESM to be work related, almost double the usage for nonwork related topics; over time this trend reversed for the lower-level workers and

middle management hierarchies, but the nonwork posts remained primarily after work hours.

Madsen (2016) examined three months of internal social media (ISM) usage of coworkers from a large Danish bank before performing 17 interviews of coworkers. Madsen's case study approach was designed to explore what coworkers talked about on the ISM, how the coworkers used the ISM to construct an organizational identity, and what did coworkers think of using ISM to discuss organizational topics. Madsen was able to discern four topics discussed on the ISM: customers, products, working conditions, and organization related. Madsen found that the strong support of the organization toward using the ISM led employees to feel empowered to problem solve in this forum. Madsen also found the coworkers had informal discussions concerning the blogs which helped to form a supportive community for the organization's identity.

As a Learning Tool. Harman (2014) participated with workplace learning academics and professional development practitioners as a researcher in a 3 year, industry-university research collaboration at an Australian workplace. The project followed four work groups, categorized as: senior managers, a group of human resource administrators, a group of trade teachers, and a group of business teachers. Harman conducted the research in two stages: stage one involved 23 interviews with members from each of the four work groups; stage two consisted of focus group sessions conducted with two of the workgroups to explore themes evident in the interview data from stage one. Harman found that the workers interviewed for stage one of the research project considered workplace learning to be commonplace, and therefore the workers

were reluctant to classify themselves as workplace learners. Harman found during stage two of the research project that workers, once a correlation was made between their workplace actions as themes developed from stage one and learning, began to think of themselves as workplace learners and their organization as a place for learning.

Luan et al. (2016) used simple random sampling during a field study in an industrial park located in China that contained a variety of high tech, professional, and large-scale companies. Luan et al. distributed 172 questionnaires on site and 128 via email when exploring if collective team identification affected a team's willingness to take part in external team learning in support of changing organizational environments; responses were received from 266 participants working on 61 teams from 16 different organizations. Luan et al. determined that collective team identification can both motivate and deter individual team members from pursing external learning opportunities. Motivation occurred because the individuals felt safety in being a team member and therefore sought external learning opportunities, but when the individuals concentrated on the external learning opportunity they spent less time on team building practices which decreased the team feeling of safety and caused the individuals to withdraw from the learning opportunities (Luan et al., 2016).

van der Haar et al. (2015) quantitatively examined team learning, and indirectly team effectiveness, as 47 emergency management teams (consisting of 206 individuals) in the Netherlands experienced high task complexity, time pressure, high risks, and changing situations during a simulation exercise built around one of nine possible scenarios. The scenarios encountered by the participants involved: individuals were

called to duty and given relevant information based on their position as a police officer, fire department personnel, or medical assistant; individuals then gathered in their teams and discussed courses of action, teams met three times with trainers to gather updates to the unfolding situation and then met again to discuss further team initiatives and actions, teams debriefed with the trainers. After each encounter with the trainers, van der Haar et al. provided questionnaires to participants concerning team learning processes and team effectiveness. van der Haar et al. found that individuals, presumably because of the simulated emergency, did not wait until the team meeting to share what they considered to be relevant information with team members. Successful teams consisted of individuals who questioned information, provided comments, and acted to reach a common solution through mutual agreement (van der Haar et al., 2015).

Wang et al. (2017) quantitatively explored the effects of shared leadership on team learning by following 310 executives, divided into 66 teams, as they completed a business strategy simulation requirement for completion of their executive MBA program at an international business school in Asia. Wang et al. wanted to know how shared leadership and team learning influenced each other over time, and how team learning behaviors were affected by the stability of the shared leadership. Wang et al. found teams that practiced shared leadership had high learning potential during the beginning of the simulation, but as time progressed and people performed habitual roles learning decreased. Wang et al. also found that stable shared leadership aided team learning behaviors because team members knew their roles, which decreased ambiguity about task responsibilities and stress faced by the team members. Teams who faced increased

ambiguity and stress because of failing shared leadership were found to difficulty shifting roles and responsibilities, which ultimately affected routines and communication between team members (Wang et al., 2017).

Widmann et al. (2016) performed a literature review of 31 articles that reported on work team learning. Widmann et al. found social interactions to be the centering factor for team learning, where team learning was defined as communicative interactions of individuals, teams, and organizations to change and improve the outputs of these three groups. Widmann et al. concluded that three factors are needed to encourage and foster sustainable team learning in the workplace: social interactions among employees where individuals feel encouraged to share thoughts and experiences should be supported; employees should be provided with a stimulating work environment where individuals know the expectations of their supervisors and are encouraged to lead projects when their expertise would be beneficial; and teams should be provided organizational visibility, where the team is recognized as a working unit and the work product of the team is accessible to all organization members.

Summary

I reviewed research literature in this chapter that suggests employees are hired based on economic feasibility and for the attributes and skills the individuals can bring to the company. Collaborative communication skills are considered desirable for career advancement opportunities. There remains a debate as to where individuals should acquire the collaborative communication skills desired by employers. Educational institutions do not have the ability to develop all skills necessary for employment as

many skills are industry specific. Industries want individuals who are job ready upon being offered a position. Organizations are therefore charged with employee skill development and attempt to do so in an economically feasible manner.

To maximize their return on investment as they develop their market share, organization facilitate learning through collaboration. Considered hard to measure, learning opportunities which are informal offer organizations a financially feasible way to develop employees. Informal learning experiences include teamwork through coaching, mentoring, and networking.

Very little research exists concerning the relationship between informal workplace learning experiences and collaborative communication skills development. To determine if employees can recognize collaborative communication skills as an integral part of coaching, mentoring, and networking experiences a qualitative study of in-depth interviews of employees' perceptions was needed. In the next chapter, the research approach and design are discussed to demonstrate alignment with the research question discussed in Chapter 1 and the literature review offered in Chapter 2.

Chapter 3: Research Method

What collaborative communication skills employees perceive they have

developed from informal workplace learning experiences are largely unexplored in

research literature. The purpose of this study was to describe what collaborative

communication skills employees perceive they have developed from informal workplace

learning experiences. In this chapter, I discuss the research design for this study as well

as the rationale for the chosen design. I describe my role as the researcher. Then, I

describe my methodology, including participant selection logic, instrumentation,

procedures for recruitment, participation, and data collection, and a data analysis plan. I

conclude with issues of trustworthiness and ethical implications.

Research Design and Rationale

The research question guiding this study was as follows: What collaborative

communication skills do employees perceive they have developed from informal

workplace learning experiences? Based on the research problem, purpose, and question, a

basic qualitative research method was the best method for this study. Merriam and Tisdell

(2106) noted that basic qualitative studies are predominant in business field studies. The

basic qualitative design, also known as generic qualitative research (Patton, 2015), and

interpretive qualitative research (Maxwell, 2013) are based on building knowledge as

people remember and describe experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 23). I analyzed

the data gathered from participant interviews to develop themes for interpreting the

meaning given to informal workplace learning experiences and collaborative

communication skills development, as is supported in a basic qualitative study design

(see Creswell, 2009). I did not choose a quantitative approach as I was trying to gain a

deeper understanding of the individuals' perceptions rather than testing relationships

among variables. Because the criteria necessary for a quantitative study were not met, a

mixed method research design was also not feasible (see Creswell, 2009).

Basic qualitative studies dominate business research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016),

but other qualitative methods were examined for fit to this study and found to be not as

viable. A qualitative case study analyzes a bounded system (Creswell, 2013; Merriam &

Tisdell, 2016; Miles et al., 2014; Patton, 2015). The employees for this study worked at

one of three pharmaceutical companies in the Midwest United States, which is not a

closed unit. A qualitative case study also investigates real life experiences within the

context in which they occur (Donnelly et al., 2013). This would require examining all

potential factors of employee learning, such as collecting data on formal learning offered

to and attended by the employees and reviewing employee development plans; these are

considered confidential by the organization. Instead, I focused on employee perceptions

as they offered responses to interview questions. Grounded theory/realism, which is

based in the researcher focusing on a process or action that has distinct steps that occur

over time (Creswell, 2013, pp. 83-90), would not have been feasible because of the ad

hoc nature associated with informal workplace learning opportunities.

Phenomenology/heuristic, which requires carefully chosen participants to report on a

lived experience (Creswell, 2013, pp. 76-83; Patton 2015, pp. 98, 115-120), would not

have been feasible because all participants would have to participate in the same

workplace learning experience, thereby taking a nonstructured occurrence and structuring

it, which relates with formal workplace learning rather than informal workplace learning. Narrative, which places stories told by the participants in a historical perspective to understand the culture that created it (Creswell, 2013, pp. 70-76; Littlefield et al., 2015; Lohuis et al., 2016), was not feasible because I explored how informal workplace learning opportunities develop collaborative communication skills, not how the organizational culture develops and employs informal workplace learning opportunities. Interactive/participatory methods, which explore people's interactions as they attempt to solve a practical problem for which the researcher seeks to improve control over the outcome (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, pp. 49-58; Patton, 2015, pp. 98, 133-134), would not have been feasible because neither informal workplace learning or collaborative communication skills were explored as a problem in need of control.

Role of the Researcher

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) explored the role of the researcher as a human instrument. As the researcher for this qualitative study, I performed as a human instrument who gathered data conscientiously from the participants whom I interviewed. Miles et al. (2014) noted that researchers who act as instruments have good familiarity with the phenomenon and setting being studied yet are nonjudgmental with the participants in the setting have a meticulous attention to detail and have a heightened sense of objectivity. Merriam and Tisdell observed that human instruments naturally have biases that can impact a study. It may prove difficult to eliminate all biases, but recognizing the biases as they occur lends to understanding how the biases influence the data collection process and interpretation of the data.

I interviewed individuals employed at three sister sites to my current organization. The sister sites are three wholly owned subsidiaries of the organization, operating independently to distribute specialized pharmaceutical drugs for the organization. I ensured that I had no previous or current personal or professional relationship or interactions with potential participants. I confirmed this fact when the respondents to my participation email appeal acknowledged my informed consent letter that reiterated my inclusion criteria. Confidentiality occurred through the participation email being sent to individuals at the sister sites with their names or business group email accounts listed on the blind carbon copy line of the email. They responded to my Walden email account or my personal cell phone number with their desire to participate. Potential participants were sent an informed consent email using the pseudonym I used to identify them in my study. Interviews were conducted through Skype for Business. I conducted the interviews from my private residence; the participants were in a secured location where their answers could not be overheard. I recorded the interviews for transcription accuracy.

I maintained my objectivity by recording notes in the margins of my interview guides and keeping a reflective journal. The margin notes included my thoughts about the participants' engagement in the interview process, records of the participants' nonverbal communications, and written suggestions for follow-up questions based on the participants' responses. After the interviews concluded, I used a reflective journal to record my thoughts on the interview process, including how I could improve as an interviewer. Collectively, the margin notes and the reflective journal brought light to my

biases toward the phenomenon and individuals being studied and aided me in controlling my biases.

Organizational policy prevents the acceptance of gifts by individuals employed by the company and its subsidiaries. To comply with this rule, I did not offer gifts, either monetary or materialistic, to participants of this study.

Methodology

The methodology section is broken into four separate parts: participant selection; instrumentation, including interview question development; recruitment of study participants; and data analysis plan.

Participant Selection Logic

The participants for this study were current employees of three business units of a pharmaceutical company located in the Midwest region of the United States. I selected these business units because they are sister sites to the organization where I was employed, and as such offered a large concentration of individuals who may have been willing to participate in my study. The vice president of operations reviewed my email appeal for participants and provided site approval for conducting the research. After obtaining institutional review board (IRB) approval (#06-26-20-0511103), I asked the vice president of operations to send the email appeals to all individuals to whom I had access, without prior vetting of the individuals to determine if they met the criteria for inclusion in the study. The vice president of operations was needed as an intermediary because email correspondences that originate from outside the organization are considered suspect, and attachments on emails generated from outside the organization

are deleted before opening. I requested that the vice president of operations list all business email addresses on the blind carbon copy line of the email invitation to maintain anonymity between potential participants. After a 2 week allowance for responses that demonstrated interest in participating, because I did not have a sufficient participant pool, I asked the vice president of operations to send a follow-up email to all employees as a reminder of my need for participants. Respondents were directed to my Walden University email address, which I monitored daily for correspondences, as well as my personal cell phone number.

There were three conditions for selection to be a participant for this study. Because I was using sister sites to the current organization where I am employed, participants could not have a previous or current personal or professional relationship to me. The second condition for inclusion was that the individuals must have been in their current position for longer than 6 months even if they were long-tenured employees who had changed positions through promotion or transition. The third condition was that the employees worked in the United States, as this addressed a noted gap in the current research literature. I emailed everyone who met these criteria an informed consent form.

From the responses received, I began my participant interviews with the first individuals who met the study criteria. Literature guidance for qualitative studies do not state a set number of respondents as a study goal. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) recommended interviewing an adequate number of participants so that the research question is answered and the problem statement is addressed, but Gerber et al. (2017) suggested that the researcher focus on reaching data saturation as an end point. Data

saturation is the point at which no new revelations are forthcoming from the participants, and patterns in the responses collected are easily identifiable. As the interview process proceeded, I needed to request interviews from additional respondents. When the answers to the interview questions no longer revealed new perceptions of informal workplace learning or development of collaborative communication skills, then the request for participants ended.

Instrumentation

I developed semistructured interview questions for this qualitative case study (Appendix). I aligned the interview questions with the research study question and the literature review. The semistructured interview questions allowed the participants an opportunity to elaborate on the development and use of their collaborative communication skills during informal workplace learning experiences. Follow-up questions generated from the responses provided by the participants were asked to gain a richer understanding of their answers.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

I recruited employees through an appeal to participate delivered to their business email addresses. I sent individuals who responded in a positive manner to the appeal a request to acknowledge their consent in continuing the interview process. Individuals who responded to the email invitation in writing that they wished to participate but did not meet the study inclusion criteria had their responses and emails stored in a subfolder designated for noncontact.

I informed individuals who completed the acknowledgement of consent to participate in the study using audio recording of their right to disengage from the interview process at any time with no repercussions. Participants scheduled time to complete their interviews at a time that was mutually convenient to myself and the participant, which was not intended to occur during scheduled working hours for either the participant or myself. I requested the participants plan for a 60 to 90 minute interview window during which they were uninterrupted and not otherwise scheduled.

The participants completed the interview by answering all semistructured questions in the interview guide, as well as prompts and follow-up questions I generated during the interview for greater clarification. Following the interview, I transcribed the interview verbatim and asked the participant to review the transcript for errors. Review of, and agreement with, the content of the transcription ended participation in the study. I agreed to send a copy of the study results to interviewees who requested results of the study once the dissertation process has concluded.

Data collected during the interview process included verbal and nonverbal information. I collected verbal data by audio recording and note taking during the interview. Use of two recording devices decreased the chance of losing data, which could occur if a single recording method was used and the system malfunctioned. Both recording devices were employed for all interviews. Handwritten notes were recorded to capture key verbal phrases or terms used by the participants and nonverbal actions used by the participant as they answered the proffered questions. At the end of the interview, I removed myself to a quiet setting and journaled my thoughts about the interview process.

At the conclusion of the interviews, I listened to the audio recording and compared the audio recording to the transcription offered through otterai.

Data Analysis Plan

I analyzed the transcriptions as I proceeded with the interviewing process. After reaffirming the purpose of the study and the lens through which the data were examined, Merriam and Tisdell (2016) recommended that the researcher write notes in the margins of the transcripts to capture insightful comments. I performed my first round of coding by open coding places in the transcripts where I had added those notes. As I transcribed more interviews and completed coding of the responses, I determined the themes supported by the margin codes.

I performed a second round of coding, which included placing marginal notes and verbatim copy and pasted responses in a Microsoft Excel table. I created a tab in the Microsoft Excel table for each interview question, numbered to assure a match between the questions and the responses with a reiteration of the research question at the top of the tab. I copied and pasted the participants' verbatim answers into rows of the table. Subsequent columns included memos noted during the interviews and transcription process, codes identified in the responses, and central themes derived from the codes.

After completing the Microsoft Excel spreadsheet, I examined the themes developed from the coding process to ensure the themes answered the research question. For transparency, I included outlier codes, those that did not fit into the identified themes. These outliers may reveal aspects of using informal workplace learning opportunities to

develop collaborative communication skills that were not immediately apparent in the other codes.

I performed a third round of coding that included writing excerpts of the interview responses on Post-It notes. The Post-It notes were moved around on a white board until themes emerged.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) determined that trustworthiness in a qualitative study is established by carefully constructing a research plan that includes detailed data collection intentions, analysis procedures, and unbiased researcher interpretations of the collected data. Trustworthiness is divided into credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability below.

Credibility

Credibility, also known as internal validity, is established through triangulation of data collected from interviews, site observations, and documentation review (Patton, 2015). When one or more of these is unavailable to the researcher, they must rely on additional sources, such as member checks and immersion in the data, to get as close to the participants' interpretation of meaning as possible (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Presenting the interview responses verbatim lends to credibility as it demonstrates the richness of the responses from the participants while establishing the relationship between the responses and the framework based on the theories presented in Chapter 2. I immersed myself into the data through repeatedly listening to the recordings as I created verbatim interview transcripts. I further immersed myself in the data by interpreting the

responses first through hand coding, then subsequently through analysis using Microsoft

Excel and Post-It notes I moved around on a whiteboard until themes emerged. Following

transcription of the interview responses, I asked the participants to review their transcript

for accuracy and to clarify any responses. Participants were given an opportunity to add

any additional information they had thought to include since the interview. Presentation

of the participant responses appears as quotations in Chapter 4 as support of my findings.

Transferability

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) identified transferability, or external validity, as

founded through the researcher offering as detailed a research process as possible so that

others who follow may relate their study to the researcher's study, or further the work of

the researcher using a comparable participant pool. I provided an anonymous description

of the participants, a description of the research site and how access was gained to the

limited number of participants in Chapter 4. I made no claims of transferability to other

employees, communities of practice, organizations, et cetera, from this study.

Transferability in a qualitative study places the onus of trying to establish an application

of the study findings on future researchers who wish to make comparisons (Lincoln &

Guba, 1985). This is supported by Patton (2015) who suggested extrapolating the

findings of qualitative studies to future studies which have similar contexts rather than

forcing transferability on the findings of the current study.

Generalizability of the results of this study was not possible due to the bounded

nature of the research site and the possibility of having an N of 1 employment category.

Future studies may validate or challenge the findings offered from this study.

Extrapolations may be offered to show how the results of this study could be used in similar, but not identical, settings, such as virtual workplaces (Patton, 2015). Patton posited extrapolations demonstrate the researcher has delved deeply into their data and is attempting to determine other uses for the results.

Dependability

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) determined establishing dependability, or reliability, of a research study through being able to replicate the study and achieve the same results from or interpretations of the data was difficult in a qualitative study. The use of one researcher to conduct and complete the interview process established consistency in the interview processes. I ensured the recording devices, semi-structured interview questions, and analysis of data was consistent across all interviews. I further supported dependability by having an individual not related to the study and not employed at the organization or sister sites, perform a coding and theme analysis of the interviews to confirm the codes I established with my analysis.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) discussed study dependability. I confirmed dependability through processes that exist in the study to establish an audit trail. Alignment between the research questions and the study design, between the research questions and the interview protocol, between the interview protocol and the collected data, and the collected data and the interpretations of the proffered perceptions supported an audit trail.

Confirmability

Patton (2015) noted confirmability or objectivity of a study was established through the researcher being open and honest about their intentions for the study, recording methods used for interviewing and biases perceived as the study progresses, and eliminating the desire to force the data to show preconceived or expected results. I have established the research process in previous sections. I used reflective journaling following each interview. I conducted analysis of the data using Microsoft Excel and Post-It notes. I included the findings in Chapter 4.

I developed the interview protocol by avoiding either a positive or negative view of informal learning experiences and collaborative communication skill development. I avoided preconceived or expected results by addressing my biases through reflective journaling, how I determined codes during data analysis, and when I determined themes present in the codes. I offered limited information concerning my background in the introductory email, but I did not discuss my participation in informal learning activities or collaborative communication skill development for myself or my coworkers during or after the interviews. I asked the participants to review the verbatim transcripts of their interviews for completeness and to add any additional responses they wished to provide for further clarification.

Ethical Procedures

Preliminary contact with a representative of the human resources department at the partner organization indicated that no forms existed currently for allowing a research study to be conducted using employees as participants. Prior to contacting any individual

that could be a participant, I completed the Walden University Institutional Review Board's (IRB) Standard Application for Research Ethics Review. Prior to all interviews, I emailed respondents an informed consent document which detailed the nature of the study and their rights as participants. These were returned to me via email, prior to determining a mutually agreeable interview time, and stored on my personal secured laptop.

Per research standards, all data collected will remain confidential. Participants were identified by pseudonyms. Participants were given the opportunity to review their verbatim transcript and specifically asked if they felt they could be identified by the information provided. If the participant felt they could be identified, then steps were taken to further mask their identity.

Protections for Confidential Data

I kept audio and written data private and confidential. I used password protection to store all data that was only processed on a secure personal laptop on password protected WiFi. Any paper notes were shredded after data were transcribed and coded. I have stored all files in a password protected file on a flash drive in a locked file in my home. Data will be maintained for a period of five years at which time the electronic files will be deleted.

<div align="center">

Summary

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The purpose of this study was to describe what collaborative communication skills do employees perceive they have developed from informal workplace learning experiences. I designed a basic qualitative study to explore and describe if

employees of a pharmaceutical company could identify collaborative communication

skills they may have developed from informal workplace learning experiences.

Participant selection began with employees receiving an email appeal to join the study

and ended when data saturation of the participants' responses had been reached. I

performed three rounds of coding of the verbatim responses, including review of notes

taken during the interviews and the use of Microsoft Excel and Post-It notes. Chapter 4

will illuminate the findings of the study through detailed description of the responses

offered by the participants presented as the themes found in the responses.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to describe what collaborative

communication skills employees perceive they have developed from informal workplace

learning opportunities. Following the writings of Marsick and Watkins (1990), I defined

informal workplace learning to be learning derived exclusively from coaching,

mentoring, and networking experiences; that definition framed my interview protocol and

the research question, which was as follows: What collaborative communication skills do

employees perceive they have developed from informal workplace learning experiences?

In this chapter, I describe the setting under which the employees were working when I

conducted the interviews, present the demographics of the participants, describe the data

collection method, report the data analysis process used to develop the themes that

answer the research question, offer an examination of trustworthiness, present the

interview themes, and summarize the findings in regard to the research question.

Setting

This study took place in the United States with employees who worked in the

pharmaceutical industry. I did not differentiate the specific job function of the employees,

nor the specific department within the organizations where the employees worked. The

employees worked at three sister sites to the corporate organization where I was

employed at the time of the study. The three sister sites are in the Midwest region of the

United States. The plan for this study was to interview participants from one of the sister

sites, but low response rate necessitated expanding the participant pool to the other sites.

At the end of 2019, the employees of the sister sites began a business technology transformation (BTT) project to update their computer systems. As I conducted interviews in July, September, and October of 2020, the employees were working extended hours to meet the shortened deadlines of the project. The employees also encountered stress from the uncertainty of whether they would remain employed after the transformation process concluded.

An additional stressor faced by the employees was the government mandated closure of the office buildings due to the Covid-19 pandemic. All employees who could complete their job duties from a remote place were removed from the on-site buildings on March 16, 2020. At the time of the interviews, one employee remained on site. The remaining participants were working from home when interviewed.

Demographics

Nine individuals responded to my participation appeal email; eight met the inclusion criteria to participate in the study. I have used pseudonyms for all participants. The interview pool consisted of five employees from one sister site -- Cedar, Maple, Oak, Palm, Spruce; two individuals from the second sister site -- Acacia, Sakura; and one individual from the third sister site -- Pine. Six of the individuals were female, two were male. Seven of the individuals were manager level employees, and one male was an hourly employee. While masking their identity, in Table 1 I provide the pseudonym created for each employee, their position within their department, and their approximate length of service at their respective sister sites.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Participant	Gender	Title	Experience
Acacia	Male	Hourly Associate	<24 months
Cedar	Female	Manager	10-15 years
Maple	Female	Manager	10-15 years
Oak	Female	Manager	15-20 years
Palm	Female	Manager	15-20 years
Pine	Female	Manager	15-20 years
Sakura	Female	Manager	10-15 years
Spruce	Male	Manager	10-15 years

Data Collection

I collected data through one interview with each consenting employee after obtaining Walden University IRB approval (#06-26-20-00511103). The interviews lasted between 45 to 75 minutes. A manager at the corporate office of the partner organization introduced me to a vice president of operations at my intended research site through email. I asked the vice president to distribute my participation appeal through email. This was necessary because the organization had a strict information technology standard in place regarding opening emails and email attachments from unknown sources; the policy included retraining and firing of employees found to be noncompliant. Having the participation appeal distributed by the vice president of operations meant that the email was not marked as suspect and the employees could trust the source of the email as it appeared to be coming from an insider known to them.

The first distribution of the participation appeal netted three individuals who met the inclusion criteria and who were willing to participate in the study. I conducted interviews with these individuals in July 2020. After waiting 2 weeks for additional interested employees to respond to the participation appeal email, I requested the vice president of operations resend the email to employees of the sister site.

After 2 weeks had passed with no responses from employees of the sister site, I submitted a change of procedure document to Walden University's IRB in August 2020; there was no change to the original IRB approval number. The change requested three additional avenues to gain participants for the study. I requested that individuals who I had interviewed, and those who would be interviewed in the future, be allowed to use snowballing techniques to gain additional participants. Snowballing was to occur only after the employee had been interviewed and was to include asking individuals with whom they worked only once if they would be interested in participating. The snowballing was set at one time to eliminate feelings of peer pressure to participate in the study. Additionally, I asked that individuals with whom I worked at the partner organization be allowed to email the participation appeal to individuals they knew at the sister site. This step was added to widen the audience to whom the email was sent, as I did not know to whom the vice president of operations had sent the participation appeal. Lastly, I requested the addition of two sister sites with whom employees of the original sister site work closely due to their niche in the pharmaceutical industry. Walden's IRB approved this request, and the recruitment process netted four additional 60 to 75 minute interviews that were conducted during September 2020.

Prior to a September 2020 town hall meeting conducted by a president at the partner organization, I was asked by the president how my study was progressing. I mentioned the lack of participants, and the president volunteered to mention during the town hall that I still needed participants for my study because employees of the three sister sites were participants of the meeting. The president directed interested individuals to respond to my contact information that was listed on a Microsoft PowerPoint slide presented during the town hall meeting. This netted two individuals who expressed interest in participating. One individual did not meet the inclusion criteria: She had not been in her position for 6 months at the time she volunteered, and she worked in my department so we knew each other. The other individual participated in a 60 minute interview in October 2020.

I conducted the interviews using Skype for Business. I was alone and located in my private residence during the interviews. I interviewed seven participants while they were in their private residences. Spruce, due to the nature of his position, was working on site at the time of his interview. He removed himself to a private office setting so his interview could not be overheard.

Preliminary examination of the interview responses from the July 2020 interviews showed a need for a deeper exploration of participant skill development. Therefore, I offered my first interviewees, Maple, Oak, and Spruce, an opportunity to participate in an additional half hour interview to further develop their responses; Oak was the only one of the three to participate in the additional interviewing process. The remaining interviews, conducted in September 2020 and October 2020, were 60 to 75 minutes in length and

each occurred during one interview session. The longer time frame allowed participants to create a more detailed reflection of the development of their collaborative communication skills as they reflected on coaching, mentoring, and networking experiences that were not related to their current BTT project.

I recorded the interviews using otterai (Otterai, 2020) and a RecJoy Model UL103A 16GB memory USB Voice Recorder. The otterai program recorded the interviews as they progressed and transcribed the interviews in real time. The otterai program also transcribed the externally sourced recordings from the RecJoy device. The RecJoy device recordings required 24 hours for the transcriptions to be available for analysis. I received an email alert when the transcriptions were completed.

When I tried using one laptop for otterai and Skype for Business, the recording was spotty and had to be enhanced by the RecJoy recording. I repeatedly listened to the RecJoy recordings to create verbatim transcripts of the interviews. The number of times I listened to the RecJoy recordings and the amount of clean up required depended on the regional accent of the participant.

I encountered unusual circumstances during the data collection in the settings in which the interviews were performed. It was anticipated that the interviews would occur during nonwork hours. The remote work situation caused by the pandemic mandates created a blurring of personal and professional time; therefore, I conducted interviews during what the partner organization and sister sites would consider professional time.

Data Analysis

I began data analysis after the transcriptions from the first three interviews were in their verbatim form. I used three rounds of analysis to immerse myself in the data provided from the interviews. My first analysis occurred as I repeatedly read the transcripts offered by the otterai program, listened to the RecJoy recordings of the interviews, and created verbatim transcripts; the transcripts were Microsoft Word documents. My second analysis focused on words or phrases that were common answers to the specific interview questions and which also answered the research question. My final step in this analysis was to determine and record how many times the words or phrases had been used by the eight participants. I conducted the third analysis by placing interview excerpts onto Post-It notes and grouping the excerpts until themes emerged.

After I completed the coding process with the first three participants' responses, I emailed the interview transcripts to a knowledgeable colleague who acted as a secondary coder. I did not provide my coding of the transcripts to him. I conducted a conference call with the secondary coder after he had completed his coding, and I compared the codes I had developed with his. I adapted my codes if doing so seemed appropriate. I asked the secondary coder to also code the additional interviews, as they became available, to identify any additional codes that were relevant in the data. I coded the final two interviews using the codes established from the previous rounds of coding and identified no new codes; therefore, I confirmed that I had reached saturation of the data.

The three rounds of analysis, which were intended to determine themes that describe what collaborative communication skills employees developed, led to an

unexpected, additional set of themes related to how the employees developed their skills. When I noticed the responses also mentioned how the skills were developed, I analyzed the transcripts specifically for "how" terminology. I employed the three-step analysis process as mentioned previously, first immersing myself in the verbatim responses offered by the participants, then using the verbatim interview question responses, and lastly using the Post-It notes. Through this process, I identified eight overall themes: five that described what skills were developed and three that described how those skills were developed.

Erickson (1986) proposed five types of ensuring quality and adequacy of interpreting qualitative data, including repeated examination for discrepant cases. Discrepant cases are those data that do not confirm to a researcher's emerging findings and aid the researcher in having a strong interpretation of their data (Morrow, 2005). In my immersion in the data, I did not detect discrepant cases in this study.

<div style="text-align:center">Evidence of Trustworthiness</div>

I established trustworthiness of this qualitative study by following a research plan that that included detailed data collection intentions, detailed analysis procedures, and unbiased research interpretation of the data. Trustworthiness is divided into credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility

Triangulation of data collected from interviews, site observations, and documentation review was not part of the design for this basic qualitative study. Therefore, I relied on immersion in the data collected from the interviews. Transcription

verifications were completed by the interview participants who were offered an opportunity to review their verbatim interview transcripts for clarity and to make sure their responses were correctly captured. Immersion in the data occurred as I participated in the interviewing process, when I listened to the otterai and RecJoy recordings of the interviews as I enhanced the transcriptions presented by otterai, when I reviewed the interview responses for codes and themes, and when I reviewed my findings with the secondary coder.

Transferability

I have offered a description of the participants who did not reveal their identity but gave a sense of the length of their employment and role in the company, detailed the settings of the data collection, and detailed how I gained access to the limited number of participants for this study. The steps I used to gather participants for this study limit claims of transferability to other employees, communities of practice, or organizations.

Generalizability of the results of this study will not be possible due to the bounded nature of the business units. Future studies may validate or challenge the findings presented below by extrapolating the results of this study in similar, but not identical, settings and with consideration to how business process updates and pandemic conditions affect the study participants.

Dependability

Replication of this study with the intent to achieve the same results would be difficult due to how the participants were affected by the BTT project and the pandemic conditions which dictated their working remotely. The use of one researcher who

conducted and completed the interview process established consistency in the interview process. Dependability is further supported by having an individual not related to the study and not employed at the partner organization or business units perform a coding analysis of the interviews to confirm the codes I established with my analysis. Confirmation of dependability was corroborated through an established audit trail that demonstrated alignment between the research question and the study design, between the research question and the interview protocol, between the interview protocol and the collected data, and the collected data and the interpretation of the proffered perceptions as detailed below.

Confirmability

I developed the interview protocol avoiding a positive or negative view of informal learning encounters and collaborative communication skill development. During the interviews I did not discuss my views of, or experience with, informal workplace learning encounters or collaborative communication skill development. Following each interview, I used reflective journaling to record perceived biases and avoided forcing the data to fit into a preconceived expectation for the results. The reflective journaling process continued while I determined codes during analysis, and when I determined themes present in the codes. I emailed a verbatim transcript of the interviews to the participants to review for completeness and to offer the participants an opportunity to add additional responses that would provide further clarification of their responses. Two of the participants responded by email that their interviews were recorded accurately, and

they had no additional comments for the transcripts; the remaining six participants did not communicate following receipt of their transcripts.

Results

The results reflect my analysis of the responses offered by all participants when answering the research question, what collaborative communication skills do employees perceive they have developed from informal workplace learning experiences? To answer the two-part research question, it became necessary for me to discern themes related to what collaborative communication skills participants discussed as well as to discuss how the coaching, mentoring, and networking experiences influenced their perceived skill development. To present my analysis of the skills discussed by the participants, I discuss first the five findings regarding what collaborative communication skills participants perceived they developed from coaching, mentoring, and networking encounters. I then present the three findings of how the participants perceived their informal workplace learning experiences.

What Collaborative Communication Skills Were Developed

Five themes emerged as I analyzed the interviews, representing the skills participants perceived they developed and which directly addressed the research question. The most common collaborative communication skill was giving and receiving feedback. The other four were oral communication, listening, presenting, and less frequently, crafting emails. In regard to each skill I will clarify how that skill was described as enacted or learned through each of the three learning experiences framed by the research question: coaching, mentoring, and networking.

Giving and Receiving Feedback

All the study participants offered detailed recollections of skill development in giving and receiving feedback. Participants mentioned this as an important interactive skill that allowed them to effectively communicate with their employees, coworkers, and stakeholders. Participants equated effectiveness in giving feedback with tailoring the message given to the recipient. Participants also mentioned when receiving feedback that the recipient needed to be open to the message being given. Sakura noted that skill development has led to development of her role as a coach, "I think I'm going to go back to listening to [the employees], but also walking through an issue and a better way to have a better outcome of a situation." As a mentor, Spruce felt it was his responsibility to help employees develop their skills so they can advance within the company, "I have a team lead … I've … helped him communicate with other people, the people that he's in charge of. I've also shown him how to collaborate with other people in other departments to learn what they do." Oak noted that familiarity with networking as a process allows an individual to develop their skills, "I would say I'm more comfortable with it … I think that you, you gain a value from other's perspectives." Learning how to give and receive feedback was shared by participants regarding coaching, mentoring, and networking.

Coaching. Participants perceived that how employees received the advice offered during a coaching encounter affects not only how they implement the recommendations, but also the perceptions they develop of who is, and is not, and effective coach. Oak noted constructive feedback "helps you receive information better … in understanding that it's a coaching experience, not a criticism … And so, it becomes a little bit easier to

accept and adapt." Cedar believed that feedback offered in a coaching encounter is a skill best learned by seeking trusted individuals to guide you through various workplace scenarios. Cedar was able to build a comfort level with giving and receiving feedback by knowing how others handled similar workplace situations:

> The more feedback you get, the better you're receiving it. And the better you are at giving it … when you have to talk to employees, especially when you're first starting out with having a team, then you have a lot more questions. And so, I talked to the leaders. I asked my bosses and some other leaders are sharing to their opinions on things and how they tend to address them, how they give feedback, how they get feedback. And it's really helped to know in these type[s] of situations, or as the situations present, that others have already experienced them. And they kind of navigate what to expect. And so, it really helps to be able to get the feedback from them and then be able to give feedback to others in your team, with their responses that they've shared.

Maple and Pine credited a positive workplace coaching experience for enhancing their ability to give and receive feedback with their direct report employees. While not in the scope of this study because it relates to formal workplace learning encounters, Maple and Spruce recalled a workplace mandated class for managers that was meant to help the managers have difficult conversations with employees. Pine's positive experience involved having a coach that believed in her abilities to accomplish difficult tasks:

> What was important to me, helped me the most, was just knowing that he believed I could do it … but if he didn't think I could do it, he had a way of, he knew that

I'm my own worst critic … he wouldn't have to say a whole lot to me for me

know that, 'hey, you might want to work on this a little more'. But he could, he

could present that to me in a way that you didn't feel like, oh, I completely messed

up or I don't know if I can do this. I'm so bad at it … he could say it in a way,

"You know how. You know what you're doing. You know what you're talking

about. You know, don't be so nervous. It's just gonna be fine." And that's, since it

was effective for me, that's what I've tried to do for the people that report to me.

Not all coaching experiences are positive. Palm remembered a fear filled

experience with a coach that shaped how she now perceives her position within the

business unit and how she interacts with her direct report employees and others she

encounters in her workday as she gives and receives feedback:

I remember early on in my career with [sister site], our president at the time …

And so I remember, something that we implemented … it was something that that

could have been perceived very negatively from the customer side. I was green to

all of that … at that time, I was kind of following what the process was and not

really thinking outside of that … I had that one negative experience with him …

he came into my office. He was very forceful … I heard horror stories about how

hard it could be. And I think he was really lightly on me … but then after that one

encounter I thought, okay, yeah, I totally see where he was coming from. From a

sales side I see how that could have been misconstrued. On the customer side, I

see how that could have been a negative experience. And I think that one, that one

decision that led to that one conversation with him, where it was not pleasant, like

all of our communication had been … I respected him as a as a mentor and as a

leader. And I think the fact that he did not literally fire me and walk away, or …

go really hard on me. I think he tempered his response because he had respect for

me too. So that one conversation kinda changed the way that I started looking at

the bigger picture.

Mentoring. Participants explained their development of giving and receiving

feedback skills based on whether the person is the mentor or the mentee. Sakura felt the

mentor should listen to the mentee and incorporate the perspective of the mentee into

problem resolution:

I just feel like it's really important to have those conversations and to elicit

feedback from others because … everybody else has different perspectives and

different experiences. And I feel like it's very important to get that feedback and

marry it with yours and come up with the best processor solution.

Pine recognized the tone of the feedback being given to the mentee is important and may

affect not only the resolution of the current situation, but also future work production of

the mentee:

I just think it's important that if you can understand, you know, everybody, well,

not everybody, but it's a little easier to give positive feedback than negative. And

you have to keep in mind, what's your ultimate goal. If you want to be the person

that says, "Well, you screwed this up, and you need to fix this now, and you know

this shouldn't happen", what is the long-term consequence of that. You may have

gotten it fixed and they may never make that mistake again. But are they going to

be motivated and invested to try to do a better job? Or are they going or is that just going to cause them to shut down and you're not going to get any more out of them.

Oak, Cedar, and Acacia recalled developing their skills related to giving and receiving feedback in the roles of mentees. Oak noted a mentoring experience as the mentee "gives you a different perspective … when you're in the situations yourself … you have a little bit more of an open mind, and receptiveness to listening to someone else." Cedar and Acacia recognized the importance of receiving timely feedback and actively sought mentors who could provide the guidance they required. Cedar sought mentors who were like minded to her style of communication:

> I'm a direct communicator … the people you ask to mentor you in this type of situation, or that you go to and ask their opinions … they know that you're open to it, they tend to be direct communicators in this situation as well … I like people to be clear. I don't like sugarcoating … I really just need an honest opinion and be as critical as you can … they know how to give feedback without it being harsh.

Acacia sought a mentor outside of the person to whom he directly reported because he felt this person was not as forth coming with advice and feedback as he needed:

> The manager I directly report to doesn't always seem to like to communicate … he doesn't give a lot of feedback, I suppose is what I'm trying to say. So, working with my informal mentor, I would say … has helped me understand the feedback that I'm getting or lack of feedback that I'm getting because he's worked with him

for so much longer than I have. And he's just so you know, he's always been that way.

Networking. Being familiar with the process was only part of the issue with developing giving and receiving feedback skills in the perception of participants. Cedar noted familiarity with the individuals with whom you network also affects skill development:

It's easier to take feedback from people that you know and trust. When you're networking, you're trying to grow that circle. You don't know these people, they don't know you as well, as close … it's harder to take the feedback and you just have to, I just had to take it in a light of just giving them the benefit of the doubt that they're coming from a good place … And then when I give feedback to people who I networked with, or trying to get more familiar with, again, I try to, try to, give it a close to facts, straight facts, but I always try to tailor it with an understanding of the person is sensitive … I don't know if there's somebody who's going to be offended by me being direct. So, I try to just make it as delicate as possible.

Sakura recognized the value of the received feedback has helped develop her skills for giving and receiving feedback within her workplace networks. Sakura mentioned,

Sometimes you get great feedback. Other times you get not so great feedback from your network partners … it's important to listen to that and adopt any

changes that, or strengthen on, or encouraged, or strengthen what is good so that you could come up with the best solutions or presentations.

Pine noted that skills pertaining to giving and receiving feedback are developed through mutual respect among the network partners:

It's just knowing the personality differences, recognizing, being able to try to recognize at the beginning, what is it this person wants from me. Being able to make them feel like you've listened. And that you've provided, if you can't come to any type of mutual agreement, that maybe you've provided some options as a takeaway for them to consider. And you're keeping them motivated, invested in whatever it is that you need them to be moving forward.

Oral Communication

Seven of the eight study participants felt they developed oral communication skills from workplace encounters. Recollections of the development of this skill were often interchanged with recollections of presentations the participants had to give, as the participants closely related the ability to effectively speak with the ability to give effective presentations. Responses to oral communication skill development from workplace coaching encounters varied by the participants' comfort levels to their perceived level of competence with the ability to communicate effectively. Sakura did not question her ability to use oral communication effectively, "I think I've been able to take situations and put myself, show them that I put myself, in their shoes and articulate how that impacted me and how the outcome could have been better." Responses to developing oral communication skills during mentoring encounters were all offered from

the perspective of the individuals as mentees. As noted with giving and receiving feedback skill development, participants actively sought mentors to aid in their skill development. Cedar mentioned requesting her mentors attend her speaking engagements to provide timely feedback, "I always ask them, you know, 'How did I do?' 'What did you think?' 'Have I asked this appropriately?' And they're, they're good at giving feedback and encouragement." Networking encounters during the BTT project some of the participants completed during the interview period was perceived to have reinforced their oral communication skills.

Coaching. Cedar, Palm, and Acacia recognized the need to incorporate observations of effective oral speakers into their skill development strategies as a means to receive coaching passively. Cedar developed her oral communication skills by trial and error of integrating what she had witnessed from engagements she felt were engaging or not effective. Palm incorporated not only the style of effective speakers into her skills, but also their examples:

> If I can better outline how I'm communicating because of something that I have gained from what someone else is sharing, then by all means I'm going to employ that going forward. Because that spoke to me, that made it very clear for me, then I'm going to try to use that same analogy, I'm going to use that same approach when sharing information to my team. Because if it made sense to me then perhaps it's gonna make more sense to them if I approach it in this new way. I think, I think I'm always looking for opportunities to learn and to grow from other people, from other teams, from executives, from the people that work for me.

At the time of the interviews Acacia did not have direct reports. Acacia recalled a seminar he was sent to as a representative of his department where he determined he could use the oral communication skills of the presenters to build his skills for the future:

Listening to other people who are really sharp too, being surrounded by all that and it sharpens you … they would have different ideas or different things that go about certain situations and hearing them talk about it was interesting, because it adds to your toolbox as well. You know, it's kind of cliché, but surrounding yourself with sharp people sharpens you as well.

Awareness of the need to have applicable oral communication skills can sometimes be outweighed by the comfort level individuals feel with their ability to communicate effectively. Oak lamented that her speaking skills "are terrible … not my most comfortable." Oak has continued to work on her oral communication skills because she felt heightened awareness of inadequacies brought increased focus to those areas needing development. Pine, a self-proclaimed introvert, approached oral speaking through introspection:

The question I always ask myself, regardless of who it is, or what setting I'm in, is, I want to be able to say, "Did I do the best I can, I could? Did I do the best I could?" … I'm gonna do my little internal checklist of okay, well, what can I have avoided, what could we have done better so that wouldn't have happened, and that's an ongoing list … and then hearing from people who have done these jobs longer than I have … I've been fortunate so that the people that I've reported to have been, I can go to them, they're very approachable so I can go to them and

say, you know, "I'm just stuck. I'm in a situation, I've looked at it from this angle,

this angle, this angle, and I just, I don't know what to do." And, and I've always

been able to go to somebody and just say, "Can I bounce this off you? Just get

your opinion on what do you think?"

Mentoring. Sakura, Maple, Cedar, Pine, and Acacia responded to questions about

the development of their oral communication skill from the perspective of mentees. The

respect these individuals have for their mentors has developed the way they use their oral

communication skills in the workplace. As Sakura noted, "I feel like it has forced me to

be organized and professional in my responses." Maple sought help from her mentors

when trying to develop her oral communication skills:

> I've had several mentors at [sister site]. One of my greatest is my director who is
>
> just awesome. She has taught me so much about the systems and what we're doing
>
> and how to do it, and how to approach manufacturers and colleagues. And she has
>
> a passion for the job which leads her team to have a passion for the job. Also, my
>
> direct manager who is, she's the person that trained me. She's so easy to talk to, so
>
> easy to get along with. She's also showed me a lot and taught me several things
>
> that, you know, have helped me be able to teach my team how to perform these
>
> tasks … I'm constantly looking for ways to improve. And that I got from her.

Acacia recognized the necessity of effectively using his oral communication skills

to be understood by others with whom he works:

> I've had to talk to him about my ideas and say, well, we used to do it this way,
>
> how come we can't do that here? Or is it a better idea? To do that here? I'd like to

present that to him effectively to where it was to where he would understand what

I'm saying.

Networking. The three sister sites had to network daily with teams and

individuals from the partner organization with whom they had little or no familiarity, thus

developing oral communication skills. Oak noted, "You become more comfortable

because you become more accustomed to talking to different audiences." Sakura was able

to develop her oral communication skills to a point of relaxation with the process of

networking, "I feel like once … you build that relationship with that other person … and

the stronger that relationship is, the easier it is to communicate or banter with them

almost on a on a friend, friendly, level." Palm developed her oral communication skills as

well as her networking skills during the BTT project:

> Networking became huge because not only was I having to understand how the
>
> rest of the businesses function, I … needed to be able to communicate to the
>
> business lead that was taking lead on the project, how important these various
>
> things were, staying on task, validating data, going through the requirements
>
> phase of what this needed for our specific company.

Pine was forced outside of her comfort zone during the BTT project and noticed the

effect of the project on her oral communication skills:

> I've had to speak up … I've been getting requests … meeting requests from people
>
> … and I have no earthly idea what they're gonna want to talk with me about, or
>
> ask me … it kind of puts you on the spot because you may not have a lot of
>
> background … I may join a call and find out oh, I'm just talking to one person or I

find out, there's 10 or 12 people on the call … there was the period of my life would have scared me to death because I've had to talk to a bunch of people that I don't know, and I don't know why they're wanting to speak to me … I think because of that frequency that this has been happening, I've sort of become desensitized … I feel more comfortable talking to someone I don't know.

Cedar had also become accustomed to using her oral communication skills while networking but noted that she communicates differently with people depending on her familiarity with the teams or individuals:

Because I've tried to network with other leaders that I don't have an experience with, I try to be even clearer and … try to stick to the facts as much as possible. So, I don't like communicating in a conversation style, when I'm trying to network with people that I'm not as familiar with, I try to keep it a little bit more formal. I try to keep level set expectations. I try to make sure that they understand exactly what I'm trying to say. And I try to just be clear on asking the questions to understand exactly what they expect is going to happen in whatever we're working on as well.

Listening

Seven of the eight participants have used workplace encounters to develop their listening skills. Spruce and Sakura recognized the necessity of developing listening skills to improve their coaching encounters when trying to attain process improvements from their direct report employees. Spruce observed, "Training people … being patient with them and showing them how to work … it's just training them … and being patient and

listening to what they have to say." Sakura noted, "I want and need to hear why they did what they did, so I can help them improve."

Coaching. Oak, Cedar, and Pine determined their listening skills were developed through coaching encounters because to reach an acceptable solution to an issue people are forced to pay attention to what is being said by all individuals involved. Oak had used her listening skills to be more aware of what was happening within the organization, "I think once you have that awareness, you listen for it … I think that's how your listening skills change or improve, because you are listening to things that are brought to your attention." Being queried by her coaches and mentors concerning how she handled workplace situations helped Cedar develop her listening skills:

> In order to understand what the problem is, you really have to listen, and you have to ask some questions to get down to the root of the cause. And it helps to know which questions to ask … you don't always go in knowing what to ask for, or how to get some clarity … when I've spoken to other leaders, and they said, 'Hey, did you ask the follow up question? Did you ask, did you?' And they are asking me more about the situation, I realized that I sometimes didn't get the whole story … it makes me pay attention more closely when I'm in the situation again, where I'm having to help somebody or help our team, to know to ask the right questions.

Pine recognized the importance of individuals' personalities in how to listen to what is being said. Without making assumptions, Pine tried to determine what the speaker wanted from the workplace encounter to know how to process the information the speaker was providing:

What's great about my team is I have a lot of different personalities … they're all very much like me … But the same time we all think very differently … through speaking to someone one on one your goal is you want to keep them invested, that you want to make sure that they feel like you're listening … even if you may not agree with their point of view that you've heard them, and but that they're also going to be invested in what you're telling them.

Palm and Acacia discussed the development of their listening skills from coaching encounters that occurred outside their normal work functions. Palm remarked on how the BTT process helped develop her listening skills as a coach:

I always look for opportunities to learn from what is being shared with me … I will say that is a constant, kind of ever evolving … I feel empowered to ask questions and that's only because there is the ability to work across teams and be collaborative in our approach to move forward and not just concentrate on the one thing that's told to me that I may be responsible for in the future state. It's knowing what that one thing is and understanding how it relates to everything else.

Acacia perceived his listening skills were developed from a workplace conference he was asked to attend as a representative of his department:

We went around the table a lot to talk about different things and so you're forced into situations where you are listening, and so I think both formally and informally, yes, it had a little impact with listening skills. In a positive way.

Mentoring. Oak and Palm noted that developing listening skills in a mentoring encounter means individuals were aware of the tone of what is being said and the delivery of the message they were conveying. Oak noted,

I would say one of the most important things that I have learned is to listen more and talk less … Because there's more to listening to me than just words … There's tone, there is delivery, and sometimes, people say what you want them to say, not necessarily what they're really feeling … I think sometimes that the delivery is as important as the words.

Pine and Acacia discussed using sensitivity when developing their listening skills. They determined the listener must determine what the speaker wants from the mentoring encounter for it to be effective. Pine mentioned,

I think … a good part of mentoring … It's not just you're telling, or you're teaching someone else, or helping somebody else you, you have to be able to read, again, ultimately, what do they want? How does, you know, what type of learner are they? What's going to be? What's going to motivate them? Are they a visual learner? Do they need … a step by step written … process? Or do they just need to talk it out?

Networking. Cedar, Sakura, and Pine discussed familiarity with those whom they were networking from the partner organizations as related to the BTT project. Cedar best summed their skill development when she stated,

I tend to go to the same people over and over again, but I've been trying to branch out. And so, because I don't know them as well as I've known others. I've had to

be very intentional about … what they're saying. Listening to what they're saying and interpreting it in a way that makes sense to whoever that particular person is. So, if they've said something … I'll ask them follow-up questions, or I'll try to get a better understanding of where they're coming from. Because I don't work with them a lot. It's harder to understand what they're trying to say. So, you … put more effort into it, because I just don't know them as well.

Presenting

Six of the eight study participants recalled how they developed their presenting skills. Cedar had discovered the higher your position in the department and the more people you interact with daily, the more presentations you are expected to deliver. Knowing your audience, observation of effective presentations, and engaging behaviors all aid in the development of presenting skills through coaching encounters. Pine noted, "You have to be prepared, that your way of learning or communicating may not make sense or be the best way that someone else needs that presented to them … it's important to be open to understanding other people's world[s]."

Coaching. Oak discussed knowing your audience to know what to discuss when using presenting as a means of coaching:

I mean to me, presenting is along the lines of oral speaking. But when I think about presenting, I think about focused content, knowing your audience. Those are the typical things that are discussed to me when presenting. Or, the fact that you may give a careful consideration to your audience and content. That may be the difference.

Palm noted the importance of observing how other people present to groups while coaching as a means of developing her own presentation skills:

I would say presenting skills have really just been a work in progress for me of watching other people and knowing what I zone out on when other people are doing presentation. And making sure that I'm keeping it focused and having a focused conversation when I'm presenting … it's being able to stay on topic, to give relevant information and to not get sidetracked … I think a lot of that is just come from watching other people, watching successful people, do it and taking away okay, why did I stay engaged for their 30-minute presentation but I zoned out after 5 minutes for this person … it's going through this presentation and seeing it done well, and then seeing it done maybe not that well and finding what part of that spoke to me in the presentation that I responded positively to.

Sakura and Acacia stated engagement in a presentation helped develop their skill. Sakura chose to use media to engage her audience when coaching:

I feel like it, it, actually forced me into being able to show that there was a better way, a better outcome easily available. Whether it be using slides, or whether it be talking through steps that could have been followed.

Acacia believed observing a dynamic presenter with the ability to engage their audience was necessary for developing presentation skills:

She had an aura of confidence and positivity. That's something that I've always liked to think that I portray. And other times, I think it's just something people are born with … the positivity and confidence and just a bubble around her that was

just, you know she was very just in charge, everything was in order, it was very organized … That glowing aura, I suppose, was, you know, something I think we'd like to all picture ourselves with but only certain people have it. That's something that I'd like to think I have, I'm not sure I do. So, I'm always trying to work on that as well.

Mentoring. Sakura and Pine analyzed their presentation skills as mentors, noting the importance of gaining audience understanding of the material being presented. Sakura recalled, "I have to do a good job of orally telling them what we're doing and what we need to accomplish, so that I can get their feedback and we can come up with the best process or solution." Palm observed people in her business unit she considered to be mentors as a way of incorporating the mentors' style into her own presentations:

I think watching the presenters that can hold the attention of their audience and understanding what they do well. And it's watching those leaders, it's watching those mentors to me. Getting up and public speaking in front of those groups like that. That's never been something that I struggled with, as long as I know the information that I'm sharing, information I'm communicating. I feel very comfortable being in front of people. But developing the skills to engage them and keep them engaged, that came directly from watching others do that, including those mentors, the people that I respected. Seeing how the audience responded to them and understanding again what they did well, so that I can incorporate that same structure into a presentation I might be leading.

Networking. Oak presented a positive outlook on presenting skill development

over time, "I think that the more networking experience you have, the more comfortable

you are in different audiences. Kinda like practice … repetitive behavior, you're a little

more comfortable." Pine's expectation of her skill development was not as positive as

Oak's:

> It's still not my favorite thing in the world to do, and I'll keep saying that, but I
>
> was a little bit more prepared. They still get me super nervous, even though I
>
> know I know what I'm talking about. I feel confident that I can speak to what I
>
> need to. I don't know if I'm ever fully going to be able to get rid of that
>
> nervousness that I have.

> Cedar mentioned the importance of knowing your audience when presenting in a

networking encounter:

> Depending on … who you're presenting to and … who your audience is … I just
>
> take that into consideration when, anytime, I have to do a presentation. So, if I
>
> know that is going to be people from other areas or for people that I'm not
>
> familiar with, or people who are not that familiar with me, I try to be more formal,
>
> try to stick to the facts. I try to encourage people to ask questions … I just try to
>
> keep it as level set as possible.

> Palm talked about developing her presentation skills while taking part in a new

networking experience that grew from the BTT project:

> We're going to do an exercise right now, getting ready to roll out a team building
>
> exercise, between two of the [sister sites]. So that our teams can work together

through training to have kind of another, another group that they're doing the

same type of job function they have been. They've got those people to lean on

during training to say, you know wait, you're going through this training just like I

am. It's good to have someone else to talk to, to lean on, to ask questions of. Like

we're all in this together … And I think it would be very helpful for the teams

know that they have other people outside just [sister site] or just [sister site] that

sit in the specialty space that are going to be experiencing the same types of

experiences, but the other person will also be going through the same experiences.

Giving them a broader base to communicate with, letting them feel like they are

all on the same team.

Crafting Emails

The working conditions of the Covid 19 pandemic made the participants of this

study reliant on email communication. Five of the eight participants recalled developing

skills pertaining to crafting emails. Participants said they coached through emails to

exchange workplace knowledge. Like giving and receiving feedback, mentoring through

emails was dependent on whether the person was the mentor or the mentee. Participants

used emails to maintain established networking groups or to build networks in time of

unusual working circumstances.

Coaching. Palm coached her team through emails as a means of sharing

knowledge that empowered the team to handle situations that arose during their workday:

We have always kind of taken the approach of sharing information. The more

information I can share with you, the more data I can provide to you … so that

you fully understand … how what we do impacts the business then the more educated that person is … it's trickling down of that information so that everyone has a basic understanding of what, and how important, their role is in the organization … that comes from coaching and mentoring and having that person explain to you why it's important … it is being able to facilitate the cooperation of others, other teams, and to have a collaborative approach across teams.

Mentoring. Oak examined crafting emails as a mentor, and Cedar and Palm discussed crafting emails as mentees. Oak's mentee used email as a way of continuing the relationship that developed from their mentoring encounter:

I mentored an associate … it did really start, it really was the basis of a friendship. So, you know, as recent as last week, you know, she would email and ask questions or, you know, we stay in touch, but she will ask questions about how to handle different scenarios. You know, she looks to me as a sounding board.

Cedar was dependent on her mentors to reassure her that she was correctly reading the emails she received from her employees:

The problem is our communication a lot is through electronic communication … it's hard to understand meaning through email … So, I would tend to, jump to the, you know, they're reacting to this negatively … so I'd go to these particular leaders and ask, you know, this is what I have, this is what he said. What do you think they mean by or what do you think the tone is on this? And for somebody who has more experience either with that particular person or in that type of situation, and they can bring a different perspective to it. That I may not, I mean, I

have gathered from it … it really it does help with, you know, having more people

going to people with more experience and asking them or people who've worked

with others, to know how to receive a message. How to understand what they're

saying before you jump to conclusions about what you might think is in between

the lines.

Palm's mentor used emails as a way of gaining input from her direct reports concerning

business processes, "I say that VP of operations there now … she made it a mission of

hers when she took over that position to ensure that every team was represented in

decision making … We have concentrated emails and calls around specific issues."

Networking. Palm networked through email to maintain relationships with people

she has previously worked with in case she needs to work with those individuals in the

future:

I still hear from that field team, from time to time, and we went through that

project in 2011 … he knows that I'm a huge football fan … He'll just send me

periodic emails. I think that that's a testament to networking well, if whenever you

can build this relationship, not just to serve the needs that you have at the time,

but, but, genuine interest in what that person is doing or what service they're

performing, or how impactful it's going to be. And how can you work together in

the future to have this kind of success, maybe in a different project.

Acacia noticed his team was dependent on emails because working remotely had

separated his group and changed their methods of interaction:

It is very reliant on technology since March … especially since March, you know

… it's an odd bird to be working together on something kind of … we send things

back and forth to each other a little bit … I would say our communication is gone

almost like 90 to 95% email … the times that we're in, you know, like, in person

networking, is not really taking place … we're networking all the time, even

through emails, you know, like, you never know what could happen in a career.

And so, I always try to maintain the utmost professional and best communication

practices possible when working with a manufacturer, when working with our

team, an external team … I'm just trying to try and maintain professionalism. And

everyone hates email. I'm trying to make my email not difficult to read. I put lots

of please and thank yous and hopefully you're doing well you know … I want to

be disarmed, professional, and concise. Just trying to be easy to work with in

those emails.

How Coaching, Mentoring, Networking Influenced Skill Development

In the process of determining which specific collaborative communication skills

were perceived as developed, participants were also sharing how they developed those

skills. This provided me with a richer understanding of participants' experiences and

allowed results to fall into one of two categories: what skills were developed and how

those skills were developed. To do justice to the data, I also analyzed this data that

emerged in the context of the interviews. The analysis of participants' recollections of

how their coaching, mentoring, and networking encounters supported collaborative

communication skills development resulted in three themes: participant role in the

experience influenced learning, participants sought respected individuals to model, and tone and timing of the message given mattered during coaching and mentoring encounters.

Participant Role in the Encounter Influenced Learning

Participants' responses varied by the role they played in the coaching, mentoring, and networking encounter. Their responses were dependent on whether they were the coach or being coached, the mentor or the mentee. The participants' recollections offered a view of the dual role the participants played within the organizations. In most cases, the participants were both the coach and the individual being coached, the mentor and the mentee. An example of this was given as if in a managerial role they (as an individual being coached or as a mentee) sought advice for how to address an employee encounter in which they would be the coach or mentor. Familiarity with the encounter process and with others involved in the encounter also affected skill development. Participants' perceived level of confidence in their ability to perform a role in the encounter was heightened by repetition. Participants' confidence in their skill level made them more comfortable during the encounter experience.

Participants perceived their skill development was affected by how coaches approached the employee and the task that needed improvement. For instance, Oak recalled an incident with an employee that she attributed to a personality conflict rather than a work task issue. Oak, as a manager, coached a new manager on how to deal with a difficult employee of a team the new manager was taking over:

I've had … a situation with a challenging employee, very knowledgeable

hardworking, but it's more of, I think, maybe more of a personality conflict type

challenge with a new manager coming into the position that this employee

reported to. So, I would say, you know, constant coaching with, with the manager

on different approaches and how to deal with this associate … that really has been

a coaching opportunity for me with the manager … the manager and I would

collaborate on different approaches too, because you don't want to give up on a

valuable associate … So, we talked through different ways, … to approach it and

they have better outcomes.

Pine mentioned helping a struggling colleague who was younger and new to the

workplace and having their relationship become a friendship. Pine combined being a

friend and being a coach when she later became her superior:

She and I were colleagues, I guess, we were peers … And, you know, as just

sitting next to her and talking as the group [was] getting to know each other, you

know, we would, we would eventually talk … and a few years later … I was [her]

supervisor … So, I helped her … And just over the course of time I really started

to see … she was just showing signs of that she's going to be a really, she could

be a really good leader, when she's ready … And you know, I've seen her

progress, learn, grow, and develop. She's done a lot … she's gone from somebody

who once thought, I can't. I can't do this on my own, to somebody who knows,

she can do it on her own. And she's grown so much. And because of all this, as

herself, worked her way up, you know, advanced and worked her way up to

management title.

Sakura and Spruce recalled mentoring their team leads. Both said they use their

opportunities as a mentor to develop skills in the team leads. For instance, Sakura

mentored an employee who was upset because she was passed over for a promotion:

There was an employee, she was very upset when somebody else was previously

promoted to the position and she was not, to the point where she went to HR. And

we actually sat in the HR office and talked through it. And I walked her through

the changes and, and skills I needed her to accomplish before she would be ready

for the position. And she definitely took it to heart. She accomplished those and

we were able to promote her.

Spruce mentored his team leads so they can effectively collaborate with other employees:

I have a team lead … I've taken him under my wing, and helped him

communicate with other people, the people that he's in charge of. I've also shown

him how to collaborate with other people in other departments to learn what they

do.

Employees were comfortable networking within their own business site but

changed networking communication techniques when introduced to team members

outside their organizations. Maple, Oak, and Sakura discussed networking to enhance

customer experiences. Maple worked on a team that she called a hub department because

they interacted with every department at [sister site] to ensure the customers could access

the items they needed, the pricing of the item was correct, and the delivery was timely.

Oak noted her need to network with leadership and employees, "You need all of those pieces, all the pieces of the puzzle to be successful and be good and provide that service the customer expects." Sakura grew her role at [sister site] through networking:

> We brought on a subset of customers that was very different from normal. And it was a very high level, big, big take and involved a project manager and senior leadership to iron out how we were going to accomplish this process. And I feel like it really taught me a lot ... I became the point contact for the VP of that customer.

However, not everyone expressed comfort around people, particularly those with whom they have little experience. Cedar offered a different view of networking:

> Networking has been, I would have to say, the biggest challenge area for me. Simply because there are a few people that I go to and get directions from. And, if I don't have a lot of experience with people, I tend not to be great at collaborating and or seeking them out for collaboration. But it is something that I have been working on.

Participant responses were influenced by two factors which they did not control: the BTT project and Covid 19. Leadership at the partner organization controlled the BTT project. Participants' personal and professional lives were affected by the fluid nature of the deadlines and expectations of the project. Palm discussed how the BTT project affected her home life:

> From a purely personal standpoint we have a toddler and he will be four in October so, for the majority of his toddler years, I have been going through BTT

and going through a massive workload. I lost one of my right-hand people who, really, I was training to be more of a succession. I was waiting for her to step up and take on larger roles post go live [industry jargon denoting the start date of a new process], and even really grooming her to be that right-hand person for me. She left the company last summer. And that, that has been really, really difficult, and has continued to remain a challenge, on top of stress the team is already undergoing because of the changes that are coming. It has really forced me to become even more involved with my team, which she was always the person that kind of engaged the team. She was their supervisor, and they went to her for everything. And so now they're having to come to me and so it's a balancing act, making sure that I'm present for them, and I can assist them in whatever needs they have. But then I'm also prioritizing from an BTT perspective and a workload perspective and also balancing that against a personal life.

Pine grew her workplace networks because of the BTT project:

I think BTT has probably done that for everyone. Because not only are you, you're getting to know some people, maybe you, maybe knew their name, maybe not. But it's put me in touch with a lot of people that [partner organization] I think it's grown those relationships between business units. And so, we're working together for a common goal, but we're also coming from very different environments.

Government mandates forced participants from the brick-and-mortar setting of the sister sites. The participants were forced to become inventive when trying to maintain

lines of communication with their business partners and fellow employees. Acacia

worked in a small department and used emails while networking to grow his contacts for

future advancements:

> I think in a small way, we're networking all the time, even through emails, you
>
> know, like, you never know what could happen in a career. And so, I always try to
>
> maintain the utmost professional and best communication practices possible when
>
> working with a manufacturer, when working with our team, an external team.

Participants Sought Respected Individuals to Model

All participants recalled coaching, mentoring, and networking encounters in

which they sought respected, knowledgeable individuals to act as their coach or mentor.

Cedar's recollections of coaching involved how she sought people she respected to help

her become a better coach, some who were better with people issues and some who were

better with facts and data issues:

> Different leaders have different strong suits, and some are better with people.
>
> Some are better with facts and data … everyone just has different styles. And so, I
>
> would, there are a few leaders that I trust and respect. And they all have different
>
> personality styles. And I would take the same issue to each of them and ask them
>
> for their advice, and then tailor that to whoever, whatever situation I needed …
>
> But I have no problem going in asking others who are more experienced for their
>
> opinions and it's helped.

Mentors were, in most cases, sought by the employee to gain a better

understanding of a work process. This effort was sometimes to better understand their

own processes or to understand someone else's so they could be a better mentor. Acacia and Palm sought knowledgeable individuals to be their mentors. Acacia had begun a friendship with his mentor because he liked the way the mentor communicated with him about his job expectations and company information:

> At [sister site], there's a manager, who I don't directly report to, but he, he sort of like a diagonal up from me … He's been great to communicate with because we, you mentioned friendship, and it's sort of like we've kind of struck a friendship. And so, it makes a lot of the informal mentoring really easy, because it's really easy for me to go and ask him any question about anything … There's so many things that I don't think I could ask my direct manager, that I could ask him … I think we understand each other really well. And he's in a place where I'd like to be, and he'd like to move up as well. So, we both share that ambition. A lot of it's informal mentoring, we don't have anything in place, but there's a lot it's been very beneficial for me.

Palm's mentor helped her grow her contacts within the organization:

> The person I reported to was very open and very she would tell me go ask [J], go ask [D], go ask [B]. She encouraged me to reach out as an individual to them. Regardless of my title, regardless of their title, like go and ask them. They're the ones that are asking for this information, feel free to reach out them and communicate directly with them … And I think I have grown more from that type of interaction. Because they took the time: a) to share information with me, b) to help train me additionally, [and] c) they included me on every information that

would be relative to what I did for the company. That was the biggest growth

opportunity I could have had is working with leaders that were very open, very

encouraging for my own growth, both personally and professionally.

Participants noted that the development of one skill may have been generated by,

or initiated, the learning of other skills. Sakura became aware of the need to cultivate

patience while developing her listening skills as they related to mentoring, "I have to be

very patient … When I listen to their side of the story, so that we can talk through

scenarios and figure out the best outcome." All participants used their powers of

observation to determine best, and least desired, practices of coaches, mentors, and

presenters. Cedar discussed collaborating with people whom she considers to be mentors,

"I can take what they have … use their style, or the way that they've done it, and

incorporate that into what I'm doing so that I can make sure the messages that I'm trying

to give is received well." Sakura discussed repetition when developing presenting skills

during networking encounters. Sakura stated that she "watched people that I admire or

that I respect and watch what they do when they…do presentations. And I try to learn

from those." Participants found networking developed their situational concentration.

When networking with individuals with whom you may not be familiar, Oak noted,

"You're more careful to be attentive and present in the moment. Rather than your mind

wandering."

Tone and Timing of the Message Given Mattered in Coaching and Mentoring

Participants mentioned that how a message was given affected the way in which

the message was received. Acting as the coach or mentor during an encounter, the

participants said they needed to deliver timely information with a tone that was acceptable to the receiver of the information. When networking, participants had better experiences if they knew their audience.

Maple learned to have her facts in order before approaching employees to coach them. This allowed her to not be confrontational with the employee:

You as management, you may have to talk with somebody, and how to be able to approach them and have your facts laid out and how to say it in a way that doesn't come off as confrontational. But [it] lets them know that "hey, I'm not sure exactly what happened, but we need to get to the bottom of it".

Palm found her best practice as a coach was to gather little bits of information about as many workplace practices as possible. She learned from her own coaches that knowledge is power and empowering:

We have always taken the stance of "let's know a little bit about all of it so that we can better serve our customers and that we can gain knowledge and grow with the business and continue to understand how the business operates" … And it's important because, and it goes directly to coaching, that learning and that understanding … so that you fully understand what all we touch and how what we do impacts the business then the more educated that person is. They can take that back to their team … So, it's being thoughtful, but that comes from training, that comes from coaching and mentoring and having that person explain to you why it's important … And to have a collaborative approach across teams. To

understand how everyone has to work together for the good of the company or

things will fail. And ultimately our customers will suffer from it.

Cedar was drawn to her mentors by their concise communication styles:

I think that perhaps they have one leader … that I worked with very closely and

who [is] at a VP level. And they've really, you know, helped with being in my

corner, I guess. So, they are very clear. They'll see what you're doing. You can

come to them with some questions. They will give you the feedback. And they

really, their guidance, their experience, it's just really helped all around, actually.

So, they're always there as a good communicator as well. And they're they always

help with, you know, responding and how to respond and how to taper, and how

to taper my message to people that maybe I'm not familiar with and how to give

people those particular messages. So, it certainly helped.

Summary

I conducted eight interviews between July and October 2020. Participant

responses to the interview questions suggested they develop five collaborative

communication skills from coaching, mentoring, and networking encounters: giving and

receiving feedback, oral communication, listening, presenting, and crafting emails. They

also spoke frequently of how they gained these skills, which I analyzed in three areas:

participant role in the encounter influenced learning, participants sought respected

individuals to model, and tone and timing of the message given mattered in coaching and

mentoring.

Participants often interchanged their descriptions of oral communication skill development with that of developing skills required for making presentations. They determined that a person who can speak effectively is one who can also present effectively. Participants remarked how developing patience aided in the development of their listening skills. Participants noted how they often thought ahead during conversations, determining solutions to issues without hearing fully what the other person was saying. Observation was key for participants when developing their skills in presenting. Watching how others coached led participants to want to know their audience and incorporate engaging behaviors in their presenting styles. Working remotely aided the participants in the development of skills related to crafting emails.

In Chapter 5 I will present an interpretation of the findings presented in this chapter considering scholarly literature. I will explore the limitations pertinent to this study. I will suggest recommendations for further research, as related to the strengths and weaknesses of this study and current research as previously presented. I will propose implications for positive social change and recommendation for practice.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to describe what collaborative communication skills employees perceive they have developed from informal workplace learning opportunities, specifically coaching, mentoring, and networking. I had one research question for this study: What collaborative communication skills do employees perceive they have developed from informal workplace learning experiences? The key findings for what skills employees developed in the context of coaching, mentoring, and networking encounters related to giving and receiving feedback, oral communication, listening, presenting, and crafting emails. The key findings for how the employees developed these skills related to the participants role in the encounters, that participants sought respected individuals as role models, and that tone and timing of the message given mattered during coaching and mentoring encounters. Chapter 5 includes an interpretation of the findings, limitations of the study, recommendations for further research, implications for positive social change, and conclusions.

Interpretations of the Findings

In this section, I interpret the findings within the conceptual framework and empirical research I reviewed in Chapter 2. The interpretation is first directed toward a comparison of the findings to Marsick and Watkins's (1990) informal workplace learning theory, which I used as a framework for the study. I then interpret what collaborative communication skills the participants perceived they developed against the empirical literature on collaborative communication skills and informal workplace learning.

Interpretation of the Findings in Light of the Conceptual Framework

Marsick and Watkins (1990) emphasized learning rather than training. They discussed training as activities that emphasized organizational needs, while learning incorporated knowledge and skills the employees deemed important for their success in the workplace (Marsick & Watkins, 1990). Marsick and Watkins's work morphed from its inception in 1990 to Marsick et al.'s (2017) recent work. I based the conceptual framework of this study on the 1990 publication, in which participant learning was separated into formal and informal learning encounters, with an emphasis on informal workplace encounters of coaching, mentoring, and networking. This description of informal workplace learning was important to my study because coaching, mentoring, and networking encounters may be universal to employees who work in brick-and-mortar buildings and remotely. Marsick and Watkins (1990), based on the work of Carnevale (1984), claimed that workplace learning predominantly occurred during informal encounters. To examine this, I asked participants if they perceived their skill development was from formal, higher education learning experiences or from their workplace experiences. All participants reported that their communication skill development occurred during their workday, not from formal higher education opportunities. Oak and Spruce credited the majority of their communication skill development to their time at [a sister site]. Cedar, Maple, Palm, Pine, and Sakura stated that workplace experiences developed their communication skills. Acacia felt he had developed the communication skills he used playing sports, but admitted he was using workplace experiences to hone the skills.

Marsick et al.'s (2009) theory contended that the contextual nature of a workplace affects the learning and development of the employees. In this study, participants discussed their skill development within many roles at their workplace: as the coach and the individual being coached, as the mentor and the mentee, and as the individual giving a presentation and an individual who attended a presentation. The coach, mentor, and presenter developed their skills to increase their comfort with the interaction, to ensure they were equipped to handle future encounters, and to grow their position within the organization. The individual being coached, the mentee, and the presentation attendees developed their skills to increase their comfort with the interaction, to ensure they were equipped to handle future encounters as either the lead or receiver of the encounter, and to remain employed. This study supports Marsick and Watkins's work by demonstrating that collaborative communication skills can be developed through employees working in a brick-and-mortar setting or remotely. This is evident in the participants recognizing they had developed skills in giving and receiving feedback, oral speaking, listening, and presenting. The skill of crafting emails was not considered at the time of Marsick and Watkins's theory development due to the infancy of computers as a means of communication, but the importance of this skill development was necessary given the remote working conditions of the participants. Acacia estimated that most of the communication with his team occurs through email because they have been working remotely.

Marsick et al.'s (2009) theory maintains an individual's need for self-directed problem solving. This study supports this idea as Cedar, Maple, and Pine reported

autonomy in seeking coaches and mentors they respected. Respected individuals were considered knowledgeable, easy to talk with, and supportive, regardless of time constraints. Respected individuals offered advice that was concise and germane to the issue being faced by the participant.

Marsick et al.'s (2009) theory did not directly address tone and timing of messages given during informal learning encounters. However, they did discuss how workplace context allows for continually running conversations that affect participant perceptions of situations and alter participants' future actions within established workplace norms. Cedar found that information provided in conversations needed to be concise. Maple and Palm determined that the leader of the conversation, whether as a coach or mentor, had to be knowledgeable and have their facts in order before engaging with employees.

This study could easily support Marsick et al.'s (2017) theory adaptation. In that version of Marsick and Watkins's theory, the authors contended that formal and informal learning complemented and completed each other. Acacia, Maple, and Spruce reported that their formal education knowledge helped them gain their position within the organization, but their communication skills learned from informal workplace experiences made them promotable within the organization. Marsick and Watkins's theory also established a social interaction dimension to workplace learning. Cedar, Oak, Palm, Pine, and Sakura reported interacting with their coworkers, managers, and individuals outside their business unit to accomplish the goals of the BTT project.

Interpretation of the Findings Within the Current Research Literature

I began this study to explore the relationship between collaborative communication skill development and informal workplace learning encounters. Recent literature, including studies conducted outside the United States, showed a lack of connection between these two topics. Researchers have explored whether the responsibility of developing communication skills lied with higher education institutions or with employers. Researchers have also examined how coaching, mentoring, and networking encounters were related to successful employee relationships but not how these encounters related to collaborative communication skill development.

Participants discussed five distinct collaborative communication skills they developed from coaching, mentoring, and networking encounters. These were giving and receiving feedback, oral communication, listening, presenting, and crafting emails. Skills related to giving and receiving feedback and listening were mentioned in recent research as necessary for career success and advancement, but researchers such as Clokie and Fourie (2016), Coffelt et al. (2016), and Chydenius and Gaisch (2016) did not explore when or how employees should develop their skills. Sakura and Acacia recalled how developing their oral communication skills made them feel more professional in their encounters. This supports Mishra et al.'s (2014) research, which showed that internal communication channels allowed for improved employee engagement and encouraged dialogue between employees and stakeholders. The literature on the significance of writing emails is not conclusive. While Clokie and Fourie (2016) stated that properly composed emails were the most desired business communication skill, Coffelt et al.

concluded that technical advances make this skill less important than oral communication skills. Breunig (2016) agreed that social media such as wikis allowed geographically dispersed employees to asynchronously share organization expertise. Important to my study was Erhardt et al.'s (2016) conclusion that team learning can be tied to knowledge sharing that occurs through emails.

Participants reported an interweaving of the development of collaborative communication skills with ancillary skill development. Spruce discussed how the development of his giving and receiving feedback skills was aided by also developing his listening skills. Sakura took her self-analysis one step further, stating that she had also developed patience while developing her listening skills that she used when giving and receiving feedback. All participants discussed how the development of oral communication and presentation skills were made possible by using observation skills. Cedar, Maple, and Palm recognized that tone and timing of a message affected how it was received by the person being coached or the mentee. Literature I reviewed in Chapter 2 did not address an interweaving of skill development, but my findings support Lucas and Rawlins's (2015) finding that the message given during an encounter needs to be receiver centric.

Participants recalled how they developed collaborative communication skills. Cedar, Oak, and Pine stated that their higher education experiences did not develop their skills. Maple, Palm, and Spruce described how their workplace experiences helped them develop their skills. Sakura, who at the time of her interview was attending a higher education institution, stated that the classes she had taken to date did not help her develop

her skill level as had her workplace experiences. Acacia related his skill development to foundational sports experiences he had as a teenager. Participant recollections support the findings of Clokie and Fourie (2016), Geithner and Menzel (2016), Taylor (2016), and van Romburgh and van der Merwe (2015), who found that university programs did not equip students with the communication skills necessary for employment.

Participants often played both the role of the coach and the individual being coached as well as the mentor and the mentee as they developed their skills. In some recollections, the participants were individuals who sought advice of trusted individuals so they could better serve their employees as coaches and mentors. Palm was the only participant to discuss a coaching encounter that was initially received as a negative performance review. After a thoughtful review of the encounter, Palm internalized the passion of her manager and refocused her energies to be successful in her position. This finding supports the findings of Kim et al. (2014) that employees who perceived that their managers offered coaching were more aware of their role in the organization and better motivated. Palm's experience contradicts Schaubroeck et al.'s (2016) research that focused on how contentious behavior of team leaders undermines team performance. Maple, Oak, Palm, and Pine recognized that how an employee perceived a mentoring encounter could affect future work production. This supports Bozionelos et al.'s (2016) finding of a positive link between mentoring and job performance as mentoring was directly related to employability career success. The BTT project brought together individuals from the partner organization and the three sister sites as they worked through integrating processes and technology. Cedar, Oak, Palm, Pine, and Sakura recalled

working with individuals they had never met prior to BTT. Using networking to solve

business related issues supports the findings of Luan et al. (2016), van der Haar et al.

(2015), Volz-Peacock et al. (2016), and Wang et al. (2017), who found that workplace

networking encounters allow teams to gain knowledge so they understand a problem,

learn from each other, and suggest innovative solutions.

Participants discussed the autonomy offered to them by the sister sites to pursue

individuals whom they felt could help them develop their collaborative communication

skills. Oak and Cedar recalled times they sought trusted individuals to help them develop

their coaching skills. Maple, Palm, and Acacia discussed how they were able to seek

mentors to help them develop their skills pertaining to interacting with others in their

workplace. Participant need for autonomy to select who helped them develop their skills

supports the findings of Bailley and Lene (2015), Hurrell (2016), and Mishra et al.

(2014), who explored worker and workplace autonomy in the role of skill development.

Participants did not directly state that the collaborative skills they developed

helped them become promotable within their work sites, but they did discuss how their

skills made them more successful in their positions. Cedar, Maple, Pine, and Spruce

spoke more in terms of personal development than skills to remain employed but recalled

a formal training class offered by the partner organization that was designed to help

managers have difficult conversations with their employees. My study supports the

findings of Tikkanen and Nissinen (2016), who found that individuals with high levels of

skills and educational qualifications for their position often seek additional learning

opportunities. In contrast to employer sponsored workplace training discussed by Hurrell

(2016) and Nickson et al. (2017), the training offered to the participants of this study was desirable to the employees because it was offered during work hours and was therefore a paid experience for the employees.

Limitations of the Study

I recognized five limitations while competing this study. First, this study was limited to individuals who worked at three specific business units of a United States based pharmaceutical distributor. The three business units were in the Midwest region of the United States. The business units were small (100 or fewer employees) family-owned companies and were homogenous in nature. Additional settings, such as any of the other business units owned by the partner organization, may have altered the findings of this study.

The second limitation was the sample size of eight individuals. I minimized this limitation by including in Chapter 4 the rich data offered during the interviews. All participants were offered the opportunity to review the verbatim transcript of their interview. Two participants replied that their transcript was complete; the remaining participants did not reply.

A third limitation was that I conducted interviews during the Covid-19 pandemic. Participants were forced to work remotely during this time, which may have affected their communication skill development perceptions. Participant reflections of coaching and mentoring were predominantly of times when employees were working in the office setting. Networking reflections were predominantly of the interactions surrounding the BTT project experiences that occurred while they were working remotely.

The fourth limitation of this study was that the participants were directly or indirectly involved in the BTT project. The project placed unexpected burdens on the participants as work and personal time frames blended. Additionally, the time frame for the completion of the project was shortened, forcing the participants to work longer than their anticipated 40-hour work week.

The fifth limitation was that I concentrated on three aspects of informal learning opportunities (coaching, mentoring, and networking) based on the encounters being shared by employees who work in a brick-and-mortar setting and those who work remotely. Not considered in this study are learning opportunities created by hallway chats, deskside conversations, or premeeting encounters, to name a few.

I addressed personal biases expected during this study proactively and consciously. I informed participants of my position as a trainer with the partner organization but not that members of my department were working directly with the participants as individuals involved in the BTT project. I did not inform the participants of my experience with informal learning encounters, nor my pursuit of developing my own communication skills. I maintained a journal in which I wrote my actions and thoughts concerning the interview processes before, during, and after the interviews. I reviewed the journal entries prior to the next interview to bring my biases to light and to recognize and control them during the interviews.

I developed the interview questions to portray a neutral view of coaching, mentoring, and networking encounters. I reflected on the probes I used prior to asking follow-up questions of the participants to ensure the questions remained neutral. I

consciously paid attention to my responses to the answers provided by the participants. During early interviews I found myself saying "okay" when the participants stopped speaking. This may have altered the completeness of the responses the participants offered as they may have thought I had received the answer I wanted and we could proceed to the next question. During subsequent interviews I consciously kept quiet until the participant indicated they had completed their response. Maintaining a reflective journal during the interview process aided me in recognizing this interview technique flaw and developing a means of controlling the answer interruptions.

Recommendations

The study of collaborative communication is in its infancy based on the amount of available research found prior to and during this study. Future research should be conducted to add to the available literature of this specialized communication method of collaboration. Recommendations for future research are based on the setting and workplace constraints under which the participants were placed at the time they were interviewed. This study was intended to interview participants working in a brick-and-mortar setting with implications that future research be conducted with individuals working remotely. Due to the Covid 19 pandemic, all but one participant was working remotely. Therefore, in reverse of the original intention of this study, future research could involve participants who are working in a brick-and-mortar setting.

One gap in the literature that I noted in Chapter 2 was the limited number of studies using U.S. participants. This study could be repeated with individuals working in any industry in the United States to add to available literature. This study was not

concerned with the position of the participants. Future research could concentrate solely on managerial employees, or hourly employees without direct reports to develop an enhanced understanding of how positions within an organization direct and affect skill development.

Future research could account for the individual's role within the encounter. Mentors/mentees and coaches/coached individuals responded differently to how the coaching, mentoring, and networking encounters affected their skill development. A deeper exploration of this would benefit employee development. Future research could also explore ancillary skill development. No research literature was found that discussed the development of additional skills, such as developing patience while developing listening skills, developing concentration while networking, or observation skills being developed during coaching, mentoring, and networking encounters. Future research could take into consideration whether the participants were involved in a business unit project. The BTT project experiences were heavily reflected in the responses of the participants.

Finally, future research could focus on the themes of how employees developed collaborative communication skills, data which emerged from this study. The findings that participant role in an encounter, that participants sought respected role models, and that tone and timing of messages given during coaching and mentoring encounters mattered were important aspects of skill development for the participants of this study. No research literature was found that discussed what I am referring to as the "how" aspect of collaborative communication skill development.

Implications

The findings of the study may have positive social change implications in how organizations value informal workplace learning opportunities. Coaching, mentoring, and networking encounters may be universal experiences to employees who work in a brick-and-mortar setting and to those employees who work remotely. Effective informal workplace learning is critical to the financial bottom line of organizations. Organizations which promote the development of their employees create an inviting workplace where employees stay for long periods of time, thus reducing the expense of employee turnover (Becker, 1993). Participants of this study averaged 13 years with their department and were complimentary of the individuals who acted as coaches and mentors along their career path. Previous studies examined coaching, mentoring, and networking encounters individually or in combination, but none had explored all three together. Organizations concerned with creating profits for stakeholders can use coaching, mentoring, and networking encounters as cost neutral methods of knowledge sharing. This study demonstrated that a significant portion of skill development occurs through observation and role modeling. Within the course of a normal workday individuals interact with more knowledgeable and experienced coworkers from whom they can develop skills desired by their organization.

The study's key findings may have positive social change implications if both the organization and the employees can recognize the development of multiple skills from informal workplace learning opportunities and then apply those skills during the workday. Communication skills have been demonstrated to be necessary for employees

to be successful (Chydenius & Gaisch, 2016; Clokie & Fourie, 2016; Coffelt et al., 2016; Ghazali & Bennett, 2017; Tsitskari et al., 2017). The participants of this study described how having knowledgeable and experienced personnel share their ability to give and receive feedback, oral communication skills, listening techniques, comfort with presenting, and ability to craft workplace emails aided in the development of participants' communication skills. Hard skills, those necessary to perform job duties, are learned in higher education settings. Workplace settings offer employees the opportunity to develop collaborative communication skills that allow them to interact with coworkers effectively and productively, industry personnel, and customers.

A positive social change implication for the field of adult education from the findings of this study is additional evidence of the value that can be placed on informal workplace learning opportunities. Specific to skill sets associated with increased collaborative communication skills, employees, as adult learners, would be given affirmation of their learning. This may then offer avenues for further learning and development for employees in their chosen fields.

Conclusions

This study supports the necessity of organizations to support informal workplace learning opportunities for their employees. Informal workplace learning transcends workplace settings and is widely available to employees looking to enrich their knowledge and skill base. Employees recognize the need to develop promotable skills to advance within an organization. Organization could place employees in coaching and

mentoring cohorts, however this study demonstrated that employees prefer to seek out

individuals they feel are receptive, knowledgeable, and respected.

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Appendix: Interview Guide

Opening Script

Hi! How are you today? First, I would like to thank you for taking time out of your day to answer my screening questions and consent for participation emails. Before you begin, I want to make sure that you understand this will require approximately 60 minutes of your time.

(Note: If the participant says that something has come up and they are unable at this time to proceed, I will offer to reschedule to a more convenient time by asking them to state when would be a better time for them.)

Let me offer some more background into myself and my study. I am a corporate trainer. I am pursuing a PhD in Education, specializing in Adult Education Leadership. People pursuing this specialization are individuals who act as bridge between adult workers and the organizations which employee the workers. We help adult workers learn and then help the organizations learn with and from the workers. As a corporate trainer I primarily help newly hired workers to learn the computer systems needed to complete their assignments and how to navigate the intricacies of working in an organization setting. Over the years I have noticed two things that have piqued my interest. One is workplace learning opportunities that are offered to employees, and the other is how individuals communicate with each other in a workplace setting. I have been fortunate enough to be able to combine these interests into a research study.

Should you choose to proceed, I will identify you by a pseudonym to identify you in a confidential manner. This means that I will not list you by name when I compile the data from my surveys or my interviews. When direct quotes are listed in the body of the paper individuals will be identified by their pseudonym, and not by their given name.

Should you choose to proceed, you will be asked a set of semi-structured questions concerning the topics of coaching, mentoring, and networking experiences and collaborative communications skill development in the workplace. The interview will take approximately 60 minutes. Once we have finished, I will transcribe your answers and send you a copy of the transcription to review for accuracy.

Collect Consent

You reviewed and responded to a consent email I provided to you when I asked you to participate in the interviewing process. Do you now maintain your consent to be electronically recorded for accurate transcription of the answers you provide to the interview questions?

(Note: If the person responds no-I understand you are revoking your consent to be electronically recorded for accurate transcription while answering my interview questions. At this time, I will end our conversation and wish you a good rest of your day. Thank you.)

(RQ) **What collaborative communication skills do employees perceive they have developed from informal workplace learning experiences**?

Interview Questions

Informal workplace learning occurs outside of a planned learning event. I would like to explore the development of collaborative communication skills through coaching, mentoring, and networking experiences in the workplace. For the purposes of this study, collaborative communication refers to oral, speaking capability, presenting, and listening skills which allows employees to feel they are heard, their work is seen, and they are valued by their organization. It may also include giving and receiving feedback in a workplace setting.

Question 1: Let us begin by having you tell me what you do here at XXX.

      Probe: How long have you been in this position?

Critical incident 1: Think back to a time when you were struggling with a workplace assignment or project and you decided that you needed the help of a coworker. Can you tell me what that problem was?

      Probe: How did you handle it?

      Probe: Who was involved in the solution of your problem?

      Probe: What made you feel that you needed the help of a coworker?

      Probe: Would you consider that the person who helped you acted as a coach trying to produce immediate task improvement or a mentor who was trying to transfer

knowledge through role modeling, teaching, counseling, and friendship? Or did you network with others to solve the problem?

Probe: Who/what influenced the success or failure of this experience?

Probe: How do you determine if a coaching/mentoring/networking experience has been beneficial for you? For a coworker? For a team?

Critical incident 2: Think back to a time when a coworker was struggling with a workplace assignment or project and asked you for help. Can you tell me what that problem was?

Probe: How did you handle it?

Probe: Who was involved in the solution of your coworker's problem?

Probe: What made you feel that you needed to help your coworker?

Probe: When you helped your coworker, were you acting as a coach trying to produce immediate task improvement or a mentor who was trying to transfer knowledge through role modeling, teaching, counseling, and friendship? Or did you network with others to solve the problem?

Probe: Who/what influenced the success or failure of this experience?

Probe: How did you determine if the coaching/mentoring/networking experience had been beneficial for you? For the coworker? For a team?

Question 2: What qualities/traits would you use to describe a person who you feel communicates effectively?

Probe: Ineffectively?

Question 3: How did your coaching/mentoring/networking experiences affect your oral communication skill development?

Probe: How did you acquire the oral communication skills you possess?

Probe: How have your oral communication skills grown?

Probe: How have you developed your oral communication skills?

Question 4: How did your coaching/mentoring/networking experiences affect your written communication skill development?

Probe: How did you acquire the written communication skills you possess?

Probe: How have your written communication skills grown?

Probe: How have you developed your written communication skills?

Question 5: How did your coaching/mentoring/networking experiences affect your collaborative communication skill development?

Probe: How did you acquire the collaborative communication skills you possess?

Probe: How have your collaborative communication skills grown?

Probe: How have you developed your collaborative communication skills?

Question 6: If you have had to overcome challenges to developing your communication skills, tell me about them?

Question 7: What value do you place on collaborative communication skills?

Probe: What value does XXX place on collaborative communication skills?

Wrapping Up

Researcher: That is all my interview questions. Is there anything else you would like to tell me?

Researcher: If I have questions concerning our interview as I am transcribing may I contact you to gain clarity before proceeding?

Researcher: Is _____ still the best way to contact you?

Researcher: I want to thank you for participating in my study and answering my

interview questions.

Researcher: When I have your complete transcript ready I will email it to you so that

you can verify that I have captured all your comments accurately.

Researcher: Thank you and I hope you enjoy the remainder of your day.