



Blending Academic Research and Real- World Application

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Q: You have a strong background of research in skills-based hiring. How do you see this approach evolving in the workplace learning environment, especially in the context of continuous technological advancement?

A: As more organizations shift to skills-based hiring, their first step will be assessing what skill sets they need to build within their workforces through internal learning and talent development programs to stay competitive. This can be a tricky analysis for larger organizations or companies who have not paid much attention to tracking skills individually or in aggregate.

Luckily, there is a growing list of AI-enabled human capital management (HCM) and talent management software platforms companies can leverage to not only identify skill deficits, but create personalized upskilling and reskilling curricula for their employees. In terms of workplace learning, what I am starting to see is workers matriculating (enrolling) in AI-designed learning paths designed to shore up AI-identified skill deficiencies.

Q: What role do you believe organizational communication plays in effective change management, and how do you integrate the research in your consulting practice?

A: As an organizational communication

scholar, I subscribe to the communicative constitution of organizations (CCO) as theorized by McPhee and Zaug (2000, 2009). Recruiting, hiring, and terminating employees, organizational culture, memory, and jargon, reporting relationships and ways of working, and interactions with external stakeholders only exist and create value because someone took the time to write them down or verbally share them with others.

Examples include mission, vision, and value statements, org charts, standard operating procedures, and annual reports. Approaching this in the frame of strategic change communication planning and execution, there are two key areas of “push and pull” where a firm grasp of organizational communication as a behavioral science is invaluable.

First, change implementers have to craft messaging and select media that not only inform and build awareness, but more importantly emphasize why the change is beneficial for all stakeholders on an individual level rather than solely an organizational one (i.e., How does this make my job easier?). This is the “push.”

Next, change implementers who aim to increase change readiness and reduce resistance would be wise to solicit input from all affected stakeholders at varying levels of the organization and include them in decision-making. Laurie Lewis (2011) encapsulates this inclusion as widespread empowerment, where power

dynamics are dampened, open and transparent feedback is encouraged, and everyone from frontline workers up to the C-suite have a seat at the table where their voice and agency are valued. This is the “pull.”

Q: As an executive coach, what common challenges do leaders face in today's business environment (hybrid work models, advances in AI, etc.), and how do you address these in your coaching sessions?

A: There are two recurring themes that I would highlight. First, until recently there has been a hyperfocus on technical skills and knowledge to the detriment of soft skill, or power skill development.

Many leaders have impressive resumes of experience and accomplishment in their area of expertise, but are under-skilled in tasks such as providing productive feedback, planning and running efficient meetings, and exhibiting emotional intelligence.

I've found that comparing and contrasting clients with relevant well-known exemplary leaders and facilitating reverse role-play scenarios helps illuminate power skill gaps. The second has to do with leaders feeling that their personality, professional and academic experience, and the culture of the organization ultimately define their leadership style.

Based on leader-member exchange (LMX) theory (Graen & Scandura, 1987), I have advised clients to develop high quality 1:1 relationships with their individual reports.

These relationships, combined with psychometric assessments, skill inventories, and other talent management resources, paint a picture of an individual's commitment and competence, thus providing guidance for the appropriate leadership style to get optimal effort from that individual.

Q: With your dual role as an academic and a practitioner (pracademic), how do you blend research and theoretical knowledge with practical applications to enhance organizational communication?

A: I have always viewed research, theory and practice as a symbiotic triad. In my academic journey as an organizational communication scholar, it has been my experience that theories are grounded in the systematic analysis of empirical data collected in organizational environments, from organizational members and their leaders. Thus, practice informs theory.

Conversely, when a leader says they believe XYZ because their gut or some social media influencer says so, I can use theory to inform practice and say, “Yes, but when Joe Smith surveyed 200 of your contemporaries and competitors, he

found ABC. Do you want your decisions to be driven by hard data or intuition?"

Q: Based on your dissertation research on entrepreneurial discourse, (a) what were the key takeaways from your dissertation, and (b) how do you think language and communication impact the legitimacy of start-ups and new ventures?

A: My dissertation research identified two major forms of normative communication entrepreneurs use to create and shape impressions of their ventures. The first, venture viability discourses, refers to formal business communication aimed at securing favorable legitimacy judgments from external stakeholders.

Examples include highlighting a venture's scalability, market opportunities, revenue model, or how its product solves a large problem. The second, engaging founder resources, describes a specific communicative skillset entrepreneurs can develop and draw on to influence external audiences.

Storytelling, along with exhibiting passion, transparency, and likability, exemplify different means of making a venture appear more legitimate. Before companies like Meta (formerly Facebook), Amazon, and Uber revolutionized connecting with family and friends, retail shopping, and transportation respectively, they were just ideas. Their founders each leveraged a

unique communication repertoire to grow their initial user bases, attract external investment to fund growth, and bring those ideas to life.

Q: As a mentor with 100 Black Men of Metropolitan Houston, what key advice do you give to young men preparing for careers in today's workforce?

A: This year, we have taken our mentees on field trips to learn about careers in aviation, aeronautics, medicine, and energy. These trips have afforded our mentees valuable face-time with top executives and thought leaders in these industries.

I advise our mentees to nurture and develop these relationships over time as larger networks tend to improve the quantity and quality of career opportunities. More generally, the internet now allows us to create and maintain relationships with people across the globe we may never meet face-to-face and otherwise may never cross paths with.

I encourage young people to use this as an advantage to begin learning about their career options early from individuals currently involved in those career paths.

Q: From your perspective, what are the emerging trends in workplace

learning and leadership development that professionals should be aware of?

A: I'm really excited to see how AI further democratizes and personalizes learning. I'm old enough to remember when managers told their employees what kind of training they needed to take. Now, AI can factor in organizational objectives, current skill inventories, and employee learning goals to make meaningful recommendations and assemble learning paths that keep workers engaged as well as skilled up.

On a separate, but related note, AI is giving professionals in the learning space more bandwidth to focus on strategic planning by automating the creation and administration of learning. AI can help write and revise learning objectives, curate and summarize content for facilitator and participant guides, write voiceover scripts, build decks for e-learning and ILT, provide coaching and tutoring, gamify training, and create knowledge check assessments. As a result, L&D professionals have more time to be partners and advisors to the C-suite.

Q: If you could go back in time and give your younger self career advice, what would you say?

A: I majored in Marketing when I was pursuing my undergraduate degree. There was a chapter of the American Marketing Association (AMA) at my university that I should have joined, but never did

because of disrespectful statements their leadership made in response to a racially charged incident on campus. I didn't feel comfortable offering time and money to an organization that could have likely made me feel more isolated and marginalized than I already felt as a Black student in the business school at a Predominantly White Institution (PWI).

Decades later, realizing the power of affiliation and the true advantages of membership in a national professional organization, I would have told my 20 year-old self to deal with the discomfort for a couple years as the relationships, exposure, professional development, and personal growth that came with it could have had exponential impact on my career.