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Interview Report: Workplace Relationships

1. Topic Introduction and Rationale

I chose the topic of workplace communication because I am personally interested in how best to handle situations as a student about to enter to professional workspace. I have had job experiences before, and always found communication can be tricky in the workplace. The purpose for this research is to explore and learn how others interact in a workplace. Being college age students, we will soon be entering the worldwide workforce. I feel this topic is directly related to the reason why the majority of us are here, to get a job. Understanding and learning about professional relationships is integral to this goal. My research question is what experiences show a more welcoming, friendlier environment? What ways promote a more efficient work environment? What could be the common ground or merging of the two?

2. Review of literature

The purpose of Sam H. DeKay’s article is to expose the fact that there is still little known about the skills required for interpersonal communication. The hypothesis is that employers would rather hire employees with well-developed interpersonal skills than those with demonstrated writing ability. One of the findings that is significant for my own study is that business communication curricula at the college and graduate school level are well served by including an interpersonal skills component. The article is related to the others in terms that the topic of interpersonal skills is largely an unexplored and fully understood region.

The purpose of Delcambre’s article is to discern between written and spoken communication. The most significant findings that is relevant to my study is that communication is both written and spoken in order to be most effective. Having written communication is long lasting and reviewable.

The purpose of Luor’s study is to better understand the impact of emoticons in the workplace. The research questions are what are the effects of emoticons on task-oriented messages in IM in the workplace, and are there any gender difference in emoticon use in IM in the workplace? The most significant finding is that positive emoticons should always be used in work coordination tasks, while negative and neutral emoticons should be avoided. This is relevant to my study in that it is common to see emoticons used in most communication types today. This study discusses new or different ways of communication similar to the other articles and how there is little known about them.

The purpose of Young’s study is to investigate how individuals practice spirituality in the workplace. The research questions that are poised are how do we communicate with individuals of different cultures, values, and language skills in the context of the workplace? The most significant finding of the study for my study was that for most of the interviewees it is important to not react immediately or impulsively without integrating one’s spirituality in the situation. This study relates to the others in the fact that spirituality and communication in the workplace is largely unknown how to best be handled.

These articles come together in the agreement that not much is known about handling communication in the workplace. There are many variables to consider. Communication with clients, privacy, spirituality, and new technologies are all entirely different situations that need to be addressed differently to provide a net positive outcome for everyone.

Stephanie Watson has a degree in mass communications from Boston University. The purpose of this article is to inform the public of some strategies to improve communication which results in employee motivation, productivity and profitability. The article talks about the fact that it is important to listen which causes employees and clients feel respected. Verbal communication is preferred over written, and is best when emotion is taken out of workplace communication. This corresponds well with the other articles due to the fact understanding others in the workplace is important.

Taryn Barnes has written on workforce trends for Borbes and Workforce Magazine. Similar to Watson’s article, Barnes’ purpose of the article is to inform how individuals communicate with one another in order to determine the success of their endeavors. Some major points that Barnes brings up is that active listening and activities outside of work itself are important in improving the quality of the relationships between employee and employer.

3. My Interviewee

My interviewee was appropriate for an interview on my topic because they are a currently enrolled student who also has some work experience. The interview was conducted mid afternoon on a Saturday in a study room in the university library, where outside distractions were at a minimum. The setting was ideal for an interview. It was also a comfortable experience. The meeting began with a few comments about the class and a mutual understanding of what was going to occur, but we both wanted to get right onto business.

4. My Questions

The list of questions that I asked the interviewee:

* What jobs have you had?
  + Have you experienced any notable group projects at school?
* What leadership positions have you experienced?
  + What were your relationships like with the other members?
* How casual is too casual for a professional work environment?
  + Choice of language and joking around
* What is your ideal work environment?
  + Prefer to work independently or as in a group?
* What is your experience of supervision in the workspace?
  + Did you ever have to check up on people
  + Did you ever feel like your boss was always looking over your shoulder?
  + How did that impact how work was done?
* Do you have any experiences in miscommunication because of the form of the communication? Email, in person, group chat, texting?
  + Which do you prefer?
  + Which do you think are more effective?
  + Do you have any experiences in miscommunication because of the form?
* Have you ever experienced a workplace romance?
  + What was its impact on others?
  + What about married couples working in the same workplace?
* What experiences do you have about after work gatherings?
* How much does dress code affect professional relationships?
* What kinds of stories should be shared, and which ones shouldn’t?
  + Do you have any experiences?

5. Results of Interview

My first question was about what jobs the interviewee had. Some of the jobs the interviewee had were working at a family business that performs dirt bike shows, working the concession stand, selling t-shirts, and other merchandise. Another job was working a family restaurant, mostly working in the kitchen. The interviewee also was a part of a student organization.

The second question was about experiences while in a leadership position or with others who were in a leadership position. Then interviewee responded in saying that they were not necessarily put in a leader role, but because of having more experience on the job was able to almost serve as a leader by means of answering questions during the job. This brought up a story the interviewee had with another coworker where they did not get along very well. The other worker has worked at the job longer. My interviewee ended up befriending the co worker buy finding a common interest in the TV show “The Office.” By being relatable in a way outside of work, they were able to resolve this hostility.

Since the interviewee was working at jobs that were managed or owned by family, I inquired if they received any special treatment or advantage because of it. The response was quite the opposite. The interviewee said, “if anything I had a disadvantage.” Regardless of who you are working for, you should always try the hardest you can to help the business succeed was the interviewee’s opinion.

The third question was how casual can language be before it is too casual for a professional work environment. The interviewee’s response was simply, “if you wouldn’t say it in church, don’t say it in the workplace.” Light joking is okay, but not much else beyond that.

The fourth question was asking about an ideal work environment. Would you prefer to work on a team, or individually. The response initially was mainly both, but the interviewee says that it is easier to work on a team. “As being an individual it’s easy to get yourself down, but if you are working with a team it’s nice when you can notice that and help bring them back up.”

The fifth question was about experienced of supervision in the workspace. The interviewee didn’t have much experience being in a supervisor role, but as part of the student org, was required not to waste time joking around, or goofing off, and get to work.

The sixth question was asking about miscommunication because of the form of communication. The interviewee said that the lack of communication in some situations caused issues. The experienced shared was a miscommunication about getting proper change for a customer. Because there was no direct way to contact another co worker, it caused confusion of what actually was needed.

The seventh question was about experiences involving workplace romances. The interviewee couldn’t recall any experience working with couples, or at least wasn’t aware of it at the time, but thought that it wouldn’t bring up any serious issues or conflicts.

The eighth question was asking about after work gatherings. In the student org, they had sessions where they just play games to get to know each other better. One example was when they went to play laser tag together. “You see people’s strengths and weaknesses even in games, and it’s kinda nice because you can help each other out.” A follow up question that was asked was if these gatherings affected the workplace in a positive way, and the response was “always.”

The ninth question was asking how much does dress code affect professional relationships. The response from the interviewee was simply that it should not matter. “If somebody wants to wear pajama pants, ok, I’m not going to judge for you that. If you can pull your weight, I’m okay with that.” The only time would be if the group was presenting to others. Everyone is representing the entire group, and everyone should be dressed according to how the group wants to be seen presented as.

The final question was asking what sorts of stories should be shared, and which ones shouldn’t? “Your church, or your grandparents, if you aren’t going to share it with them, don’t share it anywhere else. In the workplace especially.” It makes an uncomfortable situation. A couple experiences that were shared by the interviewee were situations where language was being used that they didn’t prefer to be used. Another experience was where people were sharing very personal experiences they had with their partners. It lead to a very uncomfortable situation where they didn’t know how to handle it, so it was “brushed” off and ignored, in order to not offend anyone.

6. Final Reflections

Overall I believe the interview went well. If it was held during the week, there may have been more distractions or there may be less time in order to fit it in between classes and homework. Since it was on the weekend, in the early afternoon, the library was mostly empty, and we had the choice of study rooms to pick from. I believe that was the best environment that we have at our disposal at the university. It’s a safe familiar place for both of us, where neither of us would feel out of place or not welcome.

One thing with timing that could be better, was that my interviewee was slightly ill. During the interview there were a couple moments where there was a pause for coughing, and questions had to be restated. Illness is pretty unavoidable at this university since we come in close proximity to other people on a daily basis. It’s just unfortunate that it had to occur during our interviews.

Everybody has different work experiences. A lot of students in our class have very different degree majors and interests, that could result is very different types of part, or full time, jobs. If I had a different interviewee, the experiences shared would be entirely different, and could lead to different outcomes. I believe my research question and purpose would still remain similar, unless my new interviewee wasn’t also a student.

The fact that my interviewee prefered to work in groups suprised me. I understand that it can be more fun to work directly with others. I was expecting a preference to work individually as it would provide less distractions and more room to focus. I was also quite surprised by the fact that my interviewee believe that a workplace romance would not have a large impact on the workplace relationship. I was expecting to hear that it would impact how people would communicate with the couple as opposed to other co workers.

I felt that the research left a bit to be desired. Hearing how spirituality, emoticons, and text are used in workplace communication was still largely unknown was rather disheartening. It seemed like there is still a lot of research that needs to be done in this area. It’s such a common experience that many people have, I expected to find more concrete examples and studies outside of what I thought was common sense.

This was my first experience interviewing another person. I was always the interviewee, never the interviewer. It was interesting listening to stories about a topic that I provided, and prodding slightly for a bit more information or to clarify a direction. I didn’t expect to enjoy it as much as I did. I was surprised at how simple it was too. Turning it into basically just a conversation instead of a presentation or questionnaire made everything feel genuine.

Workplace relationships are unavoidable. Everyone is going to experience them at some point in their lives. Knowing to keep emotion as much out of the workplace is paramount in order to keep things smooth and comfortable for everyone else. I believe it all resolves down to the simple, staple, golden rule, “treat others how you want to be treated.”

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