

Kirkpatrick Levels of Evaluation in Communication Skills Curriculum Design

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The Problem

- SIT students, the majority of whom are polytechnic diploma holders, generally do not have a strong foundation in communication
- Unlike junior college students, who need to go through rigorous training in writing for succeeding in their A-Level General Paper, polytechnic students may be unaccustomed with the rigor of writing and public speaking required in the university and in the workplace.
- A SIT survey conducted with employers found that although SIT students & graduates possess communication competencies, there is, clearly, room for improvement.

The Problem

- SIT, as a university of applied learning, focuses on developing students to be industry-ready
- Chiefly among employability skills are communication skills, such as presentation skills and email writing, which are trainable competencies (Brink & Costigan, 2015; Dunn & Lane, 2019)
- Currently, communication skills modules for students of various degree programs are developed by CCS faculty with general advice from program faculty.
- Curricula may not be aligned with current industry expectations and trends.

Skills Employees Feel Will be Very Important to the Future of Work (Future of Skills 2019, LinkedIn)

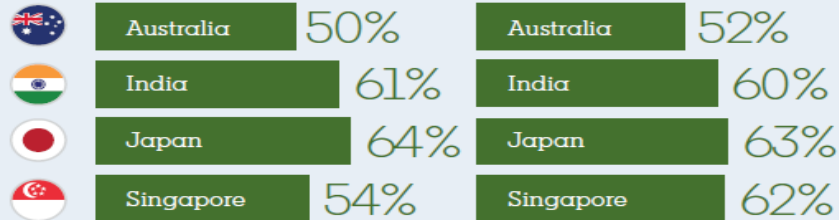
Soft skills are more important for career progression

L&D view

57%
average

Employee view

59%
average



Why soft skills?

47%

think they will be unique 'human' talents in the face of automation

44%

think higher level thinking will remain vital in a tech dominated world

43%

think they will help you adjust and retrain so you can keep doing your job



Singapore

Critical thinking, problem solving 57%

Adaptability & flexibility 53%

Communication 53%

Leadership & people management 50%

Innovation & creativity 50%

“The one thing that is going to be difficult to replace with technology is the human touch – empathy, creativity and innovation can’t be replaced by automation.”



Regan Taikitsadaporn
Chief Human Resources Officer,
Marriott International

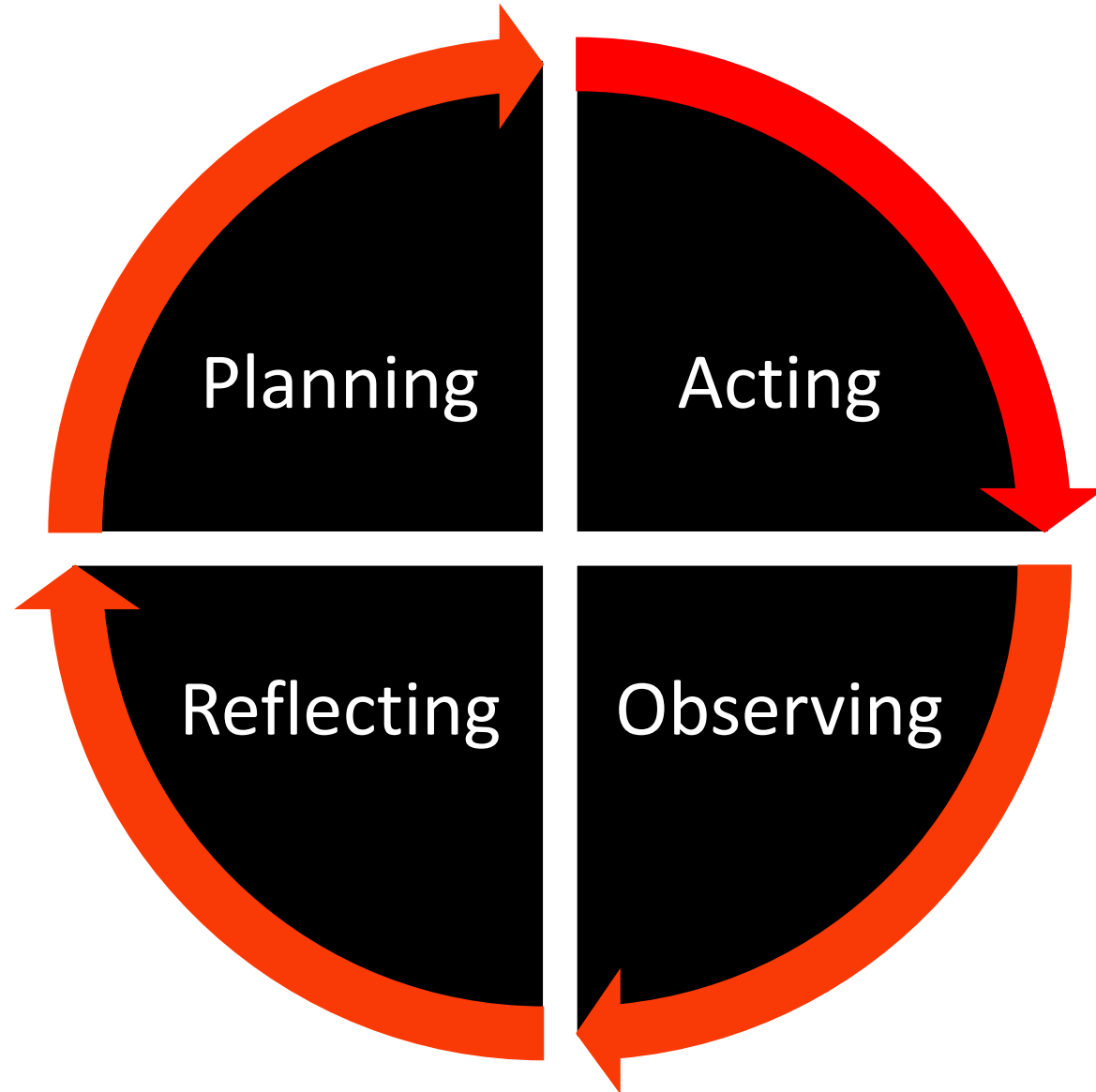
The Objective

The purpose of this exploratory study is to identify gaps between employers' expectations regarding undergraduates or new hires' communication skills and curriculum design, and to revise the curriculum having the intention to track impact at levels 1 (reaction), 2 (learning), 3 (behaviour) and 4 (results). A sample of how curriculum could be re-designed with these 4 levels of evaluation will be presented.

Pilot Study – Case Interviews with Industry

- 11 face-to-face interviews were recently conducted with industry managers and directors in engineering fields to find out critical communication skill gaps in SIT student interns and fresh graduates
- Preliminary findings showed that the gaps were mainly in:
 - Email writing
 - Presentation skills
 - Problem-solving skills
- Although these skills are addressed in current communication skills modules, there is a lack of real-life cases that present complex and confounding problems requiring nuanced approaches to resolve them.

ACTION RESEARCH
Collaborative Consultation
+ Cyclical Reflection



The Kirkpatrick model

Source:
<https://www.kirkpatrickpartners.com/Our-Philosophy/The-Kirkpatrick-Model>

Level 1: Reaction

Degree to which participants find the training favourable, engaging and relevant

Level 2: Learning

Degree to which participants acquire the intended knowledge, skills, attitude, confidence and commitment based on their participation in the training

Level 3: Behaviour

The degree to which participants apply what they learned during training when they are back on the job

Level 4: Results

The degree to which targeted outcomes occur as a result of the training and the support and accountability package

Kirkpatrick applied in a curriculum review

Focus in Tri 3 AY2016	Focus in Tri 2 AY2017 onwards
Audience profile, purpose, context	Reader-centred – audience (upward, downward, horizontal communication), purpose, context
Content and Organization (positive, neutral and negative messages)	Content and Organization (useful, persuasive, sufficient, useful, reliable, relevant) Language and tone (professional, formal, clear and concise)
Email as a channel to convey content	Email as a channel to convey content in a professional, useful and persuasive manner

Tri 3 AY2016: ACC2903 Writing in the Workplace

6 weeks x 3 hours

Assessment Task	Weighting	Tentative week/due date
<u>Assignment 1:</u> Students are required to take a quiz individually, on the APA citation style.	5%	Week 3
<u>Assignment 2:</u> Students are required to write individually, a summary of about 500 words on a company's business to the internal audit team, using a memo format. This memo is sent via email.	35%	Week 5
<u>Assignment 3:</u> Students are required to write in pairs, a recommendation report of 1000 words to the management of the client company.	50%	Week 6
Class participation	10%	Weeks 1-6

Tri 3 AY2016: In class writing activity

Revise the memo below for content, organization and language.

Hey,

We should really get going on this project as soon as possible. Anna told us in that meeting last week that the new CRM would reduce our sales cycle, which would be great. She also said the sales team would have an easier time tracking leads because it live updates mobile devices. When they are on the road they'll be able to get new and relevant information—I can think of a couple times when that would have been very helpful recently! Marketing would also like to be able to personalize our e-marketing efforts more because the current e-blasts are boring. The new CRM would let us do that, too.

I know sales and marketing can't get final approval until August 1, but I want everyone to know the game plan and agree to it ahead of time so we can hit the ground running. Let's say July 29th at the latest? We need the contract all set by the fifteenth of August to lock in the low annual subscription fee for the next two years (it's going to increase in six months). Accounting needs to look over that. We should plant to install in September at the end of the week (Friday) to avoid disrupting the whole workweek. IT can you pick a date and coordinate with the installation crew?

Sound good? Let me know if you guys have any questions. Tx.

Kate

Tri 3 AY2016: Business email assignment

Objectives:

- To write a summary to highlight important information about a company for an audit engagement
- To write an email and memo in the appropriate style and tone for business writing
- To revise the email and memo for clarity, conciseness, coherence and courtesy

Tri 3 AY2016: Business email assignment

- You are an audit intern at CPA Accounting. Your company has a new client, City Development Ltd, a Singapore-listed real estate operating company with a global presence. It has engaged your company, CPA Accounting, as its auditor.
- Your supervisor, Mr. Sun, feels that it is very important to understand a client's business before CPA Accounting audits any company. Therefore, he would like you to write a summary **for him (Mr Sun)** on City Development Ltd., detailing the following considerations:
 - Nature of the client's operations
 - Sector in which the client operates
 - Regulatory environment in which the client operates
 - Other external factors currently affecting the client's business.
- You have to write the summary in not more than 500 words, based on the company's Annual Report for 2016.

Tri 2 AY2019: ACC2905 Writing in the Workplace

6 weeks x 3 hours

Assessment Task	Weighting	Tentative week/due date
<u>Assignment 1:</u> Students are required to write individually, a business email of about 250-300 words based on a given scenario.	20%	Week 4
<u>Assignment 2:</u> Students are required to write individually, a summary of about 500 words on a company's business to the internal audit team.	30%	Week 6
<u>Assignment 3:</u> Students are required to write in pairs, a recommendation report of 1000 words to the management of the client company.	35%	Week 8
<u>Assignment 4:</u> Students are required to write individually, a reflection of about 200-250 words on what they have learnt, unlearnt and relearnt about workplace writing.	5%	Week 8
Class participation (individual)	10%	Weeks 1-8

Tri 2 AY2019: In class writing activity (Week 1 Task 7)

Revise the memo below for usefulness and persuasiveness.

Hey,

We should really get going on this project as soon as possible. Anna told us in that meeting last week that the new CRM would reduce our sales cycle, which would be great. She also said the sales team would have an easier time tracking leads because it live updates mobile devices. When they are on the road they'll be able to get new and relevant information—I can think of a couple times when that would have been very helpful recently! Marketing would also like to be able to personalize our e-marketing efforts more because the current e-blasts are boring. The new CRM would let us do that, too.

I know sales and marketing can't get final approval until August 1, but I want everyone to know the game plan and agree to it ahead of time so we can hit the ground running. Let's say July 29th at the latest? We need the contract all set by the fifteenth of August to lock in the low annual subscription fee for the next two years (it's going to increase in six months). Accounting needs to look over that. We should plant to install in September at the end of the week (Friday) to avoid disrupting the whole workweek. IT can you pick a date and coordinate with the installation crew?

Sound good? Let me know if you guys have any questions. Tx.

Kate

Tri 2 AY2019: In class writing activity (Week 2 Task 6)

- In the process of completing a tax return, your client, Sam Rhodes, refused to provide evidence to support some rather large deductions for business travel, saying, “Oh, I don’t know about receipts. Just put it down and if and when the IRAS questions me, I’ll worry about receipts then.”
- Write an email **of about 250-300 words** to Mr Rhodes explaining why you cannot prepare a tax return showing these deductions unless he can provide the receipts. Remember the importance of tact and diplomacy in an awkward situation such as this. Use the proper format, effective organization, and appropriate style. You can include your own details in your email so long as they are consistent with the general storyline above.

Tri 2 AY2019: Business email assignment

Objectives:

- To write a reader-centered business email
- To revise the email for clarity and conciseness

Tri 2 AY2019: Business email assignment

- You are working as an audit associate in a small accounting firm. Recently, you have been tasked to liaise with Mr Andre, an audit senior in a client company, on documents required for an upcoming audit. However, this has not been an easy task. Mr Andre's replies to your email requests have been terse, cold and delayed. This led you to send numerous gentle reminders to Mr Andre on the documents required, which he seems to have ignored. In his replies, Mr Andre tends to respond to other issues from previous queries in the same email, leading you to be confused as to which query has been responded to adequately and which has not. When you seek clarification from Mr Andre on certain points raised in the emails, he says that you are incompetent.
- Write an email **of about 250-300 words** to your audit manager, to explain the situation and seek his/her advice. Be objective and adopt a professional tone in your email. You would like to set the record straight but still maintain a professional relationship with Mr Andre. Invent any information you feel is necessary to make your email complete.

Tri 2 AY2019: Reflection assignment

- **In about 200-250 words**, share with your tutor
- What have you learned, unlearned and relearned regarding workplace writing, based on what we have covered in this module
- What has been the most challenging thing for you to do in this module? How did you overcome it?

Method: Action Research

Participants

- One class of ACC2905 in Tri 2 AY2017 vs one class in Tri 2 AY2019

Data collection

- Observations of students' reactions and performance in doing the “consolidation” business email tasks in weeks 1 and 2.
- Students' reflections on writing business emails in their reflection assignment

Results	Tri 3 AY2016	Tri 2 AY2019
Level 1: Reaction	Focused on organizing the email for positive, neutral or negative message	Focused on analysing type of communication, organization, usefulness and persuasiveness
Level 2: Learning	Focused on getting the message across	Focused on the implications on how and what they write to the reader in relation to how the reader will use the information
Level 3: Behaviour	Content was organized mainly based on audience profile and purpose as mentioned in the assignment, tone was inappropriate for upward communication	More awareness of the importance of tone in upward communication, usefulness and persuasiveness of the email.
Level 4: Results	Emails are just a channel to convey content	Writing good/poor emails have an impact on their work

Level 4: Results via Reflection assignment

In about 200-250 words, share with your tutor

- What have you learned, unlearned and relearned regarding workplace writing, based on what we have covered in this module
- What has been the most challenging thing for you to do in this module? How did you overcome it?

Level 4 (Results)

- S1: I have unlearned and relearned on writing a proper email. To write a proper email, there are several elements we need to identify. For instance, identifying the audiences before drafting an email **so that the content is written such that it is easy for the audience to understand.** It is also important to identify **what tones and words are suitable in different circumstances.**
- S2: One of my key takeaways from this module is learning the appropriate method to write business/formal emails. **I realized that the challenging aspect of email writing is to not only deliver the message across, but it also must be reader friendly while using the appropriate tone.** By doing so, this would allow our readers to effectively comprehend the message and reply accordingly.
- S14: During the first lesson, I have learnt that the **tone and language used in an email can create a huge impact on first impressions.**

Level 4 (Results)

- S3: I think that the most challenging part of the module for me was to write business emails as I have only written emails to just my professors or tutors in the past. I never knew that writing business emails could go wrong in so many ways, and it requires a lot of effort to ensure that the correct message sent to my desired audience. For example, if I am writing to my supervisor, I have to write in a formal tone and the tone used should be for upward communication. Depending on the content of my email, I need to use the appropriate organization as well. To overcome this, I revised the learning materials and tried to read up more about writing emails in the workplace. Additionally, feedback from my tutor has helped me to understand how I can improve and write better emails in the future.

Level 4 (Results)

- S20: Email writing is still not easy. I have struggled with email writing for as long as I can remember. I remember spending the entire morning before lunch at my various office jobs just struggling to construct appropriate emails. There are two main takeaways with regards to email writing. Firstly, **the subject line is great way to bring your main message across**. So much relevant information can be packed into that one header alone without it being lengthy. Secondly, writing emails reader-centered is key. **I always thought that just being clear and concise was enough and struggled with shortening my sentences. But when you start to think about what your reader actually wants to know, that just makes filtering out information so much easier.**

Conclusion

In this time of economic disruption, we need to

- bring the workplace into the classroom earlier (course content, activities and assignments)
- focus on transferable skills with more importance placed on the behaviour and results levels of Kirkpatrick's model.