Positive Business Communications
BCOM 430/530
Fall 2017

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COURSE DESCRIPTION:

The goal of this course is to improve your effectiveness as a leader, manager, and team member by introducing you to frameworks for understanding how communication affects individual and group performance. We focus specifically on positive communicative behaviors that can be used to not only foster exceptional performance but to also address some of the most common interpersonal workplace challenges. Positive communicative behaviors fit within the larger scope of positive organizational practices as they serve as strategies for building high quality connections, sparking positive emotions and energy, expanding possible business solutions and fostering individual and group performance.

The course begins with an overview of the defining features of positive communicative behaviors and the role they play within positive organizational practices. We quickly examine positive organizational scholarship with particular attention to subject areas most closely affected by communication. This overview addresses the question as to *why* effective communicative skills are so important for leaders and managers and the value that can be gained by becoming an exceptional communicator. It sets the stage for the remainder of the semester in which we examine specific positive communicative behaviors and their application to interpersonal challenges managers and leaders commonly face.

The second part of the course focuses on the specific communicative behaviors that foster individual and group thriving in the workplace, i.e., the "positive communication toolkit." We examine the theoretical frameworks that serve as the underpinnings behind these communication practices and explain how these communicative behaviors facilitates individual, team, or organizational thriving. We also explore the practical side

by considering our previous experiences with these behaviors and practicing how to effectively enact the behaviors within the workplace setting.

With our toolkit in hand, we turn our attention to the social and emotional intelligences needed to successful apply these communication behaviors within our everyday work lives. We explore the "deeper conversations" that occur in the workplace that go beyond the simple exchange of information. As people's roles, identities, and relationships are constructed in the course of human interaction, workplace communication serves as a means of understanding who we are and our place within a larger social group. This section of the course reviews the science of nonverbal behaviors and micro-expressions to enable students to enhance their ability to understand this deeper conversation. We also examine how our own internal processes during social interactions can create misperceptions and/or mental distractions that impede our ability to effectively communicate. We explore the growing science on the use of mindfulness techniques to increase our awareness of these misperceptions and distractions and how to redirect our attention back to salient interpersonal cues.

Finally, in the last section of the course, we apply these learnings to address interpersonal challenges that leaders and managers commonly face, such as providing difficult feedback, addressing group discord, or leading during organizational change or conflict. We examine how the positive lens provides an alternative framework to understanding the drivers of and solutions to these challenges. By this point in the semester, students have been exposed to a variety of positive communicative behaviors and have developed a more nuanced understanding of the meanings behind workplace communication. Working through each of these common challenges, we consider the deeper conversations that each of these challenges present and explore how to apply tools from our positive communication toolkit to bring about workable solutions.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:
- Gain exposure to the theoretical frameworks of communication and understand the role communication plays above and beyond the exchange of information
- Understand how communication in the workplace impacts workplace relationships, energy levels and performance at both the group & individual level
- Begin to build a repertoire of communicative skills (i.e., positive communication toolkit) and how they impact others within the workplace
- Develop an understanding of the cognitive, emotional, and motivational factors that can interfere with effectively applying positive communicative behaviors

- Develop an ability to recognize the nonverbal behaviors and micro-expressions of others as a means of recognizing when to apply different communicative behaviors
- Deepen self-knowledge by learning how others perceive your communicative behaviors using 360 assessments; explore how to build upon your communicative strengths and develop areas of weakness
- Learn how to apply your understanding of positive communicative behaviors to address common interpersonal challenges within the workplace

REQUIRED TEXTS:
Books

- Mirivel, J. (2014). *The Art of Positive Communication: Theory and Practice.* New York: Peter Lang.

Coursepack

All students are required to buy a coursepack with additional reading material for the course. The articles and books below are examples of the material that will be included in the coursepack. A chapter or chapters will be selected from the books listed below.

- Cameron, K. (2012). "Positive Communications." In *Positive Leadership: Strategies for Extraordinary Performance.* Oakland, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc., pp.65-84.

- Cooperrider, D.L, & Whitney, D. (2005). *Appreciative Inquiry: A Positive Revolution in Change.* Oakland, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.

- Ekman, P. (2004). *Unmasking the Face: A Guide to Recognizing Facial Expressions.*

- Huston, D. (2015). *Communicating Mindfully: Mindfulness-Based Communication and Emotional Intelligence.* Cleveland, OH: August Learning Solutions.

- Kopelman, S. (2014). Making Your Emotions Work for You in Negotiations. *Harvard Business Review.* https://hbr.org/2014/05/make-your-emotions-work-for-you-in-negotiations

- Nhat Hanh, Thich. (1987). *The Miracle of Mindfulness: An Introduction to the Practice of Meditation.* Beacon Press; Boston, MA.

- Nhat Hanh, Thich. (1987). *The Art of Communicating,* NYC, NY: HarperCollins.

- Quinn, R. (1996). *Deep Change: Discovering the Leader Within.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

GRADING:

Final grades are determined by applying the Ross grading policy to class point totals. Individual assignments are scored using the evaluation criteria (noted on assignment descriptions) in a distribution that reflects school grading guidelines. A *zero* will be received for all work *not completed as scheduled*, unless special circumstances apply*.* In-class exercises generally cannot be made up.

Grade Breakdown

Undergraduate & Graduate:
- 3 Analysis Papers (10 points each)   30 points
- Journal Entries (1 point/entry)   20 points
- Group Communication Challenge - report   15 points
- Group Communication Challenge - playbook   10 points
- Group Communication Challenge – presentation   5 points
- Class Participation   20 points

MBA Students Only:
- Negative Feedback Practice & Paper   15 points
  (Plan-5 points, Paper-10 points)

Analysis Papers

Three analysis papers will be assigned over the course of the semester. These are individual assignments of 2-3 pages each.

Analysis of Exemplar: For this assignment, students need to identify an individual in the workplace/academic setting who has exemplary communication skills. Students are to interview this individual to determine whether they use the communicative practices covered in class, and if so, how the practices contribute to the overall effectiveness of the communicator.

Analysis of an Interaction: Students will be presented with a video clip or written text of a complex interpersonal exchange (i.e., multiple levels/meanings to the conversation). Student will need to analyze conversation to identify the deeper conversation levels that go beyond the sharing of information. Moreover, students will be instructed to apply a positive communication framework and tools to reconstruct the conversation and subsequent outcome. Students will be required to draw upon the course material to support their argument & reconstruction.

Analysis of a Situation: For this assignment, students will select a challenging academic/workplace situation that they are currently facing or recently faced (e.g., team conflict) and discuss how they could apply the concepts covered in class to form a strategic approach to addressing the challenge.

Giving Negative Feedback Positively – Recording & Reflection Paper (MBA Students Only): Students are to identify an upcoming situation where they need to give negative feedback to someone in the school/workplace setting. There are three parts to this assignment. First, students are to write and submit (prior to the next step) a strategic plan for the conversation using guidelines identified by Kim Cameron[1]. Second, with a partner from the class, students are to execute their plan and record the conversation. Third, after reviewing the recording, students will write a 2-3 page "post-op" reflection essay reviewing the text for the application and outcome of strategies identified by Cameron.

Journal Entries
To help students keep on track with the readings, they will be required to keep a journal in which they reflect on the course concepts and (if relevant) their application to their own lives. Entries will be due on the day the material is covered in class. Students will be required to submit 20 entries and will receive a point for each.

Group Communication Challenge
Students will work in teams of four to examine a workplace communication challenge. They will need to research current perspectives and frameworks used to understand the challenge, and apply what they have learned in class to consider alternative strategies from a positive communications perspective. Moreover, students will be required to produce a "playbook" that can be used as a practical guide within the workplace. For example, a team might research current practices for addressing diversity and inclusion in the workplace and explore how a positive communication approach could be used to reframe the issue and potential strategies and tactical solutions.   There are three

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[1] Cameron, K. (2013). "How to Deliver Negative Feedback Positively" *In Practicing Positive Leadership: Tools and Techniques that Create Extraordinary Results*. (pp. 79-98). San Francisco, CA. Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.

deliverables associated with this assignment: a research report (5-6 pages), a playbook, and a presentation to the class.

Class Participation
To receive full benefit from the class, students must be actively engaged during each class. Class discussions provide the opportunity to practice speaking and persuasive skills, as well as the ability to listen. Effective class comments may address questions raised by others, integrate material from this and other courses, draw on real-world experiences and observations, or pose new questions to the class. High-quality participation involves knowing when to speak and when to listen or allow others to speak.

ELECTRONICS IN CLASS

All forms of electronics should be turned off during the class period, unless specified otherwise by the instructor. Using electronics during class is disrespectful to the person speaking and is often obvious to everyone around the offender including instructors and guest speakers. Having even a few students on electronics during a class or speaker engagement reflects poorly on all students and the school in general. If courtesy to others is not enough of a reason, it simply is unwise to use electronics during class because there is no easier way to convey to your instructor that you have chosen to disengage from the class.

DISABILITY ACCOMMODATIONS

The University of Michigan is committed to providing equal opportunity for participation in all programs, services and activities. Students wishing to receive testing accommodations must register with the UM SSD (Services for Students with Disabilities) as soon as possible. Students must then submit their Verified Individualized Services and Accommodations (VISA) form via online web form as early as possible, but no later than two weeks prior to the test or quiz for which accommodations are requested.

COMMUNITY VALUES AND ACADEMIC HONOR CODE

Cheating is a serious offense that has real negative implications to classmates. All members of the Ross community are expected to complete their own work on assignments, exams, and all other coursework, unless instructed otherwise by faculty (e.g., group assignments). Cheating is viewed as a grave lapse in personal integrity

and respect for the rights of other students. Given the BBA grading curve, cheating is comparable to stealing from a classmate. Some examples of what constitutes cheating are listed below and should be reviewed carefully. As cheating has very real consequences for others, ramifications for cheating are severe and include dismissal from the school. Additional information on cheating can be found in the Statement of Community Values, Academic Honor Code, and related resources, which can be found at the following website:

https://www2.bus.umich.edu/MyiMpact/academics/ross-community-values

USE AND SHARING OF COURSE MATERIALS

All materials generated for this course, including slides, handouts, review packets, quizzes and exams (and answers to these materials), any written review materials, group paper handouts or group papers generated for this class, or any other materials prepared by you or the professor for this course are intended for use only by current students in this class. You are not permitted to use materials related to the class that were generated by a professor in previous versions of the course, such as materials collected in unauthorized files, test banks, or online. A violation of this policy may be a violation of the Ross Community Values Code and may result in a student being referred to the Community Values Committee for disciplinary action. It is also a violation of this policy to participate in the collection, distribution, online posting, or other sharing of class materials that may result in use of those materials by people who are not currently students in the course. Finally, any electronic recording of this course, including images, is prohibited except with the prior written permission of the instructor.

Dates & Class Topics

Course Arc	Date	Class	Topic
Introduction		1	Introduction to course & positive communicative behavior
		2	Communication & positive organizational practices
The Toolkit: Positive Communicative Behaviors		3	Greeting to create contact
		4	Asking to discover
		5	Compliment to develop the self
		6	Disclose to deepen relationships
		7	Encourage to support
		8	Listen to transcend separateness
		9	Inspire to influence others
Social & Emotional Intelligences Needed for Successful Communication		10	Conversational Levels – What are we really talking about?
		11	Identities & roles within the workplace context
		12	Mindfulness, awareness & attention
		13	Emotions & amygdala hijack
		14	Misperceptions, beliefs
		15	Reading nonverbal behaviors & micro-expressions
		16	Personal Communication Profiles
Putting Positive Communication to Work		17	Giving feedback constructively
		18	Building team unity
		19	Addressing group conflict
		20	Persuading with integrity
		21	Leading through change & challenges
		22	Presenting with authenticity
		23	Dealing with difficult workplace personalities
Final Deliverables & Course Wrap-up		24	Project Presentations
		25	Project Presentations
		26	Course Wrap up & Plans for Continual Development