# Does Relational Communication Training Improve Student Satisfaction with Web-assisted Courses?

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## Abstract

The purpose of this study is to explore factors affecting differences in student satisfaction between a traditional classroom environment and a Web-assisted (online) course environment. Specifically, the objective of this study is to determine whether relational communication training can positively influence student satisfaction. This research utilized survey data collected from undergraduate students enrolled in an introductory Management Information Systems (MIS) course. Although it was hypothesized that students in the traditional learning environment would report a higher level of satisfaction with the course than students in the online learning environment, this hypothesis was not supported. Instead, the significant main effect for learning environment and satisfaction with the course was in the opposite direction: Students in the Web-assisted group reported a higher level of satisfaction with the course. Other comparisons showed that students in the Web-assisted group who received communication training reported greater satisfaction with the course and greater satisfaction with the group process/project than students who did not receive training, although the difference between satisfaction with the course scores was not statistically significant. Findings will help guide the development of course management practices for Web-assisted (online) courses.

**Keywords:** Online learning, e-learning, learner satisfaction, distance education, relational communication training

## Introduction

The extent of college-level distance education offered by US public degree-granting postsecondary institutions is significant. In the 2006-2007 academic year, 88 percent of 4-year institutions and 97 percent of 2-year institutions offered for-credit distance education courses (IES n.d.).  Additionally, the Sloan Consortium reports the growth rate for online education exceeds overall student population growth, citing a 12 percent increase in online students in 2007 that reflects over 3.9 million students enrolled in at least one online course (Allen & Seaman, 2008). While the dominant learning environment continues to be the classroom, the statistics cited here are evidence of increased efforts to provide online courses and programs at colleges and universities to meet student needs for flexible access.

Despite its focus on earlier technology, notable research on distance education (Russell, 2001) indicates that learning outcomes are the same regardless of delivery mechanism (i.e., distance versus face-to-face). However, research results have varied regarding student satisfaction with distance education. Karatas and Simsek (2009) report finding no significant relationship between type of learning system (online or face-to-face) and student satisfaction, consistent with research by Casey (2004), Misanchuk (2003), and Stein and Wanstreet (2003) (as reported in Karatas and Simsek, 2009). At the same time, other research claims that online students are less satisfied than traditional students (McFarland & Hamilton, 2006; Priluck, 2004). According to the Sloan Consortium's Five Pillars of Quality Online Education (Sloan, n.d.), "student satisfaction is the most important key to continuing learning." This edict

is supported by research by Booker and Rebmon (2005) who found student satisfaction to be positively related to retention and a decision to take one or more additional online courses. Given the role that student satisfaction plays in continuing learning, the inclusion of relational training to improve communication and satisfaction in virtual organizations (Beranek & Martz, 2005) may prove useful in improving student satisfaction with online courses.

Studies in this area have identified a number of factors affecting student satisfaction with online learning including media richness, communication interaction, and technology factors (Shepherd & Martz, 2006), student perceptions of learning and technological skill development (Priluck, 2004), and group cohesiveness and satisfaction with outcomes (Chidabaram, 1996). Student satisfaction with online courses is relevant due to increased efforts to provide distance education and the proliferation of online courses and programs at colleges and universities.

## Background

Russell (2001) collected research studies addressing learning outcomes across distance delivery modes (i.e., correspondence, radio, television, video, and online) to discover an overwhelming number of studies showed that when course materials and teaching methodology were held constant, there were no significant differences between outcomes (i.e., student achievement) in a distance delivery course as compared to a face-to-face course. Using both objective and subjective measures, Hiltz and Turoff (2002) report that university-level online education (using computer mediated communication) is as effective or more effective than the traditional modes of course instruction. However, McFarland and Hamilton (2006) report that many studies that investigate online versus traditional course delivery find "online students to be generally less satisfied than their traditional (i.e., face-to-face) counterparts" (p. 25). For example, Piccoli, Ahmad and Ives (2001) report that students in a distance education course may be more likely to "perceive that the professor is not fulfilling his or her responsibility" (i.e., students reported they felt a shift of responsibility from the instructor to themselves). In a study comparing face-to-face instruction with synchronous and asynchronous Web-based instruction, Sweeney and Ingram (2001) report a significant difference in satisfaction, with face-to-face students reporting greater satisfaction. In research using Web-assisted sections of introductory marketing courses, Priluck (2004) reports that students were more satisfied with a traditional course format and felt that format to be more effective in developing skills and course knowledge.

McFarland and Hamilton (2006) discuss two issues relating to satisfaction with online instruction: the reading requirements for online courses, and problems with collaborative learning and other forms of teamwork. While online courses require students to be proficient readers, McFarland and Hamilton (2006) point out that students appear to avoid reading as much as possible; they further suggest that requiring group projects from distance students who may not have an established cohort of friends in the class may affect overall student satisfaction in the online learning environment. Therefore, these authors suggest that "requiring or rewarding collaborative learning or other forms of teamwork might increase the effectiveness of other students on learning, which could in turn affect overall student satisfaction in the online learning environment" (McFarland & Hamilton, 2006, p. 30).

While there is evidence that virtual teams yield lower performance and lower process and outcome satisfaction for projects of short duration (de Pillis & Furumo 2007), other research on virtual teams (Beranek & Martz, 2005) offers evidence that training to improve virtual team communications results in more team cohesiveness and improved satisfaction with outcomes. In early research on communication and "swift" trust in virtual teams, Jarvenpaa and Leidner (1999) describe how the exchange of social messages early in team formation seems to facilitate trust between virtual members. There is a noted lack of research in distance education that considers relational communication training to affect student outcomes.

## Research Model and Hypothesis

The purpose of this study is to investigate the impact of learning environment and relational communication training on student satisfaction. The exploratory research model that serves as the foundation for this study is presented in Figure 1.

### Learning Environment

The US Department of Education defines distance education as a formal education process in which the student and instructor are not in the same place (IES, n.d.). Distance education is both synchronous and asynchronous; it may involve communication using audio, video or computer technology, or it may rely on written correspondence. The Sloan Consortium defines a traditional course as one using no online

technology; a web-facilitated course as one in which web-based technology is used to facilitate a face-to-face course; a blended/hybrid course as one in which a substantial portion of content is delivered online; and an online course as one in which most or all of the content is delivered online (Allen & Seaman 2008).
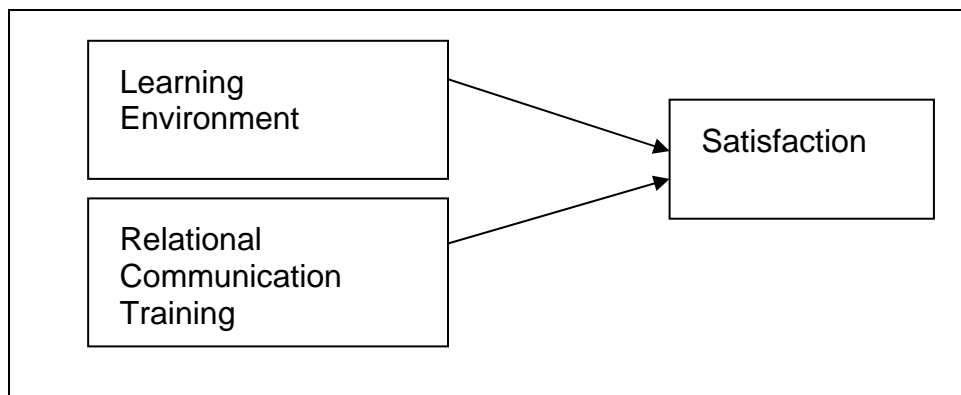


*Figure 1. The Research Model*

In this study, students self-selected into either an on-campus or a Web-assisted section of the course. According to the Sloan Consortium definitions, the on-campus (face-to-face) sections used in this study were "Web-facilitated" (i.e., a course management system was used to post the syllabus and present online quizzes) and the Web-assisted sections were "online" (i.e., all of the content was delivered online, exams were proctored, communication was asynchronous) (Allen & Seaman 2008).

*Student Satisfaction*

McFarland and Hamilton (2006) note that student satisfaction derives from multiple sources including the course material, class components, the instructor, and the course management system, in addition to personal factors such as number of courses taken and number of hours worked.

In research on student perceptions of face-to-face versus Web-based tutorials, Sweeney and Ingram (2001) report greater student satisfaction in the face-to-face environment. In this study, satisfaction is described as the "perception of enjoyment and accomplishment in the learning environment" (p. 57). Maki, Maki, Patterson and Whittaker (2000) describe student satisfaction in terms of how interesting the course is, how likely the student is to take more courses in the discipline (psychology), how likely students are to recommend the course, and the likelihood that the student would take the course again in the given format (face-to-face lecture or online). In that study, students in the lecture sections reported higher satisfaction with the course than students in the online sections. Piccoli et al. (2001) found a significant difference in satisfaction such that students in a traditional learning environment reported higher satisfaction with the learning process (in terms of course coordination and understandability) than did students in a virtual learning environment. Contradictory findings are reported by Priluck (2004) who reports no significant difference in student satisfaction between students in a traditional or a Web class.

The following hypothesis is based on research by Maki et al. (2000), Piccoli et al. (2001), and Sweeney and Ingram (2001):

> **H1:** Students in the traditional learning environment will report higher levels of satisfaction with the course than students in the online learning environment.

*Relational Communication Training*
In the context of virtual teams, Schultz (2004) describes relationship-enhancement communication training as instruction on how to express affective, interactive, and cohesive communication (i.e., social presence behaviors) in an online environment. Social presence behaviors are used to express feelings and emotions and help create an atmosphere of sharing and mutual understanding. In that study, relationship-enhancement training did not lead to higher levels of relationship development; however, those participants who received the training were significantly more communicative than those who did not receive training (Schultz 2004).

Also in the context of virtual teams, Beranek and Martz (2005) describe relational link training as a combination of teamwork training, instruction on the disadvantages of electronic communication, and guidance on the rules of electronic communication (i.e., netiquette). Teamwork training includes making introductions and spending time getting to know members of the group.

The following hypotheses are based on research by Schultz (2004) that offers evidence that communication training results in more communicative team members, and research by Beranek and Martz (2005) that found training to improve virtual team communications results in more team cohesiveness and improved satisfaction with outcomes.

> **H2:** Relational communication training is positively related to student satisfaction with the course.

> **H3:** Relational communication training is positively related to student satisfaction with the group process/project.

### Research Method

The research design is a between-subjects experiment in which satisfaction outcomes are compared between groups of students enrolled in an undergraduate introductory information systems course; the groups included students in face-to-face and Web-assisted (online) sections, taught by the same instructor. All sections utilized a common syllabus, students used the same textbook, completed the same coursework regardless of content delivery mechanism, and took the same in-class or proctored exams. The treatment group received relational communication training early in the semester. The goal of the training is to enhance online interpersonal relationships between and among the instructor and the students.

*Relational Communication Training*

The relational communication training assignment consisted of a reading assignment, presented in the context of an online discussion that occurred between employees of an organization who were members of a search committee to hire a new President for their company. The example was provided to demonstrate how the group members used a computer-based discussion board to engage in their conversation.

Students were instructed to review the discussion to note "social presence" communication behaviors that the employees used to express feelings and emotions, and create an online environment of sharing and mutual understanding. Comments following each section of dialogue pointed out specific communication techniques that can be used to enhance online group discussions. To complete the assignment, students were required to answer three multiple choice questions that covered content presented in the sample dialogue. Because the questions were presented at the same time as the communication example, they served as reinforcement of the content rather than a manipulation check. The feedback provided for each question served as additional reinforcement of the communication training content. The relational communication training assignment is provided in Appendix A.

*Measures*

The students completed a post-course online questionnaire, a survey instrument synthesized from previous research. Students rated aspects of the course (i.e., course content, instructor, group project, course management system) on a five-point scale from (1) strongly agree to (5) strongly disagree. Measures of satisfaction were identified from a preliminary factor analysis of items selected from previously validated survey instruments. Scale items were reduced by evaluating the first factors and selecting the five highest inter-item correlations of each to create two measures that are designated "Satisfaction with the Course" and "Satisfaction with the Group." Scale reliabilities are reported in Table 1.

### Research Results

The study was conducted using 182 business students from a public university in the Mid-south region of the United States. Of the 157 students who completed the satisfaction surveys, 97 students were in the face-to-face group with 60 students in the Web-assisted (online) group.

An examination of the demographic measures shows the student subjects were similar across the treatment groups. With the exception of one group (Group 2, face-to-face with communication training), the subjects were evenly split by gender. Across all groups, the subjects were generally young

(approximately 65 percent were 18-24 years-of-age), mostly employed (approximately 60 percent), working 25 hours-per-week or more, and enrolled in at least 15 credit hours of coursework.

*Table 1. Scales Used to Measure Constructs*

| Construct | Item | Source | Reliability |
|---|---|---|---|
| Satisfaction with Course | I was satisfied with the content of this course. | McFarland and Hamilton (2006) | 0.93 |
| | Overall, I was satisfied with the course. | Priluck (2004) | |
| | The instructor was effective for helping me learn the material. | Shepherd and Martz (2006) | |
| | The course was effective for facilitating my learning. | | |
| | Overall, this course was very worthwhile. | | |
| Satisfaction with Group | Trust was exhibited with the group. | Chidabaram (1996) | 0.93 |
| | Group members recognized and respected individual differences and contributions. | | |
| | Overall, I was personally satisfied with my group. | | |
| | My group produced effective and valuable results. | | |
| | Overall, the quality of my group was high. | | |

Table 3 presents descriptive statistics about the study variables relative to the learning environment. Recall that the survey used a five-point scale from (1) strongly agree to (5) strongly disagree. Lower means indicate a more positive assessment of the item (i.e., a higher level of satisfaction). One-way analysis of variance was used to evaluate differences in satisfaction across learning environments and communication training treatment groups.

Hypothesis 1 predicted that students in the traditional learning environment would report higher levels of satisfaction with the course than students in the online learning environment. As shown in Table 3, means analysis indicated higher levels of satisfaction with the course were reported by students in the Web-assisted group; therefore, hypothesis 1 was not supported. The significant main effect for learning environment and satisfaction with the course, $F(1,155) = 9.649$, $p = .002$, was in the opposite direction from what was predicted. The difference between the face-to-face and Web-assisted groups regarding satisfaction with the group process/project was not statistically significant.

Hypothesis 2 predicted that relational communication training is positively related to student satisfaction with the course. There is support for Hypothesis 2 with a near significant main effect for communication training and satisfaction with the course, $F(1,155) = 3.344$, $p = .069$. Table 4 presents the means analysis showing that students who received communication training reported greater satisfaction with the course than students who did not receive the training. However, at this level of analysis (training versus no training), the difference between satisfaction with the group scores was not statistically significant. Recall that lower means indicate a higher level of satisfaction.

Table 5 presents group identification information, and Table 6 presents means analysis across all four groups in the study. The statistically significant differences in satisfaction with the course between Group 1 (face-to-face, no communication training) and Group 3 (Web-assisted, no communication training), $F(1,101) = 6.022$, $p = .016$; and between Group 1 and Group 4 (Web-assisted, with communication training), $F(1,97) = 6.792$, $p = .011$, shown in Table 5 reflect the main effect for learning environment and satisfaction with the course reported earlier in Table 3.

*Table 2.Study Demographics: Homogenous Groups*

|  |  | Group 1 F2F No CT N=71 | Group 2 F2F CT N=26 | Group 3 W No CT N=32 | Group 4 W CT N=28 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Age | 18-24 | 65% | 65% | 56% | 60% |
|  | 25-34 | 17% | 23% | 28% | 21% |
|  | 35 & older | 7% | 8% | 6% | 18% |

| Gender | Female | 45% | 39% | 50% | 50% |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|  | Male | 45% | 62% | 50% | 50% |

| Employment | No | 24% | 39% | 28% | 36% |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|  | Yes | 65% | 58% | 63% | 64% |

| Hrs Worked | < 25 | 17% | 23% | 12% | 28% |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|  | > 25 | 46% | 40% | 37% | 43% |

| Credit Hrs | < 15 | 27% | 31% | 28% | 36% |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|  | > 15 | 62% | 65% | 66% | 61% |

*Table 3. Means and Standard Deviations of Study Variables: Learning Environment*

| Variables | Face-to-face N=97 | Web-assisted N=60 |
|---|---|---|
| Satisfaction with Course | 2.43 (.92) | 1.97 (.83) |
| Satisfaction with Group | 1.87 (.82) | 1.82 (.72) |

Figures 2 and 3 present means analysis for all groups for satisfaction with course and satisfaction with group. Recall that lower means indicate a more positive assessment (i.e., a higher level of satisfaction).

Hypothesis 3 predicted that relational communication training is positively related to student satisfaction with the group process or group project. Hypothesis 3 was supported for students in the Web-assisted group by a significant main effect for relational communication training and satisfaction with the group, $F(1,58) = 4.680$, $p = .035$. Web-assisted students who received communication training reported greater satisfaction with the group than did Web-assisted students who did not receive training.

**Discussion and Summary**

Research presented in this paper examines the relatively unexplored area of student satisfaction with online learning. The purpose of this study is to investigate the impact of learning environment and relational communication training on student satisfaction. Hypothesis 1 predicted that students in the traditional learning environment would report a higher level of satisfaction with the course than students in the online learning environment; however, this hypothesis was not supported. Instead, the significant main effect for learning environment and satisfaction with the course was in the opposite direction:

Students in the Web-assisted group reported a higher level of satisfaction with the course. Because this result differs from that of previous research (Maki et al., 2000; Piccoli et al., 2001; Priluck, 2004; Sweeney & Ingram, 2001), further research could explore the differences and similarities in these studies.

*Table 4. Means and Standard Deviations of Study Variables: Communication Training*

| Variables | No N=103 | Yes N=54 |
|---|---|---|
| Satisfaction with Course | 2.35 (1.02) | 2.07 (.60) |
| Satisfaction with Group | 1.87 (.80) | 1.82 (.76) |

*Table 5. Group Identification*

| Communication Training | Learning Environment | |
|---|---|---|
| | Face-to-face | Web-assisted |
| No | Group 1 | Group 3 |
| Yes | Group 2 | Group 4 |

*Table 6. Means and Standard Deviations of Study Variables*

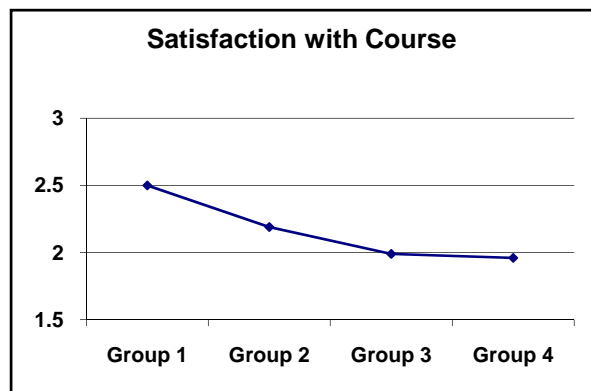| Variables | Group 1 N=71 | Group 2 N=26 | Group 3 N=32 | Group 4 N=28 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Satisfaction with Course | 2.51 (1.03) | 2.19 (.43) | 1.99 (.94) | 1.96 (.71) |
| Satisfaction with Group | 1.80 (.77) | 2.05 (.94) | 2.01 (.85) | 1.61 (.47) |



*Figure 2. Mean scores for satisfaction with course Lower value = greater satisfaction*
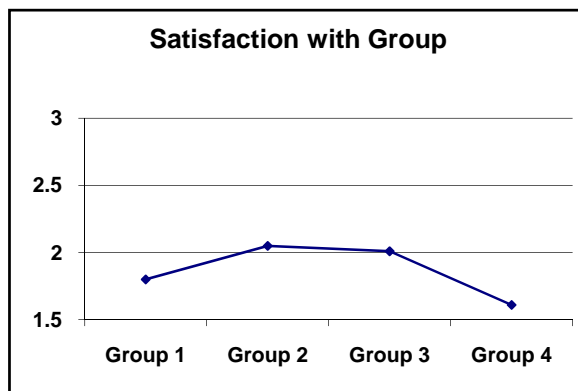
*Figure 3. Mean scores for satisfaction with group Lower value = greater satisfaction*

Hypothesis 2 predicted that relational communication training is positively related to student satisfaction with the course. Given the importance of student satisfaction to continuing learning, the near significant main effect for communication training and satisfaction with the course suggests that future research in

this area is warranted. Hypothesis 3 predicted that relational communication training is positively related to student satisfaction with the group process/project. The support for this hypothesis for students in the Web-assisted group suggests that future research could explore the relationship between satisfaction with the group process and satisfaction with the course. Additionally, more extensive follow-up studies of satisfaction levels are proposed to confirm these findings.

While the dominant learning environment continues to be the classroom, statistics reported by the Sloan Consortium show increased efforts to provide online courses and programs at colleges and universities to meet student needs for flexible access (Allen & Seaman, 2008). Eighty eight percent of 4-year institutions and 97 percent of 2-year institutions offered for-credit distance education courses in the 2006-2007 academic year (IES, n.d.); the growth rate for online education exceeds overall student population growth (Allen & Seaman, 2008).

While there is extensive research on the effectiveness of online education, there is much less research on satisfaction with online education. The Sloan Consortium's Five Pillars of Quality Online Education (Sloan, n.d.) identifies student satisfaction as the most important key to continuing learning. Research in this area is critical given the positive relationship between student satisfaction and retention and a decision to take a second or more online courses (Booker & Rebmon, 2005).

*Limitations*

This exploratory study has several limitations. One limitation is that it used only business undergraduate students enrolled in one course at one university campus. Expanding this study to multiple courses in academic disciplines and at additional universities would provide richer data.  Another limitation is that the treatment studied involved only a relational communication training assignment.  Other activities might also be effective in improving satisfaction levels and could be explored in future research.  Also untested at this point is the level or quantity of such training that is needed in order to have an effect on satisfaction, which could also be explored further.

*Implications for Future Research*

Further research is being conducted to explore the relationship between relational communication training and student satisfaction with Web-assisted courses.  In a follow-up study to the research reported here, relational communication skills are being reinforced in three ways: (1) Students are provided feedback (on a weekly basis) on their use of relational communication techniques in student-led discussion forums. (2) Communication techniques are addressed explicitly in the discussion forum rubric that requires students to "add meaningful content to group discussion board using communication techniques that enhance online discussion."    (3) The relational communication training exercise is provided as a course document for ongoing referral. For example, a student who does not use relational communication techniques in a weekly discussion forum earns a lower participation grade and receives feedback guiding him/her to review the rubric and the communication training exercise for more information on communication techniques that enhance online discussion.

Because the results reported here are based on a mostly homogenous traditional undergraduate student population, future research is planned to consider how demographic and cultural factors may influence the relationship between communication training and student satisfaction with Web-assisted courses. Specifically, comparative studies across different disciplines, majors, and student levels are planned. Future studies will also solicit student comments about satisfaction with the course and group work based on the relational communications training they receive.

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## APPENDIX A

**Relational Communication Training**

- The following is the transcript of a discussion that occurred between employees of an organization who were members of a search committee to hire a new President for their company. This example is provided to demonstrate how the group members used a computer-based discussion board to engage in their conversation.
- Please review the following discussion to note "social presence" communication behaviors that these employees use to express feelings and emotions, and create an online environment of sharing and mutual understanding.
- Also note the brief explanation that follows each section of dialogue. These comments point out specific communication techniques that we can use to enhance our online group discussions.
- Please review this discussion carefully before you complete the "Communication Training

Questions" at the end of this page.

**Louis**    "Hello everyone, I'm Louis and I am a Division Sales and Marketing Manager. I like to run and ride my bike, and this year I ran in my first half-marathon."

**Anne**    "Hello, All! I'm Anne and I'm a Financial Manager at the main office in Little Rock. I need to buy a new car and I'm looking at the Hundai Genesis because it just won the Car of the Year award."

**Will**    "Hi, Guys! This is Will. I'm a Division IT Manager and I maintain all of our email accounts. I'm pulling for Pittsburgh to win the Super Bowl this year."

**Carol**    "Hello to the group! This is Carol and I work in Manufacturing and Production. My money's on Arizona to win the Super Bowl, and I can't wait to see Bruce Springsteen at halftime! :) "

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**Notice how each person shares something personal as they introduce themselves. They are using "ice breakers" to build rapport and create an environment of sociability and open discussion.**

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**Anne**    "Let's talk about our candidates and their qualifications. I like candidate A because she has the most experience in financial planning. According to her resume, she was VP of Finance at Cisco Systems for the past four years, and before that she was Division Finance Manager at a software company for five years."

**Louis**    "Anne, it seems that you think the new President should be a "finance" person, while I think the new President should be a "sales" person. Why do you think experience in corporate finance is more important for this job than sales and marketing experience?"

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**Notice how Louis begins his comment with Anne's name. He is directing his response to Anne, even though his comment is seen by the entire group. Then he repeats what Anne has said just to make sure that he correctly understands her comment, he adds his own opinion and then he asks her to justify her comment. By asking Anne a direct question, Louis is encouraging her to interact with the group and share more information.**

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**Anne**    "Louis, I do think that it is important for us to hire a President with a background in finance and/or accounting. Without a thorough understanding of the finances, a President may misdirect funds or take on excessive debt which could lead us into bankruptcy. I've seen that happen before and it's not a pretty picture. It may not matter

how good our product is or how much we are selling if our finances are misdirected. Therefore, I prefer candidate A."

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**Notice how Anne addresses her comment to Louis, indicating that her reply is a response to his question. Then she shares information about her personal experience and her basis for selecting a new President. This information reveals her frame of reference and it allows the other group members to understand Anne and her preferences. Also notice how she uses inclusive pronouns (us, we) to promote a sense of team spirit. This reminds each member of the selection committee that they share a common goal.**

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**Louis**     "Anne, I think our new President should have a strong background in marketing and sales because the long-term survival of the company depends on our ability to market and sell our products, and provide excellent customer service. I think we need sales and marketing skills at the top level of the organization, so I prefer candidate B. After all, we can always hire more accountants to do the 'number crunching' :) "

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**Again, notice how Louis uses Anne's name to indicate that his reply is a direct response to her question. Also note that he shares information that allows others to understand his preferences and his frame of reference. And he uses humor ("number crunching") to reveal information about his personality. Additionally, he uses the "smiley face" emoticon :) to indicate that his comment is meant to be funny and not a "put-down."**

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**Carol**     "Louis, you make a good point. Our product development effort seems to be stuck. We haven't launched any new products for several years and our competitors are taking advantage of that. My husband lost his last job when his company failed to develop new products and keep up with the competition. So I agree with you; I like candidate B for further consideration in our selection process."

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**Notice how Carol reinforces Louis' comment. This encourages him to participate further in the discussion. Additionally, she shares her personal experiences with the group and information about her preferences and her frame of reference.**

**This discussion illustrates "social presence" behaviors that we can use to project ourselves socially in an online communication environment. We use social presence behaviors to express our feelings and emotions and help create an atmosphere of sharing and mutual understanding.**

**There are three types of social presence behaviors: affective, interactive, and cohesive.**

**Affective Behaviors: The expression of emotions, feelings and mood**

- When we start the discussion by introducing ourselves, we should share some personal information or make a humorous comment. Throughout the discussion, we should continue to communicate information about our personal experiences and our personal preferences.
- We should use humor when it is appropriate to do so. And we can use emoticons such as the smiley face :) and the frowney face :( to convey emotional content in written form.

**Interactive Behaviors: Evidence that we are paying attention to others**

- If our comment is a direct response to another person's comment, we should address that person directly by starting our comment with their name. It is helpful to repeat what that person said before we add our own comment and preference.
- We should encourage others to participate by making positive statements about their comments (when appropriate) and by being appreciative of their input.

**Cohesive Behaviors: Making comments that build and sustain a sense of group commitment**

- We should use inclusive pronouns (us, we) when appropriate.
- We should refer to shared experiences or knowledge that is shared by the entire group (layoffs in the automotive industry, the current global financial crisis) if appropriate.

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**Question 1:**

Assume that a group of employees are attending an online (computer-based) group meeting. The group members begin by introducing themselves. Which response better demonstrates the social presence behaviors discussed in the communication training example?

**Susie:**     "Hi guys!  I'm Susie from Accounting."

**Robert:**     "Hi guys! I'm Robert from Accounting. I'm the "new guy"- in the Little Rock office, and I just moved here from Colorado.

**Correct answer:**          **Robert**

**Correct feedback:**          **Your answer is correct.**   Robert's response is better because he reveals personal information.

**Incorrect feedback:**          **Your answer is incorrect.**   Robert's response is better because he

reveals personal information**.**

**Question 2:** Elizabeth made the following comment:

"I like Candidate C because she is active in her community. She seems to be a real "people person" who enjoys working with community service organizations."

**Which response better demonstrates the social presence behaviors discussed in the communication training example?**

**Joe:**          "Elizabeth, it seems that you think that personal values and community activism are important factors to consider when selecting our new President, and I agree. Also I think that we need a President who networks with the business leaders in the community. With the current economic climate, we need to build some new relationships and look for ways to expand our market."

**William:**          "I agree with Elizabeth."

**Correct answer:**          **Joe**

**Correct feedback:**          **Your answer is correct.** Joe's response is better. He uses Elizabeth's name to indicate that he is responiding directly to her comment. He repeats what she said and he adds his own opinion, revealing to others his personal preferences and values. Finally, he uses the inclusive pronoun "we" and he refers to shared knowledge held by the group ("the current economic climate").

**Incorrect feedback:**          **Your answer is incorrect**.   Joe's response is better. He uses Elizabeth's name to indicate that he is responiding directly to her comment. He repeats what she said and he adds his own opinion, revealing to others his personal preferences and values. Finally, he uses the inclusive pronoun "we" and he refers to shared knowledge held by the group ("the current economic climate").

**Question 3:** Martin made the following comment:

"Let's look at Candidate C for just a minute. Although he has limited sales experience and only two years of finance experience, he has worked in operations for several of our competitors and he would bring a lot of "inside information" to the table. His resume says that he has extensive knowledge of efficient manufacturing processes, and that could be very helpful as we work to trim our production costs in the next twelve months."

**Which response better demonstrates the social presence behaviors discussed in the communication training example?**

**Paul:**          "Good observation. However, I think Candidate B is the better choice because he has a strong background in sales and marketing."

**Carol:**          "Martin, I agree that it could be very helpful to have a production efficiency "guru" on our team for the next few years, but I don't think that qualifies him to be our President. Do you? I think we need a candidate with a wider range of skills to help us weather this economic decline."

**Correct answer:**          **Carol**

**Correct feedback:**          **Your answer is correct.** Carol's response is better. While Paul encourages Martin to participate with a positive comment ("Good observation") he does not address Martin by name so it may be unclear that his comment is directed at Martin. However, Carol addresses

Martin by name, restates what he said, and then she asks Martin a direct question, callilng upon him to justify his opinion. Additionally, Carol reveals her own personal preference and she uses an inclusive pronoun.

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| **Incorrect feedback:** | **Your answer is incorrect**. Carol's response is better. While Paul encourages Martin to participate with a positive comment ("Good observation") he does not address Martin by name so it may be unclear that his comment is directed at Martin. However, Carol addresses Martin by name, restates what he said, and then she asks Martin a direct question, callilng upon him to justify his opinion. Additionally, Carol reveals her own personal preference and she uses an inclusive pronoun. |