

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF A DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

**A CONFLUENCE OF BUSINESS AND EDUCATION: USING STRATEGIC COMPETENCY
MANAGEMENT AS A FOUNDATION FOR A PRODUCTIVE CONVERSATION**

BY

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ABSTRACT

This research explored the commonalties and differences between what competencies businesses require in workers and what competencies the educational systems actually produce. It explored ways that each institution could collaborate or partner with the other in dimensions other than strategic competency management. The research included a minimum of three discussions with each business and educational leader, as well as a survey only given to business leaders to obtain information on required basic, technical, leadership, and other competencies. The three discussions included an individual interview with each business and educational leader and a facilitated face-to-face conversation. These were followed by an individual interview with each to obtain reflections about the conversation.

Fourteen pairs of business and educational leaders from fourteen of the twenty-one counties in New Jersey participated in a specially designed Productive Conversation about strategic competency management. A productive conversation is one that facilitates changes for the benefit of those in the conversation, whether it is for the individual or his/her organization or profession. Such conversations can create synergy, support the mission of each, and cultivate organizational effectiveness in both institutions. Competencies are the skills, knowledge, and personal characteristics that lead to successful performance. Strategic Competency Management is the administration, development, direction, processing, and education of the competencies required today or at some future time.

The results indicated that leaders gained from the interactions. About eighty percent of the participants commented that the conversations between the business and educational leaders were productive and would result in future collaborations and personal and organizational changes. Four examples of what these conversations produced were: one educational participant began thinking of teachers as leaders; a business leader completed competency models for each function in his business; another business leader supplied scientific equipment to a school district and initiated interactions between scientists and teachers and students; and finally, an educational leader provided a contact so a business leader could offer co-op experiences to high school students.

Based on the findings of this research, discussions about strategic competency management can sometimes provide an opportunity for a productive conversation between business and educational leaders.

SIGNIFICANCE TO BUSINESS

The significance to business was more than just the conversation. The experience afforded leaders time to reflect on their businesses, and to look at the educational system through a different lens. Only five of the fourteen business leaders had previously shared competency requirements with the educational system, and one leader said what made this discussion different from previous discussions was that, "we talked on a deeper and different level." For some, even though they had children in school, the conversation demystified education for them. One had not realized that the teaching methodologies had changed since he / she went to school.

Several business leaders got more clarity around their organizations' competencies. One was going to look at his/her hourly workers to get clarity about the competencies required for them rather than to discern competence required for leadership alone.

SIGNIFICANCE TO EDUCATION

Several educational leaders said their participation gave them time to reflect. Some educational leaders said they met a business leader who was interested in working with him or her in varying dimensions. One educational leader said the business leader was willing to work with him to identify technical competencies as well as administrative competency requirements. An elementary principal said, "I want your study to show how to promote the goals shared in common – instead of everyone thinking they have unrelated goals. The goals really are related and we need to make them global. Education needs to be reminded in conversation between business and education that these are the goals of our society, not just for production or for testing. We must all be conduits of progress¹." Another educational leader said, "It was a natural conversation where we could listen and talk." A high school principal participant said, "The personal nature was the most significant as most of the exchanges are structured around issues. I enjoyed the personal nature."

SIGNIFICANCE TO BUSINESS AND EDUCATION

Does business or education initiate the "call?" One business said, "They have to call me," while another who has been working with the educational system said, "This was the first time [someone from education] came to my office." One HR leader said, "This conversation went to a deeper level. He shared more barriers." One educational leader said, "This type of research is new because it addresses communication. The outcome is communication. [Most] any other outcomes are usually beneficial to one or the other party and not to both [but] you are establishing reasons and a process of communication without an external motivator." However, the answer to "Who makes the first call?" is uncertain, although someone must and anyone can.

RESEARCH

A survey completed by the business leaders served as a quantitative measurement and the qualitative methods were applied research and action research. Both quantitative and qualitative research techniques were used.

The fourteen participating counties encompass 385 (66.3%) out of 580 public school districts², including four "Abbott"³ school districts. Four counties are represented by Abbott Districts: Jersey City, Paterson, Pleasantville, and Camden. The counties are Atlantic, Bergen, Camden, Essex, Gloucester, Hudson, Hunterdon, Mercer, Middlesex, Morris, Ocean, Passaic, Salem, and Somerset. The educational leaders represent the following roles:

- Two assistant county superintendents
- Two district superintendents
- One assistant district superintendent/curriculum director

¹ *Conduits of Progress* are people who allow him/herself to carry the mission forward, progressing toward a particular goal. The person is a shepherd of that goal.

² Most New Jersey educators say "approximately 600 school districts," but the Market Data Retrieval 2000 data lists 580 school districts for New Jersey.

³ In the decision by the New Jersey Supreme Court in 'Abbott vs. Burke', the court, in 1998, ordered the state to spend more in the 28 poor, urban districts and improve education in them.

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- One elementary principal and one high school principal
- Two vocational superintendents and one assistant vocational superintendent
- Three School-to Career Directors and one Business/Educational Liaison.

The twenty-eight participants in the research included fourteen New Jersey business leaders representing the following industries:

Industries	County	Size ⁴	Role	Company Span
Advertisement/Entertainment	County 1	Small	Dir HR	USA
Chemical	County 2 County 3 County 4	Small Medium Large	HR Dir ⁵ HR Dir HR Dir	MNC
Construction	County 5	Small	President	USA
Financial-Investment	County 6	Small	President	County 6
Food	County 7 County 8	Large	HR Dir Dir Trng ⁶	MNC
Information Tech	County 9	Small	CEO	USA
Law enforcement	County 10	Small	Dir Trng	County 10
Manufacturing	County 11	Small	President	USA
Pharmaceutical	County 12	Large	Training Leader	MNC ⁷
Telecommunications	County 13 County 14	Medium	VP OD ⁸ VP HR	USA

Limitations of the study include the absence of information from seven New Jersey counties. In addition, the research participants represented only the K-12 and vocational public schools, so applicability to charter schools, home schooling, private and faith-based schools, and colleges and universities is unknown. Another limitation was the timing of the study, since many of the meetings were scheduled in November and December. The holidays pushed most final interviews into January, leaving little time for business and educational participant follow-up. A fourth limitation is the lack of representation of minority owned businesses. I included only qualitative assessment of changes or organizational effectiveness in the institutions as a result of the Productive Conversation because this was not a longitudinal study showing quantitative change over a number of months or years.

⁴ Size: According to the Small Business Administration a small business size varies by industry. “500 employees for most manufacturing and mining industries 100 employees for all wholesale trade industries \$5 million for most retail and service industries \$17 million for most general & heavy construction industries \$7 million for all special trade contractors \$0.5 million for most agricultural industries 500 employees.” It is not clear what constitutes sizes for medium and large companies. The gauge I used was that between 500 and 1499 employees it was a medium-sized company. <http://www.sba.gov/size/Main-faq.html>

⁵ Dir means Director

⁶ Trng means Training

⁷ MNC means multinational company

⁸ OD means Organizational Development

FINDINGS

The research participants say that there needs to be clarity about workplace readiness skills with behavioral examples as well as clarity around what work means. There are businesses that want to participate in the 2001 development of the Workplace Readiness Skills. Most businesses said they do not want to tell educators how to run their business, as some educators thought. Some businesses have to be asked to help and those invitations can come from any educator but most certainly from educators who are familiar with business.

Initial Interview: Each leader participated in an individual Initial Interview that took approximately one hour. The Initial Interview obtained the leader’s perceptions, knowledge, and experiences with the other’s industry (business about the educational leader’s and vice versa); how such a conversation with the other leader could support his/her own organization’s mission and vision and effectiveness; what they wanted to learn from the other leader; and how they could serve the other leader. The data clustered around the six dimensions of an approach that creates spirited high performing teams⁹. These dimensions are Initiating (creates a sense of belonging and trust); Visioning (creates a sense of possibility); Claiming (clarifies responsibilities); Celebrating (inspires individuals and teams and honors the contributions of each); Letting Go (moves individuals beyond the barriers of conflict); and Serving (the core of the approach supports all dimensions). In summary, the Initial Interview showed commonalities among the research participants and areas of interest emerged that could stimulate conversation beyond strategic competency management to topics such as purpose and goals of education and how each can serve themselves or each other, their communities, and the students.

Productive Conversation: The Productive Conversation was facilitated with ten of the fourteen gatherings held at the educator’s location and four others at the business location. A productive conversation is one that facilitates changes for the benefit of those in the conversation, whether it is for the individual or his/her organization or profession. The topics of conversation sorted into seventeen recurring themes, consisting of six categories. The six categorical results (Competencies, Management Strategies, Community, Parents, Purpose and Goals of Education and Socialization of Kids) aggregated into the three categories comprising the research question: Mission, Synergy, and Organizational Effectiveness.

Mission	Synergy	Organizational Effectiveness
Purpose and Goals of Education <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shared Goals • Raising Money 	Parental Involvement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accountability, Responsibility, and Support • What Business Can Do 	Management Strategies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Change Management • Leadership • Trust • Motivation and Productivity • Taking Risks
Socialization of Kids <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • English as a 2nd Language • Diversity/Demographics • Best and Brightest • Starts in Elementary 	Community Involvement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responsibility & Support 	Competencies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning • Learning Application for the Real World • Technology / Information Management

⁹ This approach is called *Team Spirit*.
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Final Interview: The Final Interview was scheduled with each participant for an hour but the average length of a call lasted twenty-five minutes. The Final Interview obtained reflections about the conversation between the leaders. The Final Interview categories aggregated into Levels of Business Commitments; Reactions of Educational Leaders; Overall Perceptions; Strategic Planning & Competencies; About the Productive Conversation; Changed Thinking – Aha!; Learnings & Actions; and Challenges.

Results for Levels of Business Commitment to working with Educators:

More Committed Business	Newly Committed Business	The Same Level of Commitment	Not Committed
Four Business Leaders	Seven Business Leaders	One Business Leader	Two Business Leaders

Results for the Educational Leaders:

Definitely Got Something	Validated	About the Same	Nothing New
Ten Educational Leaders	One Educational Leader	One Educational Leader	Two Educational Leaders

Hurdles to a Productive Conversation:

During the Productive Conversation and Final Interview the leaders said the hurdles for a productive conversation were: ‘Time’, the number one hurdle, followed by ‘Consistency of Participants’, ‘Establishing Agendas’, ‘Top Leadership Support’ for the discussion, and ‘Ongoing Involvement’ of both leaders.

Productive Conversation Findings

There were nine counties where both the business and the educational leader verbally said they received benefit. In four counties either the business or the educational leader verbally said they received benefit but not both. And, in one county neither leader verbalized a benefit, although one of the leaders is taking action as a result of the conversation. In one out of five instances the nature of the previous connection between the business and educational leaders impeded the conversation. Overall eleven business and twelve educational leaders will take some action either with the business leader or the educational leader or in other ways. As the number of conversations increased, there was increased positive reaction to adding work ethic and integrity as critical competencies required for all employees.

Critical Competencies: This is a compilation of competencies used in the survey and mentioned in the Initial Interview, Productive Conversations, and Final Interviews with each business and educational leaders. (Bold competencies are those mentioned most often by participants; italicized competencies are mentioned often; and the others are rarely mentioned).

Answers:	<i>Other</i>
<i>Analytical</i>	Integrity
<i>Client/Customer Focus</i>	Sense of Focus
Communications	<i>Ownership</i>
<i>Creative Thinking</i>	<i>Courage</i>
Decision Making	Work Ethic
<i>Influence</i>	<i>Entrepreneurship</i>
<i>Information Skills</i>	Organizational Skills
<i>Initiative/Innovation*</i>	<i>Articulate Level of Computer Awareness</i>
Interpersonal	<i>Understanding the State of the Art Technology</i>
<i>Leadership</i>	<i>Motivation</i>
Learning/Continuous Learning	<i>Critical Thinking</i>
<i>People/Org. Development</i>	Competitive Drive
<i>Problem Solving Skills</i>	
Self Management/Self Control	
Teamwork	
* Some leaders thought innovation and initiative should be separate	

Survey/Questionnaire: One hundred percent of business participants answered the survey.

Survey Findings

Changes occur in business primarily due to Market and Strategic Changes yet only 29% of the businesses review their competencies yearly.

Competencies are linked to Selection, Performance, Development, and Succession Planning processes but are not rewarded and reinforced.

92% say HR is accountable for the competency data and upkeep of the models.

Top five competencies that the business participants said they expect all employees to have:

- Teamwork
- Communications
- Problem-Solving
- Client/Customer-Focus
- Interpersonal

Top five competencies that the business participants said are missing in employees and recruits:

- Communications
- Leadership
- Problem-Solving
- Decision-making
- Teamwork

SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

The results indicate that of the fourteen pairs of county leaders, nine counties benefited from the conversation; four counties had one of the leaders benefit from the conversation, and one county had neither the business nor the educational leader benefiting from the conversation.

Application: The results show that there can sometimes be a productive conversation between business and educational leaders using competencies as a foundation for discussion. There is value to having periodic conversations or dialogues on topical subject areas. The results show that some of the business and educational leaders believe that they have deepened relationships and obtained both intrinsic and extrinsic value from the conversations.

Action: New Jersey has Workplace Readiness Skills¹⁰, developed in 1996, with input from over 200 business, educational, and parental groups. This study provides a method of how communities might follow-up with that body of work by encouraging conversations among business and educational leaders and parents in a community or county to discuss the application, implementation, training, and reinforcement of the competencies and related behaviors.

To have a productive conversation, business and educational leaders said,

- take the time to develop relationships
- structure the conversations
- share vision and goals
- limit the conversations to no more than two hours at a time
- broaden the conversation to a range of participants including, but not limited to other business, educational, and community leaders, teachers, parents, students, librarians, and adults without children
- employ an approach that encourages teaming and organizational effectiveness tools
- have the process facilitated at the beginning
- get past a “nice” conversation to one that is authentic, having clarity as to the lead person for follow-up.

To increase organizational effectiveness and strategic results:

- a business needs to consider what is happening in the educational system today because in twelve years or less the business will be hiring today’s students
- businesses and educational leaders need to reconsider what and how they reward, recognize, and reinforce competencies that they select, develop, and appraise
- educational leaders need to consider inviting different members of the school district community including parents, businesses, community leaders, other educators, and students to a meeting every six months to discuss a topic of importance to the community.

¹⁰ The New Jersey Department of Education led the development of eight Cross Content Curriculum Standards that include the five following cross-content Workplace Readiness Skills, applicable to all areas of instruction for K-12: 1) all students will develop career planning and workplace readiness skills; 2) all students will use technology, information, and other tools; 3) all students will use critical thinking, decision-making, and problem-solving skills; 4) all students will demonstrate self-management skills and; 5) all students will apply safety principles

- business and educational leaders need to prepare and come with an open mind to a “Productive Conversation” gathering and follow-up by sharing the information within their own institutions.

A productive conversation can be considered a ‘think tank’ that does not always have an immediate, extrinsic, actionable result but often has more of the intrinsic result of looking at one’s organization with different paradigms or perspectives. Some positive results of the conversations included:

- synergy for further partnering
- sharing of people and informational resources
- possible internships with several business and educational leaders
- contacts in each other’s school districts or county for further work with education
- functional competency modeling initiated in two businesses
- identification of topics for consideration for future consideration
- validation, enthusiasm, and support of the other leader.

Positive results for cultivating organizational effectiveness and supporting the mission included:

- clarification of competency requirements in some businesses and educational institutions
- paradigm shift for one educational leader to thinking of teachers as leaders and the leadership role in an educational system
- consideration of changes to an educational leader’s mission statement
- an internal personal and organizational review of mission
- time for reflection.

A confluence of business and education can be a strategic conversation about competencies that can lead to developing integrated strategic processes in selection, career management, development, performance management, and reward and recognition. It can lead to collaborations in mentoring, teaching, sharing real world examples of competency use, and even the sharing of human resources. This productive conversation can lead to developing parent, teacher, and student friendly policies, as well as creating time to think about one’s organization, community, and self. This confluence can create synergy, support the mission of each, and cultivate organizational effectiveness in each institution.