

ABSTRACT

Background and Aims

Organisations cannot function without communication, however, it is the effectiveness and appropriateness of the communication that is vital to organisational effectiveness. The undisputed need for the assessment of communication competence skills is evident in selection and recruitment, job profiling, performance evaluation, and the development of focused skill orientated training. However, no existing individual instrument adequately measures communicative competence in South African workplaces as a number of unique barriers to interpersonal communication within SA workplaces are unaccounted for in established conceptualisations of workplace communication competence, informing communication assessment approaches and methodologies. Thus, the overarching aim of the current research is to develop a workplace communication assessment scale of routine verbal task-related communication skills, which is contextually and representationally valid, and accommodates contextual social features of South African organisations, relevant in judgments of communication competence. In realising this aim the development of an alternative conceptualisation of SA workplace communicative competence was required. The future establishment of criterion referenced norms for specific jobs would be of practical utility to Human Resources (HR) in the customisation of organisational and job specific communication assessment tools and focused interventions.

Method

In Phase 1 a broad, inclusive representative item pool was reduced by frequency analysis and collapsing/deleting semantically similar items to 69 retained routine SA workplace communication behaviours. In Phase 2, the 69-item experimental scale was administered to a 303 SA working sample. Competing factor structures were evaluated according to exploratory factor analysis (EFA) model fit indices, pre and post item deletion, followed by confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to differentiate superior model fit. Lastly, the psychometric properties of the resultant scale, in terms of convergent and divergent validity with two existing measures (CCQ (Monge, Bachman, Dillard, & Eisenberg, 1982)) and the SRC (Cupach & Spitzberg, 1981)), as well as reliability, were evaluated.

Results

The 63-item eight factor model demonstrated the best fit in terms of an even distribution of primary factor loading across the factors, a single non-loading item, no theoretically incompatible item cross-loadings, an even distribution of variance across factors, and the most conceptually interpretable pattern of factor loadings. Additionally, Phase 2 provided evidence of the scale's content, structural, convergent, and discriminant validity, and reliability.

Discussion

SA respondents differentiated eight subcategories as a basis for evaluating how they communicate at work. This suggests greater dimensionality relative to other workplace communication competence measures. The differentiation of the Higher Order Language subscale (i.e. the understanding of abstract and inferential language) suggests a broader conceptualisation of workplace communication skills as required by competent communicators in SA workplaces.

Conclusion

This research has offered an alternative conceptualisation of workplace communication competence, and developed a valid, reliable, communication assessment scale, from diverse disciplines and theoretical orientations, that measures all dimensions of routinely occurring interactional task-related communication skills within SA workplaces. This communication competence framework facilitates the efficient production of tailored job-specific criterion referenced norms for the immediate customisation of job-specific communication assessment tools and focused interventions. The utility of the new scale extends beyond Industrial/Organisation Psychology practice to inform return to work (RTW) rehabilitation in Speech Language Pathology.