

Analyzing the Perceptions of Accounting Practitioners regarding Communication Skills of Distance-Learning Graduates

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Abstract : Higher education institutions are constantly challenged to deliver skilled graduates into the workplace. Employers expect graduates to have the required technical knowledge as well as various pervasive skills. This also applies to accountants who need to know the technical requirements of financial reporting and be able to communicate with individuals, teams and clients at a high level. Accountants need to develop effective business conversational skills and use these skills to communicate up, down and across organizations, taking into consideration cultural and gender diversity. In addition, they need to master business writing and presentation skills. However, providing students with these skills in a distance-learning environment where interaction between students and instructors is limited, is a challenge for academics. The study on which this paper reports, forms part of a larger body of research, which explored the perceptions of accounting practitioners of the communication skills (or lack thereof) of recently qualified accounting students. Feedback (qualitative and quantitative) was obtained from various accounting practitioners in South Africa. Taking into consideration that distance learners communicate mainly with their instructors via email communication and their assignments are submitted using various word processor software, the researchers were of the opinion that the accounting graduates would be capable of communicating effectively once they entered the workplace. However, the research findings, inter alia, suggested that the accounting graduates lacked communication skills and that training was needed to differentiate between business and social communication once they entered the workplace. Recommendations on how these communication challenges may be addressed by higher education institutions are provided.

Keywords : accounting practitioners, communication skills, distance education, pervasive skills

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