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Integrating Management Fundamentals, Business Communication, and Negotiation Skills to Foster Collaborative Business Competencies

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Abstract: The increasing complexity of today's business environment requires graduates to possess not only strong management knowledge but also effective communication, negotiation, and collaboration skills. In business and retail management education, these competencies are critical for preparing students to engage in real-world organizational and inter-organizational interactions. This study aims to examine how the integration of management fundamentals, business communication, and negotiation skills contributes to the development of collaborative business competencies among students. Using a quantitative approach, this study collected data from students enrolled in business and retail management programs at a vocational higher education institution. Data were gathered through structured questionnaires measuring perceptions of management fundamentals, business communication skills, negotiation skills, and collaborative business competencies. The data were analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to examine the direct and indirect relationships among the constructs. The results indicate that management fundamentals have a significant positive effect on both business communication and negotiation skills. Furthermore, business communication and negotiation skills were found to significantly enhance collaborative business competencies. The findings also reveal that business communication and negotiation skills partially mediate the relationship between management fundamentals and collaborative business competencies. These results suggest that management knowledge alone is insufficient to foster effective collaboration unless it is complemented by strong communication and negotiation capabilities. This study contributes to the literature by providing empirical evidence on the importance of an integrated learning approach in business and management education, particularly within vocational contexts. From a practical perspective, the findings highlight the need for curriculum designs that intentionally integrate management theory with applied communication and negotiation training to better prepare graduates for collaborative business environments.

Keyword: Management Fundamentals, Business Communication, Negotiation Skills, Collaborative Business Competencies, Vocational Education.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid transformation of the global business environment has intensified the demand for graduates who possess not only theoretical management knowledge but also practical competencies in communication, negotiation, and collaboration. Reports from the World Economic Forum indicate that skills such as communication, negotiation, and collaboration consistently rank among the top employability skills required in the modern workforce, particularly in business-oriented industries (World Economic Forum, 2023). As organizations increasingly operate within networks, partnerships, and supply chains, the ability to collaborate effectively has become a strategic capability rather than a supplementary skill.

Management fundamentals have traditionally served as the foundation of business education, providing students with essential knowledge related to planning, organizing, leading, and controlling organizational resources. However, prior studies suggest that mastery of management concepts alone is insufficient to ensure effective performance in collaborative business environments (Mintzberg, 2009). Graduates often struggle to translate managerial knowledge into practice due to limited exposure to applied communication and negotiation processes that are critical in real-world business interactions (Robbins & Coulter, 2018).

Business communication plays a central role in facilitating coordination, information sharing, and relationship building within and across organizations. Effective communication enables individuals to articulate ideas clearly, manage conflicts, and align diverse interests toward shared objectives (Adler, Rodman, & du Pré, 2017). Empirical research indicates that inadequate communication skills are among the primary causes of collaboration failure in business settings, particularly in retail and service industries where interpersonal interactions are intensive (Clampitt, 2016). This highlights the need to integrate communication training within management education rather than treating it as a standalone subject.

Negotiation skills further complement management and communication competencies by enabling individuals to reach mutually beneficial agreements, manage power dynamics, and sustain long-term business relationships. Negotiation is increasingly recognized as a core managerial skill, particularly in contexts involving partnerships, supplier relationships, and collaborative decision-making (Lewicki, Barry, & Saunders, 2020). Studies show that individuals with strong negotiation skills are more likely to achieve integrative outcomes that enhance trust and collaboration among business partners (Fisher, Ury, & Patton, 2011).

In vocational higher education, such as polytechnic institutions, the alignment between curriculum content and industry needs is especially critical. Vocational education emphasizes applied learning and practical skill development to ensure graduate employability (OECD, 2020). However, several studies have identified a gap between what is taught in management courses and the collaborative competencies expected by industry, particularly in business and retail management programs (Billett, 2015). This gap suggests that management education should adopt a more integrated pedagogical approach that combines managerial theory with applied communication and negotiation training.

Collaborative business competencies refer to an individual's ability to work effectively with others to achieve shared business objectives, including teamwork, coordination, joint problem-solving, and relationship management. These competencies are increasingly viewed as critical for organizational success in dynamic and competitive markets (Dyer, Dyer, & Dyer, 2013). Research indicates that collaborative competencies are not innate but can be developed through structured learning experiences that emphasize interaction, reflection, and real-world application (Johnson, Johnson, & Smith, 2014).

Despite the growing recognition of the importance of collaboration in business, empirical research examining how management fundamentals, business communication, and negotiation skills jointly contribute to collaborative business competencies remains limited.

Most existing studies tend to examine these constructs in isolation, resulting in fragmented insights that fail to capture the integrative nature of business education (Salas, Shuffler, Thayer, Bedwell, & Lazzara, 2015). Furthermore, empirical evidence from vocational education contexts, particularly in developing and emerging economies, remains underrepresented in the literature.

Responding to this gap, the present study aims to examine how the integration of management fundamentals, business communication, and negotiation skills fosters collaborative business competencies among students in business and retail management programs. By adopting an integrative perspective, this study seeks to contribute to the literature by clarifying the interconnected roles of these competencies in preparing graduates for collaborative business environments. From a practical standpoint, the findings are expected to provide valuable insights for educators and curriculum designers in vocational higher education institutions seeking to enhance the relevance and effectiveness of business and management education.

Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

Management Fundamentals

Management fundamentals constitute the core knowledge base of business education and typically include key managerial functions such as planning, organizing, leading, and controlling organizational resources. These fundamentals provide students with a structured understanding of how organizations operate and how managerial decisions influence organizational performance (Robbins & Coulter, 2018). In educational contexts, management fundamentals serve as the cognitive foundation upon which more applied managerial skills are developed.

However, scholars argue that while management fundamentals are essential, they are not sufficient on their own to prepare students for the complexities of contemporary business environments (Mintzberg, 2009). Modern organizations increasingly rely on collaboration, cross-functional teamwork, and inter-organizational partnerships, which require managers to apply management knowledge through interpersonal processes. Empirical studies in management education indicate that students who possess strong conceptual understanding of management but lack applied interpersonal skills often struggle to perform effectively in collaborative business settings (Billett, 2015).

Nevertheless, management fundamentals play a critical enabling role by shaping individuals' cognitive frameworks and decision-making logic. A solid understanding of management principles enhances individuals' ability to communicate organizational goals, evaluate alternatives during negotiation, and align collaborative efforts with strategic objectives (Daft, 2016). Therefore, management fundamentals are expected to positively influence the development of applied skills such as business communication and negotiation.

H1: Management fundamentals have a positive effect on business communication skills.

H2: Management fundamentals have a positive effect on negotiation skills.

Business Communication

Business communication refers to the process of creating, transmitting, and interpreting messages in organizational and business contexts. Effective business communication facilitates coordination, reduces misunderstandings, and supports relationship building among stakeholders (Adler et al., 2017). In collaborative business environments, communication skills are essential for articulating ideas, managing conflicts, and achieving shared understanding among team members and business partners.

Research consistently shows that communication competence is a key predictor of successful collaboration. Poor communication has been identified as a primary cause of

collaboration failure, particularly in retail and service sectors where interpersonal interactions are frequent and complex (Clampitt, 2016). In educational settings, students who receive systematic training in business communication demonstrate higher levels of teamwork effectiveness and collaborative problem-solving ability (Johnson et al., 2014).

From a theoretical perspective, business communication functions as a social mechanism through which management knowledge is enacted in practice. Management concepts such as coordination, leadership, and control are operationalized through communication processes (Daft, 2016). Consequently, individuals with strong communication skills are better equipped to translate management knowledge into collaborative action, suggesting a direct link between business communication and collaborative business competencies.

H3: Business communication skills have a positive effect on collaborative business competencies.

Negotiation Skills

Negotiation skills refer to the ability to reach agreements through dialogue, compromise, and problem-solving while managing differences in interests, power, and perspectives. Negotiation is widely regarded as a core managerial competency, particularly in contexts involving partnerships, supplier relationships, and collaborative decision-making (Lewicki et al., 2020). Effective negotiators are able to create value, manage conflict constructively, and sustain long-term business relationships.

Studies on negotiation emphasize the importance of integrative negotiation approaches, which focus on mutual gains and collaboration rather than zero-sum outcomes (Fisher et al., 2011). Individuals trained in negotiation skills are more likely to engage in cooperative behaviors, demonstrate empathy, and build trust with counterparts, all of which are critical for effective collaboration. Empirical evidence suggests that negotiation training significantly improves individuals' collaborative orientation and joint problem-solving capabilities (Thompson, 2015).

In educational contexts, negotiation skills complement management fundamentals by enabling students to apply managerial reasoning in interactive and often ambiguous situations. Students with strong negotiation skills are better able to balance organizational objectives with relational considerations, thereby enhancing collaborative business outcomes (Lewicki et al., 2020).

H4: Negotiation skills have a positive effect on collaborative business competencies

Collaborative Business Competencies

Collaborative business competencies refer to an individual's ability to work effectively with others to achieve shared business objectives. These competencies include teamwork, coordination, joint decision-making, conflict management, and relationship building (Dyer et al., 2013). In contemporary business environments characterized by interdependence and networked structures, collaborative competencies are increasingly viewed as strategic assets.

Research indicates that collaborative competencies are not innate traits but can be developed through education and training that emphasize experiential learning, interaction, and reflection (Johnson et al., 2014). Business and management education plays a critical role in fostering these competencies by integrating theoretical knowledge with applied interpersonal skills.

The Mediating Role of Business Communication and Negotiation Skills

Building on the preceding discussion, this study proposes that business communication and negotiation skills function as mediating mechanisms through which management fundamentals influence collaborative business competencies. While management fundamentals provide the conceptual foundation for understanding organizational processes, communication and negotiation skills enable individuals to enact this knowledge in collaborative contexts.

Prior research suggests that integrative learning approaches, which combine management theory with applied interpersonal skills, are more effective in developing collaboration-related competencies than fragmented curricula (Salas et al., 2015). This perspective aligns with experiential learning theory, which emphasizes the importance of transforming knowledge into action through interaction and practice (Kolb, 1984).

Accordingly, this study posits that management fundamentals indirectly enhance collaborative business competencies through their positive effects on business communication and negotiation skills.

H5: Business communication skills mediate the relationship between management fundamentals and collaborative business competencies.

H6: Negotiation skills mediate the relationship between management fundamentals and collaborative business competencies.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative research design using a cross-sectional survey approach to examine the relationships among management fundamentals, business communication skills, negotiation skills, and collaborative business competencies. A quantitative approach was considered appropriate because the objective of the study was to test theoretically derived hypotheses and examine structural relationships among latent variables within an educational context (Hair et al., 2019). Survey-based methods are widely used in management education research to capture students' perceptions of learning outcomes and competency development (Billett, 2015).

Population and Sample

The population of this study consisted of undergraduate students enrolled in Business and Retail Management programs at a polytechnic institution in Indonesia. Polytechnic students were selected because vocational education emphasizes applied learning and industry-relevant competencies, making them an appropriate sample for examining the development of collaborative business skills (OECD, 2020).

A purposive sampling technique was employed to select respondents who had completed or were currently enrolled in courses related to management fundamentals, business communication, and negotiation. This criterion ensured that respondents had sufficient exposure to the learning content relevant to the constructs under investigation (Johnson et al., 2014).

A total of 220 questionnaires were distributed, and 200 valid responses were obtained and used for analysis, resulting in a response rate of 90.9 percent. This sample size meets the minimum requirements for Partial Least Squares–Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), which recommends a minimum sample size of ten times the largest number of structural paths pointing at a single construct in the model (Hair et al., 2019). Furthermore, prior studies in educational research indicate that sample sizes above 150 are adequate for achieving stable estimates in SEM-based analyses (Kline, 2016).

Measurement Instruments

All constructs were measured using previously validated scales adapted to the educational context of polytechnic students. To ensure content validity, the items were modified to reflect learning experiences rather than workplace practices. Responses were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (“strongly disagree”) to 5 (“strongly agree”), which is commonly applied in educational and management research (Podsakoff et al., 2003).

Management Fundamentals

Management fundamentals were measured using items adapted from Robbins and Coulter (2018) and Daft (2016). The scale assessed students’ perceived understanding of core management functions such as planning, organizing, leading, and controlling. Sample items include “I understand how management functions are applied in business decision-making” and “The management courses have helped me understand how organizations operate.”

Business Communication Skills

Business communication skills were measured using items adapted from Adler et al. (2017) and Clampitt (2016). The instrument assessed students’ perceived ability to communicate ideas clearly, listen effectively, and manage interpersonal interactions in business contexts. Sample items include “I am able to communicate my ideas clearly in group discussions” and “I can effectively convey business messages in written and oral forms.”

Negotiation Skills

Negotiation skills were measured using items adapted from Lewicki et al. (2020) and Fisher et al. (2011). The scale captured students’ perceived ability to negotiate agreements, manage differing interests, and reach mutually beneficial outcomes. Sample items include “I am confident in negotiating solutions that benefit all parties” and “I can manage differences of opinion during negotiations.”

Collaborative Business Competencies

Collaborative business competencies were measured using items adapted from Dyer et al. (2013) and Johnson et al. (2014). The instrument assessed students’ ability to work effectively in teams, coordinate tasks, resolve conflicts, and achieve shared goals. Sample items include “I can work effectively with others to achieve group objectives” and “I am able to contribute constructively to team-based business projects.”

Data Collection Procedure

Data collection was conducted during the academic semester after students had completed major learning activities related to management, communication, and negotiation. Questionnaires were administered in classroom settings and through online platforms to maximize participation. Prior to data collection, students were informed about the purpose of the study, and confidentiality and anonymity were assured to encourage honest responses (Podsakoff et al., 2003).

To reduce common method bias, several procedural remedies were applied, including assuring respondents that there were no right or wrong answers and randomizing the order of questionnaire items (Podsakoff et al., 2012).

Data Analysis Technique

Data analysis was conducted using Partial Least Squares–Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS software. PLS-SEM was selected because it is suitable for

predictive research, models with multiple mediators, and relatively small to medium sample sizes, which are common in educational research (Hair et al., 2019). Additionally, PLS-SEM does not require strict assumptions of data normality, making it appropriate for student survey data.

The analysis followed a two-stage approach. First, the measurement model was evaluated by assessing indicator reliability, internal consistency reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. Indicator reliability was assessed using outer loadings, with values above 0.70 considered acceptable. Internal consistency reliability was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability, with threshold values above 0.70 (Kline, 2016). Convergent validity was assessed using Average Variance Extracted (AVE), with values exceeding 0.50 indicating adequate validity.

Second, the structural model was evaluated by examining path coefficients, coefficient of determination (R^2), and the significance of hypothesized relationships. A bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 resamples was employed to test the significance of direct and mediating effects, as recommended for mediation analysis in PLS-SEM (Preacher & Hayes, 2008).

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were addressed throughout the research process. Participation in the study was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all respondents. Students were assured that their participation or responses would not affect their academic evaluation. These procedures are consistent with ethical standards for educational research involving human participants (Kline, 2016).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Respondent Profile

A total of 200 valid questionnaires were analyzed in this study. The respondents consisted of students enrolled in Business and Retail Management programs at a polytechnic institution. In terms of gender distribution, 54.5% of respondents were female and 45.5% were male. Regarding academic level, 61.0% of respondents were in their third year, while 39.0% were in their second year. The majority of respondents (68.0%) had completed courses related to management fundamentals, business communication, and negotiation, indicating adequate exposure to the learning content examined in this study.

Measurement Model Evaluation

Before testing the structural relationships, the measurement model was evaluated to assess reliability and validity.

All indicator loadings exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70, with values ranging from 0.713 to 0.892, indicating satisfactory indicator reliability (Hair et al., 2019).

Internal consistency reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (CR). The results show that Cronbach's alpha values ranged from 0.812 to 0.901, while CR values ranged from 0.864 to 0.926, exceeding the minimum recommended value of 0.70 (Kline, 2016). These findings indicate strong internal consistency across all constructs.

Convergent validity was evaluated using Average Variance Extracted (AVE). The AVE values were 0.58 for Management Fundamentals, 0.62 for Business Communication Skills, 0.60 for Negotiation Skills, and 0.64 for Collaborative Business Competencies. All AVE values exceeded the threshold of 0.50, confirming adequate convergent validity (Hair et al., 2019).

Discriminant validity was assessed using the Fornell-Larcker criterion and the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio. The square root of the AVE for each construct was

greater than its correlations with other constructs, and all HTMT values were below 0.85, indicating satisfactory discriminant validity (Henseler et al., 2015).

Structural Model Assessment

The structural model was evaluated to test the hypothesized relationships among management fundamentals, business communication skills, negotiation skills, and collaborative business competencies.

Collinearity assessment revealed that all variance inflation factor (VIF) values ranged between 1.34 and 2.11, which are below the conservative threshold of 3.0, indicating no multicollinearity issues (Hair et al., 2019).

The coefficient of determination (R^2) values indicate that Management Fundamentals explained 42.3% of the variance in Business Communication Skills and 39.8% of the variance in Negotiation Skills. Furthermore, Management Fundamentals, Business Communication Skills, and Negotiation Skills jointly explained 56.7% of the variance in Collaborative Business Competencies. These R^2 values are considered moderate to substantial in educational and behavioral research (Cohen, 1988).

Hypotheses Testing

Bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples was conducted to assess the significance of the hypothesized paths.

The results indicate that Management Fundamentals have a significant positive effect on Business Communication Skills ($\beta = 0.65$, $t = 11.72$, $p < 0.001$), supporting **H1**. Similarly, Management Fundamentals were found to have a significant positive effect on Negotiation Skills ($\beta = 0.63$, $t = 10.89$, $p < 0.001$), supporting **H2**.

Business Communication Skills exhibited a significant positive effect on Collaborative Business Competencies ($\beta = 0.31$, $t = 4.98$, $p < 0.001$), providing support for **H3**. Negotiation Skills also showed a significant positive effect on Collaborative Business Competencies ($\beta = 0.37$, $t = 5.84$, $p < 0.001$), supporting **H4**.

Mediation analysis revealed that Business Communication Skills partially mediated the relationship between Management Fundamentals and Collaborative Business Competencies (indirect effect $\beta = 0.20$, $t = 4.31$, $p < 0.001$), supporting **H5**. Likewise, Negotiation Skills were found to partially mediate the relationship between Management Fundamentals and Collaborative Business Competencies (indirect effect $\beta = 0.23$, $t = 4.76$, $p < 0.001$), supporting **H6**. The direct effect of Management Fundamentals on Collaborative Business Competencies remained significant ($\beta = 0.29$, $t = 4.52$, $p < 0.001$), indicating partial mediation (Preacher & Hayes, 2008).

Summary of Findings

Overall, the results demonstrate that management fundamentals play a critical role in developing collaborative business competencies among polytechnic students, both directly and indirectly through business communication and negotiation skills. Among the mediators, negotiation skills exhibited a slightly stronger effect on collaborative competencies compared to business communication skills, suggesting that negotiation capability is particularly important in fostering effective collaboration within business and retail education contexts.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine how management fundamentals, business communication skills, and negotiation skills contribute to the development of collaborative business competencies among polytechnic students. The findings provide several important

insights into the effectiveness of an integrated learning approach in vocational business education.

First, the results demonstrate that management fundamentals have a strong and significant effect on both business communication skills and negotiation skills. This finding suggests that a solid understanding of core management concepts—such as planning, organizing, leading, and controlling—serves as a cognitive foundation that supports the development of applied interpersonal skills. This result is consistent with prior studies arguing that managerial knowledge shapes individuals' mental models, which subsequently influence how they communicate and negotiate in organizational contexts (Mintzberg, 2009; Daft, 2016). For polytechnic students, management fundamentals appear to function as a conceptual anchor that enables them to contextualize communication and negotiation activities within broader organizational objectives.

Second, the findings reveal that both business communication skills and negotiation skills significantly enhance collaborative business competencies. This supports existing literature emphasizing that effective collaboration depends heavily on individuals' ability to communicate ideas clearly, manage interpersonal dynamics, and resolve differences constructively (Adler et al., 2017; Dyer et al., 2013). In vocational education settings, where learning is oriented toward practice and employability, this result highlights the importance of equipping students with interpersonal skills that directly translate into collaborative performance in real-world business environments.

Notably, negotiation skills exhibit a slightly stronger effect on collaborative business competencies compared to business communication skills. This suggests that while communication is essential for information exchange and coordination, negotiation skills play a more decisive role when collaboration involves divergent interests, resource constraints, or conflicting priorities. This finding aligns with negotiation theory, which emphasizes the role of integrative negotiation in fostering trust, mutual gains, and long-term collaborative relationships (Fisher et al., 2011; Lewicki et al., 2020). For students in business and retail management programs, negotiation competence appears particularly critical in preparing them for collaborative roles involving suppliers, partners, and customers.

The mediation analysis further enriches the discussion by demonstrating that business communication skills and negotiation skills partially mediate the relationship between management fundamentals and collaborative business competencies. This indicates that management knowledge alone does not automatically translate into collaborative capability. Instead, its impact is significantly enhanced when students are able to enact that knowledge through effective communication and negotiation. This finding supports integrative learning perspectives, which argue that competencies are best developed when theoretical knowledge is combined with applied skill development (Kolb, 1984; Salas et al., 2015).

From an educational perspective, the partial mediation suggests that curricula focusing exclusively on management theory may fall short in fostering collaborative competencies unless they are intentionally integrated with communication and negotiation training. This finding resonates with critiques of traditional business education, which often emphasize conceptual knowledge at the expense of applied interpersonal skills (Billett, 2015). In the context of polytechnic education, where graduates are expected to be job-ready, the integration of these learning components becomes even more critical.

Overall, the findings contribute to the literature by providing empirical evidence that collaborative business competencies among students are the product of an interconnected set of capabilities rather than isolated skills. By demonstrating the joint and mediating roles of business communication and negotiation skills, this study advances a more holistic understanding of competency development in vocational business education. The results also

respond to calls for empirical research that bridges the gap between management education theory and practice, particularly in applied learning contexts (OECD, 2020).

CONCLUSION

This study examined the role of management fundamentals, business communication skills, and negotiation skills in fostering collaborative business competencies among students in a polytechnic business and retail management program. The findings provide clear evidence that management fundamentals serve as a critical foundation for developing applied interpersonal skills, which in turn enhance students' ability to collaborate effectively in business contexts.

The results demonstrate that management fundamentals significantly influence both business communication and negotiation skills, highlighting the importance of managerial knowledge in shaping students' cognitive frameworks and decision-making processes. Furthermore, business communication and negotiation skills were found to have significant positive effects on collaborative business competencies, underscoring the central role of interpersonal capabilities in effective collaboration. Notably, negotiation skills exhibited a slightly stronger impact on collaborative competencies, suggesting that the ability to manage differing interests and reach mutually beneficial agreements is particularly important in collaborative business environments.

The mediation analysis reveals that business communication and negotiation skills partially mediate the relationship between management fundamentals and collaborative business competencies. This indicates that while management knowledge is essential, its contribution to collaboration is substantially strengthened when students are able to apply that knowledge through effective communication and negotiation. These findings emphasize the importance of an integrated learning approach that combines management theory with applied skill development, particularly within vocational education settings.

Overall, this study contributes to the literature on business and management education by offering empirical support for an integrative model of competency development. By focusing on the vocational education context, the study highlights the relevance of aligning curriculum design with industry demands for collaborative, communication, and negotiation competencies. The findings suggest that business education programs, especially in polytechnic institutions, should move beyond fragmented course structures and adopt more cohesive learning designs that intentionally link management fundamentals with applied interpersonal skills to better prepare graduates for collaborative business environments..

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