



CLEMSON UNIVERSITY MASTER OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION:

## **KII™ in the Classroom Case Study**

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# KII™ in the Classroom Case Study

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## Introduction

The question that framed this case study was, “How would students in a graduate level program perform, think, and learn if they had knowledge of their influence potential?” Students took the KII™ assessment then used the KII™ Report as supplemental information in a 3-5 page class paper. It was concluded that knowledge of influence potential greatly shaped and determined learning direction and comprehension.

The Clemson University’s Master of Business Administration (MBA) course of study positions students to become immersed in creative learning, sharing ideas and collaborating with prestigious domestic and international companies on real-world projects. Students have the opportunity to network with executives, entrepreneurs and HR professionals, offering multiple ways to advance their career or program of specialized study. Clemson MBA students are making a difference in the world.



Influence is the most important asset a person can possess. The Keller Influence Indicator® (KII™), developed by Dr. Karen Keller, was introduced to 43 students enrolled in the Business Communication 850 course at Clemson University MBA Program to take a look at how they might use the KII™ in their studies, learning, and course engagement.

It was Dr. Keller’s desire to determine the effect influence has on the student’s ability to focus, and develop new knowledge, and their insight and awareness into the specific influence traits that inspire them to become better leaders and productive entrepreneurs. Additionally, it was the author’s guess that knowing more about your influence traits would open the door for a stronger sense of one’s own leadership and entrepreneurial capability.

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## Methodology

The Clemson MBA Business Communication professor supplied each student with a link to purchase and take the KII™ assessment. They were to complete the assessment within 10 days. 39 students completed the assessment. Students created individual accounts that were password protected. Once they completed the assessment, the KII™ Report was available to view and/or download and print.

The class assignment was to develop a Communication Plan to effectively implement and communicate an innovation idea. The purpose of the assignment was to incorporate all aspects of class discussion and learning to create a plan to make their idea a reality. They were to include their personal communication skills/influence while clearly articulating the benefits of their innovation idea through written communication and oral presentation, and honing their listening and meeting management skills critical to their success over time.

The students included information and insight they gained from the KII™ Report in this class assignment. Students were given access to the KII™ Research Summary Report to gain increased knowledge and understanding of the creation, norming and demographic data of the Keller Influence Indicator®. At no time during this process were student's confidential information shared and they remained anonymous throughout the study. Dr. Keller met with the class via a video conference call discussing the KII™ assessment, research and answered any questions. The SOCR™ Report, which is the KII™ Summary and Organizational Competencies Report, was delivered three months later as additional new information that they could incorporate into their self-awareness and development into these Five Organizational Competencies; leadership, communication, team effectiveness, strategy and solutions, and execution and evaluation.

# Findings

Once the class completed the KII™ assessment, their K-Factor™ and Seven Influence Traits™ scores were calculated according to their responses on the assessment. The class aggregate findings are as follows:

TRAIT	RANGE	AVERAGE
K-Factor®	51-95	69.4
Confidence	49-100	72.7
Commitment	66-100	83.0
Courage	49-93	74.8
Passion	49-100	75.0
Empowering	49-93	76.8
Trustworthiness	54-99	78.7
Likeability	54-96	74.6

Students incorporated their KII™ knowledge and insight into the classroom assignment. It was indicated that several of the Seven Influence Traits™ were highly valued and relevant to what the student wished to accomplish in their development and growth as leaders and proficient communicators.

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## Discussion

Below are a few examples of students' written responses about taking the KII, reflecting on their scores, and how this awareness, information and insight can impact their success as leaders and entrepreneurs.

**Student A** examines their likeability and empowering scores.

"The two lowest scores from my Influence Indicator Assessment were Likeability at 80 and Empowering at 84. The area that I am most interested on improving is empowering. Empowering encompasses several aspects; it is a way of leading that is accomplished by sharing the knowledge and tools needed for other people to succeed. Through this process, the individuals that are helped are better able to find success in their work. This is because they now have access to the resources needed, instruction as to how to use it, and the confidence to succeed."

Student A went on to say, "A further characteristic that being able to empower requires is effectively sharing information with others. This takes strong communication skills and a deep understanding of the material. To truly understand a subject, one needs to be able to know how to teach and instruct others. This higher level of thinking shows that one is willing to put extra effort in and able to operate at a high level."

***"Someone with strong empowerment skills makes it possible for people to handle problems and better themselves."***

This student acknowledges the importance of empowering and how they need to intentionally put it into practice in order to benefit from what they've learned.

Another student reported on the conflict between scores reported and the reality or reason behind those scores. **Student B** writes:

"According to Dr. Keller, someone with strong empowerment skills makes it possible for people to handle problems and better themselves. She assumes that "when you give people the resources, authority, opportunity, and the chance to contribute they will increase their competency and fulfillment." The majority of my employees are in dead-end minimum-wage jobs, so how do you empower unmotivated employees? I'm also not sure how to overcome my insecurity/distrust of my employees, most of whom have let me down more times than I can count. In the end, they aren't the ones who will be chastised, so I make sure things get done by micromanaging or just doing it myself. I would like to recognize employees who do a good job and I do so verbally when appropriate, but our corporate recognition system is flawed and I can't do anything really memorable for my employees. Progressive discipline, on the other hand, is quite easy to do so the stick becomes mightier than the carrot, and few people actually feel empowered. In many ways, I don't feel empowered myself. Most decisions that I want to make have to be approved by those above me and that process is inefficient and unrewarding.

According to Dr. Keller, "Being trustworthy means another person can place their trust in you

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and feel secure that their trust will not be betrayed. As a trustworthy person, you are honest, you keep your promises, and you value loyalty to others.” Yet, I have a low score. According to Dr. Keller, this is a matter of perspective from my employees – they don’t think I am trustworthy because of who they think I am. I will admit that I struggle learning how to manage in this new role of mine. In my former role, when I asked someone to do something, they did it willingly or at least thoroughly. In my current role, I have had employees flat out refuse to participate in a task or agree to do it and immediately express to their coworkers (loudly) that they will not. As I have observed this behavior with other managers, I have attempted to use their methods in dealing with it. Maybe I come across as manipulative or dishonest – it is never my intention to do so. I am trying to learn as best I can. How do you build trust while maintaining a business full of unwilling/unruly participants? Sometimes, the place just has to run and the people just have to do the job whether they like it or not.

***“I must learn to trust my employees to do their jobs and in turn build their trust of me to manage their tasks.”***

The issue I see in both of these seem to have to same solution: I must learn to trust my employees to do their jobs and in turn build their trust of me to manage their tasks. I know the stress level that comes from micromanaging or doing everything. I have been at work hours after closing trying to fix what someone else left undone (whether because I didn’t inspect properly or they just left and clocked out without finishing or checking out). As the report says, I must build a rapport with my staff (which I try to do daily). Dr. Keller says, “strong rapport leads to respect, trust and commitment from others.” I’m also learning to deal with my assertive staff members and funnel that energy into proper channels. As I learn how to channel, though, I must be careful not to “use ‘tricks’, deception or manipulation, to get what [I] need or want” as this will negatively affect my perceived trustworthiness with my staff. I need to consistently recognize (by whatever medium I can effectively do so) employees for their strengths and even failed attempts. It’s so easy to get caught up in the stress of the day and the overabundance of tasks to complete that I forget to recognize (or delay too long and the person leaves for the night).

I must build my patience with people I view as incompetent so that they trust that I know what needs to be done to finish the shift strong. Overall, I must be consistent: whether by recognition, patience, dealing with assertive employees, or building rapport, I must behave the same way today as I did yesterday. My struggle here is remembering what I did yesterday or why I did it. Sometimes, I get so caught up in the moment, I can tell someone that something is OK to do (because of the current situation) but then the employee assumes this is the standard. The days easily run together for me due to the high-stress environment I’m in, so I often forget what I allowed in this one-time setting (that was assumed to be an every time setting). I also must take care of issues immediately and not let them fall away. I sometimes shy away from a confrontation or let a bad situation continue because causing a person to leave for the night would negatively impact customer service. I must find a balance in these issues to deal with problems when they come yet operate effectively.”

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This response is a strong indication of the impact outside circumstances may play in determining how influential a person is allowed to be. This individual obviously is more empowering and trustworthy but the KII™ Report reflected how he/she is prevented from showing and acting on these traits.

What's more, another student reported disagreement with their KII™ Report on how they view themselves compared to how others might view them. **Student C** writes:

“Likeability is important because it takes into account how positively I am viewed by others. I would be interested to know the questions that calculate this score, as I may have answered some of the questions incorrectly in the eyes of the test’s underlying assumptions. For example, while I am very busy and don’t often like listening to other people’s stories; despite that I do it to be polite. I am almost always smiling, friendly and am often described as bubbly. The description in “likeability score meaning” section describes someone who is very different from me. The score meaning section described someone that discounts social rules and niceties, someone who doesn’t smile, etc. I try to follow social norms and being liked by others is very important to me; I am a people pleaser.

The competitive advantage section made more sense. I am always well prepared and oftentimes my honesty is misunderstood. The personal strength section seems a little off as well. I do not like for others to talk more (as the section says) because people enjoy speaking and don’t feel I have a curious nature at all. I typically take things at face value. In addition, the blind spots and pitfalls section is not describing me at all. I smile all the time and typically make eye contact unless I am extremely uncomfortable. The final section on making improvements had some good recommendations. I do need to work on being more empathetic and showing compassion. I often become consumed with my business and don’t always take time to pay attention to others. Despite my test results not being a completely accurate reflection of my daily behavior, I agree that I can improve in the area of likeability, as well as the other six areas highlighted in the Keller Influence test.

***“By making a conscious effort to improve my likeability, it will slowly shift how I am perceived by others.”***

I think the number one way for me to improve my likeability is to slow down. This will give time to recognize those around me, listen to others tell stories and identify opportunities to make others feel special. Secondly, I could be more perceptive of my tone and approach in communicating with others. This is especially important when requesting help from others or providing constructive feedback. I know at times I don’t realize that I come across as inconsiderate or rude when that is not my intention. Lately, I can try to make schedules, initiatives and conversations less about me and more about others. In additional I will continue to be my naturally happy and bubbly person that I am and make eye contact when speaking with others.

By making a conscious effort to improve my likeability, it will slowly shift how I am perceived by others. As the results summary say, increasing my likeability does not have a one dimensional effect. Others will see me as more dependable, trustworthy, competent and all around fun to be around. It will help me gain the respect and admiration of those around me. In my career it will



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help me be considered for leadership roles because others will want to be on my team and want to follow my lead. With my ultimate goal of moving into a leadership position in my career it is critical that I am not only able to increase my likeability but my overall Keller influence score.”

This response was included to demonstrate that even though the student disagreed with the KII™ results, the student gained some insight as to how they could be viewed a certain way and what they could do to improve that perception.

And lastly, another student responded on her likeability score. **Student D** writes:

“When it comes to my likeability score of 71, I agree with it 100%. I believe I am liked by most and disliked by many. I have bad tendencies which should be worked on. Conversely, I also don’t want to be liked by everyone. I think that is a way to get hurt and be taken advantage of. I do not try to avoid friendships, but I believe if a situation arises in which I ‘get thrown to the curb’ by a friend, it probably happened for a reason. I have learned in many scenarios that not everyone wants to hear the truth. They may think they do, but in the end, they will believe what they want to believe. The influence test says it best “You would rather be blunt, even if it upsets people”. I enjoy being a dominant female in which I try to do the right thing in situations even if that means someone may not like me after what they hear.

All in all, there are things I would like to work on in order to increase my likability. Some of these things include showing more passion for the people around me. I should learn to listen better and care about people’s everyday life. I should ask more questions and be more outgoing. I need to learn to become engaged in a conversation and stay involved in it. I need to take advantage of the moments I can give positive feedback. I have noticed in the past I tend to compare other people’s stories to situations in my life and then begin talking about my relationship rather than concentrating on the other person. I have been working on asking questions about others’ personal stories, instead of sharing my own and turning the table to me. I should let people get to know me and my story, but I should listen and communicate about theirs too. I believe due to the first impression I may give off, it takes me longer to become likable. Therefore, I will work on being more outgoing and intrigued when meeting new people.

***“The concept of trying to become more likable is a hard emotional factor to accept.”***

I think the concept of trying to become more likable is a hard emotional factor to accept. I want people to like me for who I am, but unfortunately, I notice now I may need to change in order for people to enjoy being around me.”

This response indicates the open-mindedness of one student to consider how others react to them based on what how they act or express themselves. This student is actively entertaining new ways of interacting with others, especially during the first meeting.

All of these examples demonstrate how the students initially felt about their scores but upon further reflection and reading they came to understand, learn and accept why they received the score they did. Each student was able to use that learning and describe how they would incorporate it into their future behavior.

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## Conclusions

The KII™ offered Clemson University MBA students the opportunity to view themselves as individuals who have the influence potential to realize their goals as leaders, entrepreneurs, and as contributors to society. The KII™ Report opened their eyes to their competitive advantage, strengths, blindspots, improvements to make and the benefits of those improvements. It showcased the internal changes and adjustments an individual must go through in order to substantially grow, i.e., shift their awareness, attitude and action. The KII™ introduced the MBA student to deeper appreciations, breakthroughs and new perspectives about themselves. All of which are critical to their success as influential individuals.

The professor, **Gary Bernardez**, summarized how he utilized the Keller Influence Indicator® as part of his class. He noted:

“The basis of my course was to utilize subject matter experts and my corporate experience to address the broad subject of Business Communications. This included written communications, oral presentations, listening skills, customer feedback, conflict resolution, etc.

The topic of Influence was very important to me and one that I wanted to stress to the students. Over my 29 years in corporate America, I witnessed how critical influence is to your success, especially early in your career as you build the foundation of your career. I did not have a good base of material to discuss influence other than personal experience.

I was fortunate enough to be introduced to Karen Keller through an associate and quickly understood that the Keller Influence Indicator® would be a great fit for the course. My approach was to introduce the students to the assessment during the first class to stress the importance influence plays in all areas of effective communication. Students took the assessment and were informed of the tools that Karen has to further develop their ability to be influential.”

**“Over my 29 years in corporate America, I witnessed how critical influence is to your success”**

— Gary Bernardez,  
Clemson University

The Keller Influence Indicator® does have an impact on how students view themselves, how they are viewed by others. It inspired them to reflect on ways to improve these perceptions. They realize the effect this will have on their ability to empower, be liked or trustworthy. Further, they understand the connection between the Seven Influence Traits™ and overall success as a student, leader, entrepreneur and person.

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## References

See the KII™ Summary Research Report <http://karen-keller.com/kii/research-summary-report>

## Appendix

### **BUSINESS COMMUNICATION 850 COURSE DESCRIPTION**

The ability to effectively communicate permeates all aspects of business life. Every component of leadership requires strong and fit-for-purpose communication skills to achieve results in a complex and globally connected world.

The exchange of information takes place in numerous ways, including written, oral presentations, listening, body language, conflict resolution, meetings, and many more. Your ability to persuasively interface with the various constituents in a business environment is critical. Effective communication skills are an important key to success.

This course will provide you with a solid understanding of the many ways communication functions within an organization. Through a combination of readings, case studies, guest speakers, and real-world scenarios, we will explore the many facets of business communication over the next five weeks.