

# 14

## Interpersonal Communication Skills

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### Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, you will be able to understand:

- ◆ Soft skills and the importance of Interpersonal Communication
- ◆ Active listening and Critical Thinking Skills
- ◆ Emotional Intelligence, Emotional Quotient
- ◆ The Role of leadership in organisation

*The most powerful agent of growth and transformation is something much more basic than any technique: a change of heart.*

John Welwood

### 14.1 Introduction

"People skills" or interpersonal skills are an essential ingredient for success in any career. These skills create a positive communication climate in which people feel valued. The key factors to building a positive environment in all areas of one's life are interpersonal communication, active listening, critical thinking and emotional intelligence, which during a conflict focus on solving problems.

### 14.2 Principles of Interpersonal Communication

Interpersonal communication differs from other forms of communication discussed earlier, in that there are few participants involved; those interacting are in close physical proximity to each other; there are many sensory channels used, and feedback is immediate.

The following principles are basic to interpersonal communication:

**Interpersonal communication is inescapable:** The very attempt not to communicate communicates something. Through not only words, but through tone of voice and through gesture, posture, facial expression, etc., we constantly communicate to those around us and through these channels, we constantly receive communication from others. Remember that: people judge you by your behaviour, not by your intent.

**Interpersonal communication is irreversible:** A Russian proverb says, "Once a word goes out of your mouth, you can never swallow it again." You cannot really take back something once it has been said. The effect will inevitably remain.

**Interpersonal communication is complicated:** No form of communication is simple. Because of the number of variables involved, even simple requests are extremely complex. .Actually we don't exchange ideas, But symbols that stand for ideas. This complicates communication. Words (symbols) do not have inherent meaning; we simply use them in certain ways, and no two people use the same word exactly alike.

**Interpersonal communication is contextual:** In other words, communication does not happen in isolation. There is: **psychological context**, which is who the communicators are and what they bring to the interaction. Their needs, desires, values, personality, etc., all form the psychological context.

**Relational context**, which concerns reactions to each other.

**Situational context** deals with the "psycho-social-where" one is communicating. For example, an interaction that takes place in a classroom will be very different from one that takes place in a Board room.

**Environmental context** deals with the "physical -where" one is communicating. Furniture, location, noise level, temperature, season, time of day, all are examples of factors in the environmental context.

**Cultural context** includes all the learned behaviours and rules that affect the interaction. If you come from a culture (foreign or within your own country) where it is considered rude to make long, direct eye contact, you will out of politeness avoid eye contact. If the other person comes from a culture where long, direct eye contact signals trustworthiness, then we have in the cultural context a basis for misunderstanding.

### 14.3 Functions of Interpersonal Communication

Interpersonal communication is important because of the following functions it achieves:

**Gaining Information:** One reason we engage in interpersonal communication is to gain knowledge about another individual. We attempt to gain information about others so that we can interact with them more effectively.

**Building Understanding:** interpersonal communication helps us to understand better what someone says in a given context. Words can mean very different things depending on how they are said or in what context. **Content Messages** refer to the surface level meaning of a message. **Relationship Messages** refer to how a message is said. The two are sent simultaneously, but each affects the meaning assigned to the communication and helps us understand each other better.

**Establishing Identity:** We also engage in interpersonal communication to establish an identity based on our relationships and the image we present to others

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**Interpersonal Needs:** we also engage in interpersonal communication to express interpersonal needs. William Schutz has identified three such needs: inclusion, control, and affection.

- Inclusion is the need to establish identity with others.
- Control is the need to exercise leadership and prove one's abilities.
- Affection is the need to develop relationships with people.

### Tips for Improving Interpersonal Skills

Lines of communications must be open between people who rely on one another to get work done. Poor interpersonal communications skills (which include active listening), result in low productivity simply because one does not have the tools needed to influence, persuade and negotiate – all necessary for workplace success.

**1) Congruency in communication elements:** If the words used are incongruent with the other interpersonal communication dynamics interpersonal communication is adversely affected. Body language, facial expression, posture, movement, and tone of voice to help emphasize the truth, sincerity, and reliability of the communication. A consistent message ensures effective communication.

**2) Listening Effectively:** Effective or active listening is a very important skill to enhance interpersonal communication. Listening helps to build strong personal relationships. The process of communication completes when the message as intended by the sender is understood by the receiver.

## 14.4 Active Listening & Critical Thinking

**Active Listening:** Most of us assume that listening is natural trait, but practically very few of us listen properly. What we regularly do is - we hear but don't listen. Hearing is through ears and listening is by mind. Listening happens when we understand and message as intended by the sender.

If one does not learn how to listen, a great deal of what people are trying to tell you would be missed. In addition, appropriate response would not be possible. Active listening is important for several reasons. First, it aids the organization in carrying out its mission. In addition, it helps individuals to advance in their careers. It provides information that helps them to learn about important happenings in the organization, as well as assisting them in doing their own jobs well. It also helps build strong personal relationships. Despite these advantages, most workers are poor listeners for a variety of reasons, physiological, environmental, attitudinal, socio-cultural, and educational.

### Guidelines for Active Listening

- Look at the person and suspend other things you are doing in order to understanding the other person's concerns, intentions.

- Be interested in what the person is saying. If you just can't make yourself interested, you will lose important information, so try taking notes. Doing so will keep you body and mind active.
- Listen to the tone of voice and inflections; look at gestures and body language - these may carry an unspoken message.
- Restate what the person said. Restating their meaning is a way for you to make sure you understand the person clearly.
- Ask questions once in a while to clarify meaning. Doing so will keep you alert. and let the other person know you have been listening and are interested in getting all the facts and ramifications.
- Be aware of your own feelings and opinions.

**Critical Thinking:** Critical thinking is the discipline of rigorously and skillfully using information, experience, observation and reasoning to guide your decisions, actions and beliefs. Critical thinking means questioning every step of your thinking process: Have you considered all the facts? Have you tested your assumptions? Is your reasoning sound? Can you be sure your judgment is unbiased? Is your thinking process logical, rational and complete? This kind of rigorous, logical questioning is often known as Socratic questioning, after the Greek Socrates who is considered to be the founder of critical thinking. By developing the skills of critical thinking, and bringing rigour and discipline to your thinking processes, you stand a better chance of being "right", likely to make good judgments, choices and decisions in all areas of your life. This is an important part of "success" and "wisdom".

To do this effectively, you need to develop skills to:

*Analyze Cause and Effect:* You must be able to separate the motive or reason for an action or event (the cause) from the result or outcome (the effect).

*Classify and Sequence:* You must be able to group items or sort them according to similar characteristics.

*Compare and Contrast:* You must be able to determine how things are similar and how they are different.

*Infer:* You must be skilled in reasoning and extending logic to come up with plausible options or outcomes.

*Evaluate:* You must be able to determine sound criteria for making choices and decisions.

*Observe:* You must be skilled in attending to the details of what actually happened.

*Predict:* You must be able to finding and analyze trends, and extend these to make sensible predictions about the future.

*Rationalize:* You must be able to apply the laws of reason (induction, deduction, analogy) in to judge an argument and determine its merits.

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*Prioritize:* You must be able to determine the importance of an event or situation and put it in the correct perspective.

*Summarize:* You must be able to distill a brief report of what happened or what you have learned.

*Synthesize:* You must be able to identify new possible outcome by using pieces of information that you already know.

**Qualities of a Critical Thinker:** By combining the skills of critical thinking with the appropriate mindset, you can make better decisions and adopt more effective courses of action. To develop as a critical thinker one must be motivated to develop the following attributes

1. *Open-minded* – is willing to accept and explore alternative approaches and ideas.
2. *Well-informed* – Knows the facts and what is happening on all fronts.
3. *Experimental* – Think through “what if” scenarios to create probable options and then test the theories to determine what will work and what won’t.
4. *Contextual* – Keeps in mind the appropriate context when thinking things through. Apply factors of analysis that are relevant or appropriate.
5. *Reserved in Making Conclusions* – Know when a conclusion is “fact” and when it is not. Only true conclusions support decisions.

### 14.5 Emotional Intelligence

Every day, emotions shape the path of our lives and influence our decision-making. Our emotional actions and reactions affect who we are and control whether or not we are able to achieve our goals. Each days news comes to us with emotional disquiet showing an increase in incidents of aggression - teens with guns in schools, freeway mishaps ending in shootings, disgruntled employees killing colleagues. Such reports of the collapse of civility and safety, reflects out of control emotions in our own lives and in those of the people around us. As Aristotle saw, the problem is not with emotionality, but with the appropriateness of emotion and its expression. The difference quite often lies in the abilities called emotional intelligence, which include self-control, zeal and persistence, and the ability to motivate oneself.

“Emotional Intelligence” refers to the capacity to recognize your own feelings and those of others, for motivating yourself, and for managing emotions well in yourself and in your relationships. “It describes abilities distinct from, but complementary to, academic intelligence, the purely cognitive capabilities measured by IQ. Many people who are book smart but lack emotional intelligence end up working for people who have lower IQs than they but who excel in emotional intelligence skills.”<sup>1</sup> The basic flair for living called emotional intelligence is being able, for example, to rein in emotional impulse; to read another’s innermost feelings; to handle

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<sup>1</sup> Emotional Intelligence, Daniel Goleman, 1995

relationships smoothly as Aristotle put it, the rare skill “to be angry with the right person, in the right way.” “Intelligent” puts emotions at the centre of our abilities. These factors, which include self-awareness, self-discipline, and empathy, add up to a different way of being smart-one he terms “emotional intelligence.” While childhood is a critical time for its development, emotional intelligence is not fixed at birth. It can be nurtured and strengthened throughout adulthood-with immediate benefits to our health, our relationships, and our work. A view of human nature that ignores the power of emotions is sadly shortsighted. The very name Homo sapiens, the thinking species, is misleading in light of the new appreciation and vision of the place of emotions in our lives that science now offers. As we all know from experience, when it comes to shaping our decisions and our actions, feeling counts every bit as much-and often more-than thought. We have gone too far in emphasizing the value and import of the purely rational-of what IQ measures-in human life. For better or worse, intelligence can come to nothing when the emotions hold sway. Emotional Quotient Inventory is designed to measure a number of constructs related to emotional intelligence. A large part of our success in life is based on our EQ, our emotional quotient. How we manage our emotions and the way we relate to others determines how successful and satisfied we are at work, home, and with friends. Our EQ is the ability to make and deepen connections at three levels: with ourselves (personal mastery), with another person (one-to-one), and within groups/teams. Our EQ, or Emotional Intelligence, is the capacity for effectively recognizing and managing our own emotions and those of others. Emotions have the potential to get in the way of our most important business and personal relationships.

## 14.6 Competencies Associated with Emotional Intelligence<sup>2</sup>

### I – Personal Competence – How You Manage Yourself

#### *Self-Awareness*

- *Emotional self-awareness:* Reading your own emotions and recognizing their impact; using ‘gut sense’ to guide decisions
- *Accurate self-assessment:* Knowing your strengths and weaknesses
- *Self-confidence:* A sound sense of your self-worth and capabilities
- *Self-Management*
- *Emotional self-control:* Keeping disruptive emotions and impulses under control
- *Transparency:* Displaying honesty and integrity; trustworthiness
- *Adaptability:* Flexibility in adapting to changing situations or overcoming obstacles
- *Achievement:* The drive to improve performance to meet inner standards of excellence
- *Initiative:* Readiness to act and seize opportunities

<sup>2</sup> “Working with Emotional Intelligence”, Daniel Goleman, 1998

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- *Optimism*: Seeing the upside in events

### II – Social Competence – How You Manage Relationships

#### Social Awareness

- Empathy: Sensing other's emotions, understanding their perspective and taking active interest in their concerns
- Organizational awareness: Reading the currents, decision networks, and politics at the organizational level
- Service: Recognizing and meeting follower, client, or customer needs

#### Relationship Management

- Inspirational leadership: Guiding and motivating with a compelling vision
- Influence: Wielding a range of tactics for persuasion
- Developing others: Bolstering others' abilities through coaching, feedback and guidance
- Change catalyst: Initiating, managing, and leading in a new direction
- Conflict management: resolving disagreements
- Building bonds: Cultivating and maintaining a web of relationships
- Teamwork and collaboration: Cooperation and team building

According to John Kotter of Harvard Business School, 'because of the furious pace of change in business today, difficult to manage relationships sabotage more business than anything else – it is not a question of strategy that gets us into trouble, it is a questions of emotions'. The wonderful thing about EQ, unlike IQ which stabilizes when a person is around 18 years of age, is that it can change. A person today with a low EQ score on "empathy" can have a higher "empathy" score in the future – if that person recognizes his/her limitation, changes attitude, adopts a learning strategy, and practices key listening and empathy skills.

Successful organizations nurture their people with outstanding EQ. The future will belong to those who have excellent relationship skills.