CHAPTER 1:
A FRAMEWORK FOR INTERPERSONAL SKILL DEVELOPMENT

The first chapter sets the stage for improving interpersonal relations in organizations by presenting a framework for interpersonal skill development and training. Students who follow this framework seriously will increase the probability of enhancing their interpersonal relations in the workplace through the use of this text and its accompanying course.

CHAPTER OUTLINE AND LECTURE NOTES

Many people are held back from promotions and pay raises, and even lose their jobs, because of poor interpersonal relations (relationships with people).

I. PLAN OF THE BOOK
A three-part strategy is presented for achieving interpersonal effectiveness. First, key concepts are presented. Second, the reader receives behavioral guidelines. Third, the reader does exercises such as self-quizzes, skill-builders, and analyzes cases. Much of the book is about interpersonal skill training, the teaching of skills in dealing with others so they can be put into practice. Interpersonal skills are sometimes referred to as soft skills, whereas technical skills are referred to as hard skills.

II. A MODEL FOR IMPROVING INTERPERSONAL SKILLS
A five-part model is presented for acquiring and improving interpersonal skills.

A. Goal or Desired State of Affairs.
The goal helps provide motivation and makes it possible to exercise the self-discipline necessary to follow through on your plans.

B. Assessing Reality
The person needs to assess how far away he or she is from reaching the goal. Soliciting feedback from others about distance from the goal is helpful.

C. An Action Plan
Actions must be taken to improve interpersonal relations. Implementing the plan requires self-discipline.

D. Feedback on Actions
The person obtains feedback on the consequences of his or her actions. Short- and long-term measures of effectiveness are important.

E. Frequent Practice
For the new skill to be long lasting it must be integrated into the person’s usual way of conducting himself or herself. After a skill is programmed into a person’s repertoire, it becomes a habit.

III. IDENTIFICATION OF DEVELOPMENTAL NEEDS
People are the most likely to develop new skills when they feel the need for change. A specific area in which a person needs to change is referred to as a developmental need. Self-analysis, thinking through past feedback, and soliciting new feedback are helpful in identifying developmental needs. Feedback from performance appraisals is useful also.

A. Universal Needs for Improving Interpersonal Relations
Some areas for skill improvement in interpersonal relations are found among managerial, professional, technical, and sales personnel. A universal training need is an area for improvement common to most people. The text is organized around universal needs, as follows:

1. Understanding individual differences
2. Interpersonal communication
3. Developing teamwork skills
4. Group problem solving
5. Cross-cultural relations
6. Resolving conflicts with others
7. Becoming an effective leader
8. Motivating others
9. Helping others develop
10. Positive political skills
11. Customer service skills
12. Enhancing ethical behavior
13. Personal productivity and stress management
14. Job search and career management skills

IV. DEVELOPING INTERPERSONAL SKILLS ON THE JOB
Opportunities exist in the workplace for developing interpersonal skills that can be a valuable supplement to more formal training.

A. Informal Learning
Informal learning is the acquisition of knowledge and skills that takes place naturally outside of a structured learning environment. One study showed that up to 70 percent of learning takes place informally. Learning interpersonal skills informally can take place though such means as observing a coworker, manager, or team leader deal with a situation. Formal and informal learning of interpersonal skills are useful supplements to each other.
B. Specific Developmental Experiences

Certain workplace experiences are particularly suited to interpersonal skill development. These experiences are (1) unfamiliar responsibilities, (2) proving yourself, (3) problems with employees, (4) influencing others without authority, and (5) having a difficult boss.

**ANSWERS TO DISCUSSION AND REVIEW QUESTIONS**

1. One of the most prestigious business schools, the Wharton School, now places much more emphasis on people skills than previously. What do you suspect are the reasons for this change?

   A major reason for the current emphasis on teaching interpersonal relations in the leading business schools is that the pendulum swung too far in the other direction. Many MBAs in the past emphasized financial results too heavily, often neglecting the human aspects of management such as motivating people and building morale.

2. In your opinion, do high-ranking business executives rely more on soft skills or hard skills to accomplish their work?

   Top business executives rely heavily on leadership skills to accomplish their work so it could be argued that they emphasize people skills. Nevertheless, financial skills as well as other analytical skills are also important for business executives.

3. Why do people need soft skills in an era of high technology?

   Soft skills are important in an era of high technology for several reasons. Despite the presence of technology, human problems exist. People still need to be motivated to work at full capacity; communication problems still exist; conflicts must be resolved; and so forth. Another factor favoring soft skills is that the era of information technology has created much depersonalization. Soft skills are therefore helpful in humanizing the workplace.

4. In your own words, what does "assessing reality" mean in the model for improving interpersonal relations?

   Assessing reality refers to measuring the gap between where the person would like to be in terms of interpersonal effectiveness, and where he or she really is. The gap represents the opportunity for skill development.

5. How does a person know if the feedback he or she receives from another person is accurate?
A major factor in measuring the accuracy of feedback is corroboration. If several informed individuals point to the same developmental need for an individual, he or she should take it seriously. Intuition is also an important consideration. If the feedback "feels" right, it is most likely accurate.

6. Based on what you have learned so far in this book, and your own intuition, how would you respond to the statement, You can t learn how to get along with people from reading a book?

The model presented in this book indicates that you can learn ideas for getting along with people from a book, but you must also obtain feedback on how well you have acquired the skills, and practice the new skills.

7. Give an example of a skill you might have learned informally at any point in your life.

Students cite excellent examples of informal learning, including both hard skills and soft skills. One student explained how he learned to become a butcher by observing experienced butchers. Dealing with customer complaints is another skill set many people have learned through informal learning.

**ANSWERS TO CASE QUESTIONS**

*Can Claims Examiner Carrie Be Helped?*

A major point illustrated by this case is that even generally competent professionals have developmental needs in the interpersonal domain.

1. What are Carrie s developmental needs?

   Carrie s developmental needs include (a) becoming less critical of others, (b) softening her strong negative disposition, and (c) becoming less judgmental of others.

2. What are Carrie s universal developmental needs?

   Carrie has many universal developmental needs. Among them are (a) teamwork skills, (b) resolving conflicts with others, (c) motivating others, (d) helping others develop, and (e) positive political skills.

3. What do you recommend that Michelle Pettigrew do to improve Carrie s interpersonal relationships in the office?
Although a slow process, Pettigrew should give Carrie frequent feedback about how her behaviors annoy and irritate others.

4. What is your evaluation of Michelle’s approach to dealing with Carrie so far?

The information presented in the case suggests that Michelle is dealing only with Carrie’s behavior as it affects her (Michelle) directly. Michelle might counsel Carrie about her negative relationships with coworkers and customers as well.

COMMENTS ABOUT QUIZZES AND EXERCISES

*What Are Your Developmental Needs?*

This exercise is placed first in the text because it sets the stage for serious thinking about personal development in the interpersonal sphere. One approach to this exercise is to request each student to present one developmental need and action plan to the class. After the presentations are complete, students are asked to interpret what they heard. My experience has been that students often ask the instructor to identify his or her most pressing developmental need. So be prepared!
EXAMINATION QUESTIONS

Multiple Choice

(b) 1. Interpersonal relations refer mostly to
   a. employer-employee problems.
   b. relationships with people.
   c. settling labor disputes.
   d. relationships among coworkers.

(c) 2. Jobs requiring interaction with people require a combination of
   a. technical skills and developmental needs.
   b. effective skills in interpersonal relations and customer-service.
   c. effective skills in interpersonal relations and technical work.
   d. leadership skills and interpersonal skills.

(a) 3. A key aspect of interpersonal skill training is that the
   a. skills can be put into practice.
   b. learner overcomes all developmental needs.
   c. learner forms good interpersonal relations with the other learners.
   d. skills are placed into memory.

(d) 4. The difference between soft skills and hard skills refers to the distinction between
   a. intellectual and mechanical skills.
   b. personal and job-related skills.
   c. irrelevant and relevant skills.
   d. interpersonal and technical skills.

(c) 5. In the basic learning model, a goal refers to
   a. what the person has already accomplished.
   b. completion of the training program.
   c. a desired state of affairs.
   d. the activities required for achieving personal change.

(b) 6. In the basic learning model, assessing reality refers to
   a. researching whether a suitable training program is available.
   b. estimating how far one is from reaching a goal.
   c. figuring out if the person really has developmental needs.
   d. being realistic about one’s possibilities for promotion.
7. An example of an action plan to help Jack become more patient would be for him to
   a. set a goal of becoming more patient.
   b. receive counseling about his impatience.
   c. ask friends if he is really impatient.
   d. figure out how far he is from his goal of being more patient.

8. In the learning model, self-discipline is an especially important contributor to
   a. asking for feedback.
   b. establishing a goal.
   c. choosing an action plan.
   d. implementing the action plans.

9. The first step in the learning model is
   a. informal learning.
   b. establishing a goal for change.
   c. assessing reality.
   d. developing an action plan.

10. The final step in the learning model is
    a. assessing reality.
    b. obtaining feedback.
    c. frequent practice.
    d. developing an action plan.

11. An important requirement at each stage of the model for acquiring skills is
    a. personal satisfaction.
    b. self-discipline.
    c. encouragement from an outside source.
    d. studying the appropriate model.

12. Which one of the following is the most important factor for bringing about the development of a new interpersonal skill?
    a. the learner’s perception of the need for change
    b. the availability of a suitable change program
    c. an encouraging mentor
    d. learning objectives for the training program

13. A developmental need refers to
    a. a person’s level of motivation for change.
b. a person’s need for change.
c. the goal of a skill development program.
d. the goal of a trainer.

d) 14. An important way of identifying developmental needs is through
   a. reading biographies of leaders in your field.
   b. the results of mental ability testing.
   c. choosing the opposite of universal developmental needs.
   d. feedback from others.

c) 15. The first step toward change is
   a. identification of the problem.
   b. establishing a change goal.
   c. a desire for perfection.
   d. satisfaction with the status quo.

(a) 16. The purpose of the developmental need inventory is to identify needs for development and
   a. draw actions plans for bringing about needed change.
   b. specify responsibility for bringing about the change.
   c. compare past successes with future goals.
   d. compare one’s own developmental needs with those of others.

(b) 17. A universal training need refers to
   a. the most comprehensive type of need for change.
   b. an area for skill improvement shared by most people.
   c. a training need of most career beginners.
   d. an urgent need for development.

d) 18. An individual’s developmental need
   a. must be chosen from universal training needs.
   b. becomes converted into a universal training need.
   c. can never be a universal training need.
   d. might also be a universal training need.

c) 19. The biggest change in recent years in how work is organized has been
   a. increasing the number of levels in an organization.
   b. appointing more managers and supervisors.
   c. the shift from traditional departments to teams.
   d. giving less responsibility to workers.

(a) 20. Political skills in the workplace refer to
   a. influencing others so your interests are satisfied.
b. tricking other people toward your way of thinking.
c. undermining the efforts of other people.
d. making other people look bad.

(b) 21. The need for leadership skills has increased in the modern organization because
a. many more permanent leadership positions have been created.
b. more people are required to exercise leadership at least part of the time.
c. many entry-level workers are appointed as supervisors.
d. companies have de-emphasized the importance of groups and teams.

(c) 22. A current trend in helping employees grow and develop is that
a. training departments have grown rapidly to help employees grow and develop.
b. managers expect schools to take care of all growth and development.
c. workers are expected to help coworkers.
d. employees are given three months to grow and develop.

(d) 23. A good example of informal learning would be
a. taking a course in golf or tennis.
b. attending a seminar with friends.
c. studying a text or manual by yourself.
d. acquiring a skill by observing a more experienced worker.

(b) 24. Which one of the following has been identified as a powerful on-the-job learning experience?
   a. influencing others when you have considerable authority
   b. dealing with problem employees
   c. dealing with familiar responsibilities on a regular basis
   d. having a boss who agrees with you in almost all areas

(c) 25. Which one of the following experiences is likely to do you the most good in terms of developing job skills?
   a. being assigned familiar responsibilities
   b. dealing with highly motivated, competent employees
   c. having a boss with serious shortcomings
   d. influencing subordinates (workers who report to you directly)

True/False

(F) 1. Interpersonal skills are referred to as soft skills because a person with good interpersonal skills develops a soft touch toward other people.
2. As the work environment has become more technological, the demand for interpersonal skills has decreased.

3. For purpose of interpersonal skill training, a goal can be considered a desired state of affairs.

4. Assessing reality in the model for learning skills refers to evaluating how much one really wants to develop.

5. An action plan in the learning model refers to a mechanism for changing the relationship between the person and the environment.

6. Self-discipline is especially needed to implement action plans in the learning model.

7. Short-range feedback is usually sufficient to measure the effectiveness of skill development.

8. True skill development takes place when a person integrates the new skill into the usual way of conducting oneself.

9. When an interpersonal skill becomes a habit, it loses its effectiveness.

10. The learning model proceeds in this sequence: Goal  assessing reality  an action plan  feedback on actions  frequent practice.

11. Skipping a step in the learning model is recommended providing the learner is well motivated.

12. People are the most likely to develop new skills when another person talks about the importance of the change.

13. A developmental need refers to about the same idea as a weakness a person should overcome.

14. An example of a developmental need would be, "I become flustered when I talk to people who hold important positions."

15. An example of a developmental need would be, "Someday I would like to be a business owner."

16. Soliciting feedback is an important method for identifying developmental
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needs.

(T) 17. The results of performance evaluations are a recommended source of feedback for determining developmental needs.

(T) 18. An example of a developmental need would be for a person to be very poor at office politics.

(F) 19. The shift toward increasing the number of departments in organizations has led to the increased importance of teamwork skills.

(T) 20. Ethical decision-making is a skill that can be developed.

(T) 22. An example of informal learning would be to develop your Internet search skills through chatting about these skills with coworkers during breaks.

(F) 23. A survey of many company employees indicated that informal learning still only accounts for about 10 percent of workplace learning.

(F) 24. A team leader usually has more authority than a traditional manager at the same organizational level.

(F) 25. One of the biggest inhibitors to developing effective interpersonal skills is to have a boss you cannot get along with.