

ARULMIGU PALANLANDAVAR ARTS COLLEGE FOR WOMEN,

PALANI

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

LEARNING RESOURCES

SOFT SKILLS

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DEFINING SOFT SKILLS

Soft skills are a combination of people skills, social skills, communication skills, character or personality traits, attitudes, mindsets, career attributes, social intelligence and emotional intelligence quotients, among others, that enable people to navigate their environment, work well with others, perform well, and achieve their goals with complementing hard skills. The Collins English Dictionary defines the term "soft skills" as "desirable qualities for certain forms of employment that do not depend on acquired knowledge: they include common sense, the ability to deal with people, and a positive flexible attitude." Soft skills is a composite expression, and each of the two words explains a defining aspect of the concept.

The word "skill" highlights the practical function. The term alone has a broad meaning, and describes a particular ability to complete tasks ranging from easier ones like "learning how to kick a ball" to harder ones like "learning how to be creative." In this specific instance, the word "skill" has to be interpreted as the ability to master hardly controlled actions.

The word "soft" is the opposite of "hard", may appear to mean "subjective, fuzzy, and unreliable," but, "calling these skills soft or noncognitive belies their importance." Because of their subjectivity, soft skills are often not assessed and yet many in business consulting argue that they lie at the foundation of what makes a leader and will determine if an employee will rise to a leadership position. Soft skills represent personal skills necessary for such activities as team work and motivating others.

Soft skills are a cluster of productive personality traits that characterize one's relationships in a social environment. These skills can include social graces, communication abilities, language skills, personal habits, cognitive or emotional empathy, time management, teamwork and leadership traits. A definition based on review literature explains soft skills as an umbrella term for skills under three key functional elements: people skills, social skills, and personal career attributes.

The importance of soft skills lies in the fact that they are not restricted to a specific field. These thinking dispositions consist of a group of abilities that can be used in every aspect of people's lives, without any need to readapt them based on the situation. Their ductility helps "people to adapt and behave positively so that they can deal effectively with the challenges of their professional and everyday life". Soft skills make people flexible in a world which keeps changing.

Interest in soft skills has increased over the years. The more research that is conducted, the more people understand the relevance of this concept. The huge amount of fund companies and worldwide organizations are investing in the training and development of this field shows this interest. The European Commission launched the program Agenda for new skills and jobs in 2012 in order to train and explain to young adults this new set of skills.

Now, in the 21st century, soft skills are a major differentiator, a sine qua non for employability and success in life. The Nobel Prize James Heckman claims that "soft skills predict success in life, that they casually produce that success, and that programs that enhance soft skills have an important place in an effective portfolio of public policies". The significance employers give to the topic is shown by the fact that soft skills are now as

important as GPA (once considered the most important factor in making decisions) in hiring a new worker.

The high request, and the broadly diffused confusion about the meaning and the training of soft skills represent two elements that can explain the lack of soft skills in the job market. Employers struggle to find leaders and worker able to keep up with the evolving job market. The problem is not limited to young people who are looking for a job, but also for actual employees. A 2019 survey by the Society for Human Resource Management found that three-quarters of employers have a hard time finding graduates with the soft skills their companies need.

Hard Skills Versus Soft Sills:

“Hard skills include technical or administrative competence”. Soft skills are commonly used to “refer to the “emotional side” of human beings in opposition to the IQ (Intelligent Quotient) component related to hard skills”. Hard and soft skills are usually defined as similar concepts or complements. This fact demonstrates how these two different types of abilities are strictly related.

Hard skills were the only skills necessary for career employment and were generally quantifiable and measurable from an educational background, work experience or through interview. Success at work seemed to be related solely to the technical ability of completing tasks. For this reason, employer and companies used to hire new people based only on their objective competencies. This clarifies why nowadays people with good soft skills are in such shorter supply than workers with good hard skills.

The trend has changed in the last years. Hard skills still represent a fundamental aspect, but soft skills equalled them for importance. According to the leadership professor Robert Lavasseur, most of the researchers he interviewed in this field “rated soft skills higher than technical skills”. Studies by Stanford Research Institute and the Carnegie Mellon Foundation among Fortune 500 CEOs confirm this idea establishing that 75% of long term job success resulted from soft skills and only 25% from technical skills. Another study found that 80% of achievements in career are determined by soft skills and only 20% by hard skills. In employment sectors that have seen rapid growth, employers have stated that newly graduated employees posses a skill gap. This skill gap resides between soft and hard skills, these newly graduated employees posses the hard skills required and expected, but are lacking the soft skills.

Measuring Soft Skills:

Recent studies by the OECD have found that soft skills can be meaningfully measured within cultural and linguistic boundaries. Such measures include a combination of methods that include self-reported personality, behavioural surveys and objective psychological assessments. These measurements can be improved by collecting data from multiple sources across learning contexts such as the school environment, family context and the wider community and triangulating the data.

This is because surveys can be subject to bias and having multiple sources such as self, teacher, peer and parental reporting can provide unique perspectives on student’s skills as well as infer latent personality. In addition, anchoring vignettes is another method that can be implemented to lessen biases and increase data quality as well as improve cross-cultural comparability of soft skill assessments.

Kinds of Soft Skills:

Some top soft skills are:

- Negotiating
- Customer service
- Networking
- Presentation
- Conflict resolution
- Communication effectiveness
- Teamwork
- Problem-solving
- Working under pressure

IMPORTANCE OF SOFT SKILLS FOR EMPLOYABILITY

Soft skills are an essential part of improving one's ability to work with others and can have a positive influence on furthering your career. If you are a small business owner or self-employed, soft skills can help you find, attract, and retain clients. Highly-developed presentation skills, networking abilities, and etiquette awareness can help you win new clients and gain more work from existing clients. Honing your abilities to resolve conflicts, solve problems, and provide excellent customer service can lead to stronger relationships with colleagues, vendors, and other professional contacts. Ultimately, strong soft skills can help you gain confidence—an invaluable trait in the business world. On the other hand, a lack of soft skills can limit your potential, or even be the downfall of your business. By developing strong leadership, teamwork, and communication abilities, you can run projects more smoothly, deliver results that please everyone, and even positively influence your personal life by improving how you interact with others.

Soft skills refer to both character traits and interpersonal skills that will influence how well a person can work or interact with others. The term 'soft skills' covers a wide range of skills as diverse as teamwork, time management, empathy and delegation.

The World Economic Forum Future of Jobs report suggested that by 2020, complex problem-solving, critical thinking, creativity, people management and emotional intelligence would be among the most important skills required in the workplace.

The importance of these soft skills is often undervalued, and there is far less training provided for them than hard skills such as coding. Organizations seem to expect people know how to behave on the job and the importance of skills such as taking initiative, communicating effectively and listening, which often is not the case.

Why are soft skills important?

Most interactions with other people require some level of soft skills. At a company you might be negotiating to win a new contract, presenting your new idea to colleagues, networking for a new job, and so on. We use soft skills every day at work and developing these soft skills will help you win more business and accelerate your career progression.

On the other hand, a lack of soft skills can limit your potential, or even be the downfall of your business. By developing strong leadership, delegation, teamwork, and communication abilities, you can run projects more smoothly, deliver results that please everyone, and even positively influence your personal life by improving how you interact with others.

Outside of the office, soft skills such as communication are used to build friendship groups and meet potential partners. You might be negotiating the price of your new house renovation, or mentoring your neighbours' children on the weekend. Soft skills are useful both in our professional and personal lives.

Career progression and promotion:

It is found that "Ninety-four percent of recruiting professionals believe an employee with stronger soft skills has a better chance of being promoted to a leadership position than an employee with more years of experience but weaker soft skills." It has become vital to develop these skills if you want to progress in your career as they will set you apart from others at the interview and on the job.

The modern workplace is interpersonal:

Skills such as active listening, collaboration, presenting ideas and communicating with colleagues are all highly valued in the modern workplace. Strong soft skills ensure a productive, collaborative and healthy work environment, all crucial attributes for organisations in an increasingly competitive world.

Customers and clients demand soft skills:

Consumers these days have a huge number of choices of where to buy from, brought about by the internet and smart phones. For these consumers, convenience and low prices are easy to come by, so customer service is often what influences the choice to use a particular business. The ability to communicate at a human level with customers is therefore a vital factor in an organization's success.

The future workplace will rely on soft skills:

Automation and artificial intelligence will result in a greater proportion of jobs relying on soft skills. Advances in technology have caused tasks that require hard skills to decline, making soft skills a key differentiator in the workplace. A study by Deloitte Access Economics predicts that "Soft skill-intensive occupations will account for two-thirds of all jobs by 2030". As the cost of robots decreases and the performance of artificial intelligence improves, jobs such as manufacturing line workers, will become automated. Traditional skills like teamwork, communication and critical thinking will be more important than ever.

Soft skills are hard to automate:

Following on from the previous point, soft skills such as emotional intelligence are hard to automate and unlikely to become automated anytime soon. This means they're expected to become more desirable in the near future. However soft skills can be difficult to teach and track improvements on. Companies such as VirtualSpeech are tackling this by using VR as a way to improve soft skills.

Soft skills are in high demand by recruiters:

Soft skills are in high demand in the workforce. According to the 2017 paper by a Harvard student on the importance of social skills in the labour market, jobs requiring high levels of social interaction grew by nearly 12 percent as a share of the U.S. labour force.

Most in-demand soft skills (from LinkedIn research):

- Communication
- Organisation
- Teamwork
- Critical thinking

- Social skills
- Creativity
- Interpersonal communication
- Adaptability

As computers are very poor at simulating human interaction, social skills are still important. Therefore, individuals should still look to improve their social and soft skills through activities such as volunteering, leading a team or even by working on an open source project with other people.

ENGLISH AS LIFE SKILLS

What are Life Skills:

Life skills are abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable humans to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of life. This concept is also termed as psychosocial competency. The subject varies greatly depending on social norms and community expectations but skills that function for well-being and aid individuals to develop into active and productive members of their communities are considered as life skills. Life skills are often taught in the domain of parenting, either indirectly through the observation and experience of the child, or directly with the purpose of teaching a specific skill. Parenting itself can be considered as a set of life skills which can be taught or comes natural to a person. Educating a person in skills for dealing with pregnancy and parenting can also coincide with additional life skills development for the child and enable the parents to guide their children in adulthood.

Many life skills programs are offered when traditional family structures and healthy relationships have broken down, whether due to parental lapses, divorce, psychological disorders or due to issues with the children (such as substance abuse or other risky behavior). For example, the International Labour Organization is teaching life skills to ex-child laborers and at-risk children in Indonesia to help them avoid and to recover from worst forms of child abuse.

‘Life skills’ is a term used to describe a set of basic skills acquired through learning and/or direct life experience that enable individuals and groups to effectively handle issues and problems commonly encountered in daily life. They include creativity, critical thinking, problem-solving, decision-making, the ability to communicate and collaborate, along with personal and social responsibility that contribute to good citizenship – all essential skills for success in the 21st century, both for healthy societies and for successful and employable individuals.

Issues Touched upon by Life Skills:

- Real: they actually affect people’s lives
- Topical
- Sensitive: they can affect people on a personal level, especially when family or friends are involved
- Controversial: people disagree and hold strong opinions about them
- Moral: they relate to what people think is right or wrong, good or bad, important or unimportant in society.

Why do we need to learn life skills?

Democracies need active, informed and responsible citizens, who are willing and able to take responsibility for themselves and their communities and contribute to the political process.

Democracies depend upon citizens who, among other things, are:

- aware of their rights and responsibilities as citizens
- informed about social and political issues
- concerned about the welfare of others
- able to clearly articulate their opinions and arguments
- capable of having an influence on the world
- active in their communities
- responsible in how they act as citizens.

These capacities do not develop unaided; they have to be learnt. While certain life skills may be acquired through our everyday experience in the home or at work, they are not sufficient to adequately equip citizens for the active role required of them in today's complex and diverse society. If citizens are to become genuinely involved in public affairs, then a more systematic approach towards citizenship education is essential.

English as a life skill:

English as a life skill is a straight and simple tool of communication stripped of its historical baggage, a skill for employment and a vehicle for reaching the outside world of knowledge. It has been a property owned by few elites in Sri Lankan society as a prized possession of a privileged class, as an instrument of social repression but not for its utility. It is now necessary to transform English to common property, for the benefit of all and for the development and prosperity of the country.

English is the language of Information Technology, International Trade and Commerce which Sri Lanka is expected and bound to take forward. The Sri Lankan standard of education is of the highest level with an efficient and intelligent labour force which has won the confidence of local and international employers.

A linguist in England once said that even if English disappears in England it will still continue in India as India has embraced English in education. India has emerged today as the world's centre of excellence for the teaching of English for non-English people. Thousands of people came to India from the former Soviet Republic, or CIS countries, South East Asia, Latin America, Eastern Europe, Russia, China and many other countries in the world. Sri Lanka has the capacity and competence to be an excellent 'Centre of Excellence' on English and Education including Medicine, Agriculture and related subjects. India used English as a utility value and a tool of communication and education, not as a tool for social climbing.

English as a way of life in India and Sri Lanka:

In India and Sri Lanka, cricket and English have become a way of life and played and spoken as well as or better than where it was originated. Children from Tamil and Sinhala speaking homes find it much easier to learn to speak Japanese, Korean, Russian, Chinese, French, and German than to speak English.

In the Middle East – especially in the UAE – over 300,000 are employed with sound working knowledge and competency to speak foreign languages fluently, with reluctance or

refusal to learn to speak English due to deep rooted social fears back in the country of speaking English with an accent.

We must encourage the learner to make mistakes in pronunciation and grammar when speaking and the teacher should quietly and gently guide the learner to progressively make less and less mistakes, giving confidence that it is as easy as any other language. In the United Kingdom not everybody speaks good English. London is an immigrant city full of migrants speaking “Broken English” or their own languages.

Confidence building:

It is confidence building and getting to know the basic vocabulary of a few hundred words with which learner can build on. If two basic building blocks English and IT, were put in place in all hooks and corners of the country, we will be able to get unexpected results in the employment sector which is full of unemployed and under employed, by joining 10% of the population in public service expecting at least a labourer job in the government with a pension, a lot of leave and other perks with very light work irrespective of the qualifications. There are mushrooming international schools of inferior standard and quality teaching mainly for the children unable to find a good school or parents capable and eager to give them an English education. When Arts graduates from Universities go in processions on the road for employment in the public sector, they find employment as sales assistants, industrial and private sector and other establishments.

If we provide this powerful tool scientifically and with ease to those in Information Technology Sector, Journalists, Artists, mature students, and those in employment in the public and private sector and those seeking employment and planning SME’s, it will be a boon and a foundation for a new life and era for the development in the spheres of economics, politics and general outlook in education and employment sectors.

English is a West German Language that was first spoken in medieval England, and now a global language. It is Official language to 60 sovereign countries including Sri Lanka. It is the third most commonly used language developed over 1,400 years and the language of Information Technology, Medicine Trade and Commerce mainly in the Commonwealth of Nations and the West.

Now that we are entangled with English due to colonization by the British, we are bound to carry on with it as in cricket and the system of administration and trade. Our workforce and the future generation needs only a little bit of a push and confidence to learn basic spoken English which will enhance their IT skills and personality.

If one is in a position to command few hundred words with confidence and ease with directions from competent dedicated advisors and teachers, it is possible to master the skill to improve other skills and personality with confidence for success in any discipline.

Technology of Communication:

English at one level is a technology of communication. You need to realize that every technology – and this includes English – is an ideological system as well. In our country English was a communication that was crafted by our Westernized elites as an ideology that provided a gateway to the West which required perfect grammar and pronunciation. Now we no longer need to continue this difficult route which was utilized by the privileged class and instrument of social repression and not as a tool of communication. Internet and mobile phone will be a main route to be utilized.

INTRAPERSONAL SKILLS

SELF-ESTEEM

What is Self-Esteem?

In psychology, the term self-esteem is used to describe a person's overall sense of self-worth or personal value. In other words, how much you appreciate and like yourself. It involves a variety of beliefs about yourself, such as the appraisal of your own appearance, beliefs, emotions, and behaviors. Self-esteem often seen as a personality trait, which means that it tends to be stable and enduring.

Why Self-Esteem is important?

Self-esteem can play a significant role in your motivation and success throughout your life. Low self-esteem may hold you back from succeeding at school or work because you don't believe yourself to be capable of success. By contrast, having a healthy self-esteem can help you achieve because you navigate life with a positive, assertive attitude and believe you can accomplish your goals.

Theories of Self-Esteem:

Many theorists have written on the dynamics involved in self-esteem. The need for self-esteem plays an important role in psychologist Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs, which depicts self-esteem as one of the basic human motivations.

Maslow suggested that people need both esteem from other people as well as inner self-respect. Both of these needs must be fulfilled in order for an individual to grow as a person and achieve self-actualization. It is important to note that self-esteem is a concept distinct from self-efficacy, which involves how well you believe you'll handle future actions, performance, or abilities.

Factors that Influence Self-Esteem:

Many factors influence self-esteem. Your inner thinking, age, any potential illnesses, disabilities, or physical limitations, and your job can affect your self-esteem. Additionally, genetic factors that help shape a person's personality can play a role, but it is often our experiences that form the basis for overall self-esteem. Those who consistently receive overly critical or negative assessments from family and friends, for example, will likely experience low self-esteem.²

Signs of Healthy Self-Esteem:

There are some simple ways to tell if you have healthy self-esteem. You probably have healthy self-esteem if you are more likely to:

- Avoid dwelling on past, negative experiences
- Express your needs
- Feel confident
- Have a positive outlook on life
- Say "no" when you want to
- See overall strengths and weaknesses and accept them

Signs of Low Self-Esteem:

You may need to work on how you perceive yourself if you tend to experience these common problems caused by low self-esteem:

- You believe that others are better than you
- You find it difficult expressing your needs

- You focus on your weaknesses
- You frequently experience feelings such as shame, depression, or anxiety
- You have a negative outlook on life
- You have an intense fear of failure
- You have trouble accepting positive feedback
- You have trouble saying "no"
- You put other people's needs before your own
- You struggle with confidence

Types of Self-esteem:

Healthy level of self-esteem:

People with a high level of Self-esteem

- Firmly believe in certain values and principles, and are ready to defend them even when finding opposition, feeling secure enough to modify them in light of experience.
- Are able to act according to what they think to be the best choice, trusting their own judgment, and not feeling guilty when others do not like their choice.
- Do not lose time worrying excessively about what happened in the past, nor about what could happen in the future. They learn from the past and plan for the future, but live in the present intensely.
- Fully trust in their capacity to solve problems, not hesitating after failures and difficulties. They ask others for help when they need it.
- Consider themselves equal in dignity to others, rather than inferior or superior, while accepting differences in certain talents, personal prestige or financial standing.
- Understand how they are an interesting and valuable person for others, at least for those with whom they have a friendship.
- Resist manipulation, collaborate with others only if it seems appropriate and convenient.
- Admit and accept different internal feelings and drives, either positive or negative, revealing those drives to others only when they choose.
- Are able to enjoy a great variety of activities.
- Are sensitive to feelings and needs of others; respect generally accepted social rules, and claim no right or desire to prosper at others' expense.
- Can work toward finding solutions and voice discontent without belittling themselves or others when challenges arise.

Secure vs. defensive

A person can have high self-esteem and hold it confidently where they do not need reassurance from others to maintain their positive self-view, whereas others with defensive high self-esteem may still report positive self-evaluations on the Rosenberg Scale, as all high self-esteem individuals do; however, their positive self-views are fragile and vulnerable to criticism. Defensive high self-esteem individuals internalize subconscious self-doubts and insecurities, causing them to react very negatively to any criticism they may receive. There is a need for constant positive feedback from others for these individuals to maintain their feelings of self-worth. The necessity of repeated praise can be associated with boastful,

arrogant behavior or sometimes even aggressive and hostile feelings toward anyone who questions the individual's self-worth, an example of threatened egotism.

The *Journal of Educational Psychology* conducted a study in which they used a sample of 383 Malaysian undergraduates participating in work integrated learning (WIL) programs across five public universities to test the relationship between self-esteem and other psychological attributes such as self-efficacy and self-confidence. The results demonstrated that self-esteem has a positive and significant relationship with self-confidence and self-efficacy since students with higher self-esteem had better performances at university than those with lower self-esteem. It was concluded that higher education institutions and employers should emphasize the importance of undergraduates' self-esteem development.

Implicit, explicit, narcissism and threatened egotism

Implicit self-esteem refers to a person's disposition to evaluate themselves positively or negatively in a spontaneous, automatic, or unconscious manner. It contrasts with explicit self-esteem, which entails more conscious and reflective self-evaluation. Both explicit self-esteem and implicit self-esteem are subtypes of self-esteem proper.

Narcissism is a disposition people may have that represents an excessive love for one's self. It is characterized by an inflated view of self-worth. Individuals who score high on narcissism measures, Robert Raskin's *40 Item True or False Test*, would likely select true to such statements as "If I ruled the world, it would be a much better place." There is only a moderate correlation between narcissism and self-esteem; that is to say that an individual can have high self-esteem but low narcissism or can be a conceited, obnoxious person and score high self-esteem and high narcissism.

Threatened egotism is characterized as a response to criticism that threatens the ego of narcissists; they often react in a hostile and aggressive manner.^{[14][58][59]}

Low level of self-esteem:

Low self-esteem can result from various factors, including genetic factors, physical appearance or weight, mental health issues, socioeconomic status, significant emotional experiences, social stigma, peer pressure or bullying.

A person with low self-esteem may show some of the following characteristics:

- ✚ Heavy self-criticism and dissatisfaction.
- ✚ Hypersensitivity to criticism with resentment against critics and feelings of being attacked.
- ✚ Chronic indecision and an exaggerated fear of mistakes.
- ✚ Excessive will to please and unwillingness to displease any petitioner.
- ✚ Perfectionism, which can lead to frustration when perfection is not achieved.
- ✚ Neurotic guilt, dwelling on or exaggerating the magnitude of past mistakes.
- ✚ Floating hostility and general defensiveness and irritability without any proximate cause.
- ✚ Pessimism and a general negative outlook.
- ✚ Envy, invidiousness, or general resentment.
- ✚ Sees temporary setbacks as permanent, intolerable conditions.

Individuals with low self-esteem tend to be critical of themselves. Some depend on the approval and praise of others when evaluating self-worth. Others may measure their likability in terms of successes: others will accept themselves if they succeed but will not if they fail.

The three states:

This classification proposed by Martin Ross distinguishes three states of self-esteem compared to the "feats" such as triumphs, honors, virtues and the "anti-feats" such as defeats, embarrassment, shame, etc. of the individuals.

Shattered:

The individual does not regard themselves as valuable or lovable. They may be overwhelmed by defeat, or shame, or see themselves as such, and they name their "anti-feat". For example, if they consider that being over a certain age is an anti-feat, they define themselves with the name of their anti-feat, and say, "I am old". They express actions and feelings such as pity, insulting themselves, and they may become paralyzed by their sadness.

Vulnerable:

The individual has a generally positive self-image. However, their self-esteem is also vulnerable to the perceived risk of an imminent anti-feat such as defeat, embarrassment, shame, discredit, consequently, they are often nervous and regularly use defense mechanisms. A typical protection mechanism of those with vulnerable self-esteem may consist in avoiding decision-making. Although such individuals may outwardly exhibit great self-confidence, the underlying reality may be just the opposite: the apparent self-confidence is indicative of their heightened fear of anti-feats and the fragility of their self-esteem. They may also try to blame others to protect their self-image from situations that would threaten it. They may employ defense mechanisms, including attempting to lose at games and other competitions in order to protect their self-image by publicly dissociating themselves from a need to win, and asserting an independence from social acceptance which they may deeply desire. In this deep fear of being unaccepted by an individual's peers, they make poor life choices by making risky decisions.^{[64][65]}

Strong:

People with strong self-esteem have a positive self-image and enough strength so that anti-feats do not subdue their self-esteem. They have less fear of failure. These individuals appear humble, cheerful, and this shows a certain strength not to boast about feats and not to be afraid of anti-feats. They are capable of fighting with all their might to achieve their goals because, if things go wrong, their self-esteem will not be affected. They can acknowledge their own mistakes precisely because their self-image is strong, and this acknowledgment will not impair or affect their self-image. They live with less fear of losing social prestige, and with more happiness and general well-being. However, no type of self-esteem is indestructible, and due to certain situations or circumstances in life, one can fall from this level into any other state of self-esteem.

Contingent vs. non-contingent:

A distinction is made between contingent or conditional and non-contingent or unconditional self-esteem.

Contingent self-esteem

It is derived from external sources, such as what others say, one's success or failure, one's competence, or relationship-contingent self-esteem. Therefore, contingent self-esteem is marked by instability, unreliability, and vulnerability. Persons lacking a non-contingent self-esteem are "predisposed to an incessant pursuit of self-value". However, because the pursuit of contingent self-esteem is based on receiving approval, it is doomed to fail, as no one

receives constant approval, and disapproval often evokes depression. Furthermore, fear of disapproval inhibits activities in which failure is possible.

POSITIVE THINKING

What is Positive Thinking?

Positive thinking is the idea that you can change your life by thinking positively about things.

This idea can sound a bit soft and fluffy, which is something of a problem for many people who recognize that just thinking good thoughts won't change the world and therefore discard the whole idea. However, research shows that positive thinking really does have a scientific basis. You can't change the world, but you can change how you perceive it and how you react to it. And that can change the way that you feel about yourself and others, which can in turn have a huge effect on your well-being.

Quick Tips to Enable Positive Thinking:

- **Gain Control of Yourself:**
Do not be critical of yourself to others. Whilst it can be useful to confide your concerns to someone you trust, telling the world is something else. Be kind to yourself. Make a list of your good qualities and believe them, believe in yourself.
- **Don't be a Complainer:**
By being negative you can isolate yourself from others and cut yourself off from positive solutions to problems.
- **Learn to Relax:**
Allow time for yourself each day, if only for a few minutes it is important to find time to relax and unwind. See our page on Mindfulness for more.
- **Boost Your Own Morale:**
Treat yourself every now and again, especially if you have overcome a problem or made a personal achievement.
- **Congratulate Yourself**
Congratulate yourself on a job/task well done and perhaps tell a friend. Justified praise is a good boost to morale.
- **Learn to Channel Nerves and Tension Positively:**
When you are nervous, adrenalin is pumped through the body and you feel more keyed up and alert. This extra energy can be used to good effect; enabling you to communicate with greater enthusiasm and intensity, for example.
- **Learn to be Assertive:**
Stand up for what you believe in and do not be pressured by others. See our section on Assertiveness for more.

Effect of Negative Thinking

To understand the effect of positive thinking, it's helpful to think about negative thinking first.

Most negative emotions, such as fear or anger, are designed to help with survival. They cause us to take swift and effective action to save ourselves from whatever is threatening us. This

means that they also prevent us from being distracted by other things around us. If there's a bear standing in front of you, you don't want to stop to pick flowers.

But negative thinking is not so great in more modern settings. If you've got a lot to do, and you're worried that you won't get it all done, the last thing you need is for your brain to shut down and focus only on how long your 'To Do' list has got.

Negative thinking is a habit, something you can train your brain to avoid. Constant negative thinking can make you much more likely to be stressed and can lead to more serious problems, like depression.

The Power of Positive Thinking:

Barbara Fredrickson, a researcher at the University of North Carolina, carried out a classic experiment with five groups of people where she showed each group images designed to provoke a different emotional response.

Group 1 saw images designed to trigger feelings of joy;

Group 2's images were selected to make them feel contented;

Group 3's images were neutral;

Group 4 saw images to make them afraid; and

Group 5 saw a series of images designed to make them angry.

Each group was then asked to write down what actions they would take in a situation that created similar feelings.

Groups 4 and 5 wrote down significantly fewer actions than the other groups. Groups 1 and 2 wrote down the most actions. In other words, feeling positive emotions helps you to identify more possibilities and options in your life. But what is perhaps even more interesting is that these extra possibilities and options seem to translate into action. People who think more positively are more likely to do things to deliver on those options. They build new skills and develop existing ones, so that they genuinely have more options in life.

Positive Thinking in Practice: The Placebo Effect:

High quality trials for new medicines and therapies compare a treatment group, which receives the new treatment, with a 'control group' that does not. But as a general rule, these control groups do not just have 'no treatment'. Instead, they receive a 'placebo', that is, a treatment substitute which looks like the real thing, but has no physical effect. Examples of placebos include sugar pills or flavoured water instead of genuine tablets or medicines.

The 'Placebo Effect' is a well-documented phenomenon in medicine, in which those who *think* that they are being given a new and effective treatment are more likely to recover than those who know that their treatment is nothing new. The placebo effect may sound extraordinary, but it has been seen time and time again in clinical trials. New treatments have to 'beat' placebos to be sure that they have a real effect; and the mind is an extremely powerful tool and, if at all possible, healthcare practitioners should help their patients to draw on it.

A positive attitude will probably not cure cancer in itself. But positive thinking will make it easier to manage your life, reduce stress, and also help you to take care of yourself better. And those things are important to help you recover from serious diseases.

Positive thinking is good. But you should not try to use it to block out everything negative that happens in your life. Sometimes bad stuff happens, and you will feel down

about it. It's no good pretending that you don't because forced positive thinking can be counterproductive.

Developing Habits of Positive Thinking:

If you think about positive thinking as 'being happy', it is much easier to work out what you should do to develop habits based on it. For example, what do you like doing? And with whom do you like spending time? Research shows that there are three very good ways to build positive thinking skills: Meditation: People who meditate every day show more positive thinking than those who do not. Is that the meditation causing the positive thinking, or just having time to think? It's hard to tell, but it's also hard to argue with the science. People who meditate tend to show more mindfulness, or ability to live in the present, which is also associated with positive thinking.

- Writing: A group of undergraduates were asked to write about an intensely positive experience every day for three days. Amazingly, they had better moods and better physical health afterwards, and the effect lasted for quite a long time. This is a pretty easy thing to do: you could, for example, write a blog focusing on positive experiences, or keep a diary.
- Play: It's important to make time for yourself to have fun. Sometimes you might need to actually put it into your diary to force yourself to make that time, whether it's to meet a friend for coffee, or go out for a walk or a bike ride. You can also look at our page on Neuro-Linguistic Programming for more ideas about how to help yourself to think positively.

MOTIVATION

What is Motivation?

Motivation is the process that initiates, guides, and maintains goal-oriented behaviors. It is what causes you to act, whether it is getting a glass of water to reduce thirst or reading a book to gain knowledge. Motivation involves the biological, emotional, social, and cognitive forces that activate behavior. In everyday usage, the term "motivation" is frequently used to describe *why* a person does something. It is the driving force behind human actions.

Motivation does not just refer to the factors that activate behaviors; it also involves the factors that direct and maintain these goal-directed actions, though such motives are rarely directly observable. As a result, we often have to infer the reasons why people do the things that they do based on observable behaviors. Psychologists have proposed different theories of motivation, including drive theory, instinct theory, and humanistic theory such as Maslow's hierarchy of needs. The reality is that there are many different forces that guide and direct our motivations.

History of Motivation:

What are the things that actually motivate us to act? Throughout history, psychologists have proposed different theories to explain what motivates human behavior. The following are some of the major theories of motivation.

Instincts:

The instinct theory of motivation suggests that behaviors are motivated by instincts, which are fixed and inborn patterns of behavior.⁵ Psychologists including William James,

Sigmund Freud, and William McDougal have proposed a number of basic human drives that motivate behavior. Such instincts might include biological instincts that are important for an organism's survival such as fear, cleanliness, and love.

Drives and Needs:

Many of your behaviors such as eating, drinking, and sleeping are motivated by biology. You have a biological need for food, water, and sleep. Therefore, you are motivated to eat, drink, and sleep. Drive theory suggests that people have basic biological drives and that behaviors are motivated by the need to fulfill these drives.

Arousal Levels:

The arousal theory of motivation suggests that people are motivated to engage in behaviors that help them maintain their optimal level of arousal. A person with low arousal needs might pursue relaxing activities such as reading a book, while those with high arousal needs might be motivated to engage in exciting, thrill-seeking behaviors, such as motorcycle racing.

Types of Motivation:

Different types of motivation are frequently described as being either extrinsic or intrinsic:

- Extrinsic motivations are those that arise from outside of the individual and often involve rewards such as trophies, money, social recognition, or praise.
- Intrinsic motivations are those that arise from within the individual, such as doing a complicated crossword puzzle purely for the personal gratification of solving a problem.

Uses of Motivation:

There are many different uses for motivation. It serves as a guiding force for all human behavior, but understanding how it works and the factors that may impact it can be important in a number of ways.

Understanding motivation can:

- Help improve the efficiency of people as they work toward goals
- Help people take action
- Encourage people to engage in health-oriented behaviour
- Help people avoid unhealthy or maladaptive behaviours such as risk-taking and addiction
- Help people feel more in control of their lives
- Improve overall well-being and happiness

Impact of Motivation:

Anyone who has ever had a goal like wanting to lose 20 pounds or run a marathon probably immediately realizes that simply having the desire to accomplish something is not enough. Achieving such a goal requires the ability to persist through obstacles and endurance to keep going in spite of difficulties.

There are three major components of motivation: activation, persistence, and intensity.

- **Activation** involves the decision to initiate a behaviour, such as enrolling in a psychology class.
- **Persistence** is the continued effort toward a goal even though obstacles may exist. An example of persistence would be taking more psychology courses in order to earn a degree although it requires a significant investment of time, energy, and resources.

- **Intensity** can be seen in the concentration and vigor that goes into pursuing a goal.⁴ For example, one student might coast by without much effort, while another student will study regularly, participate in discussions, and take advantage of research opportunities outside of class. The first student lacks intensity, while the second pursues their educational goals with greater intensity.

The degree of each of these components of motivation can impact whether or not you achieve your goal. Strong activation, for example, means that you are more likely to start pursuing a goal. Persistence and intensity will determine if you keep working toward that goal and how much effort you devote to reaching it.

Steps to Move Forward:

All people experience fluctuations in their motivation and willpower. Sometimes you might feel fired up and highly driven to reach your goals, while at other times you might feel listless or unsure of what you want or how to achieve it. Even if you're feeling low on motivation, there are steps you can take that will keep you moving forward. Some things you can do include:

- Adjust your goals to focus on things that really matter to you
- If you're tackling something that is just too big or too overwhelming, break it up into smaller steps and try setting your sights on achieving that first step toward progress
- Improve your confidence
- Remind yourself about what you achieved in the past and what where your strengths lie
- If there are things you feel insecure about, try working on making improvements in those areas so that you feel more skilled and capable.

No Motivation Level:

There are a few things you should watch for that might hurt your motivation. These include:

- **Quick fixes or all-or-nothing thinking.**

It's easy to feel unmotivated if you can't fix something immediately or if you can't have it all at once. Remind yourself that reaching your goals takes time.

- **Thinking that one size fits all.**

Just because an approach or method worked for someone else does not mean that it will work for you. If something isn't helping you reach your goals or is making you feel unmotivated, look for things that will work better for you.

CREATIVITY

Defining Creativity and Innovation:

Creativity is the act of turning new and imaginative ideas into reality. Creativity is characterized by the ability to perceive the world in new ways, to find hidden patterns, to make connections between seemingly unrelated phenomena, and to generate solutions. Creativity involves two processes: thinking, then producing.

Creativity is a phenomenon whereby something somehow new and somehow valuable is formed. The created item may be intangible (such as an idea, a scientific theory, a musical composition, or a joke) or a physical object (such as an invention, a printed literary work, or a painting).

Creativity is a pattern of thinking:

Creativity is an ability that allows people to develop new ideas, but that still feels a bit vague and intangible (kind of like saying swimming is the ability to not drown in water, technically true, but not particularly useful if you're going for a deeper understanding. All skills originate in our brains: whether it's physical (learning to do the breaststroke) or mental (learning to solve an algebraic equation), it's all about neurons in the right part of your brain firing over and over again until what you're doing becomes ingrained.

Creativity is the skill to transcend traditional ways of thinking and come up with new ideas. When it comes to creativity, neuroscientists have identified three large-scale (and aptly named) networks of the brain that are important:

- The executive attention network helps you pay attention and focus
- The imagination network allows you to daydream or imagine yourself in someone else's shoes
- The salience network lets you identify when things you have buried deep in your brain are salient to the world around you.

Main Components of Creativity:

Originality:

The method or idea must be new and unique. It should not be the extension of something, which already exists. However, one can take inspiration from the already existent methods and ideas to fabricate something new and unique.

Functionality:

Another important component of creativity is its functionality. A creative idea must work and produce results, otherwise, the whole effort will be in vain. Most of the times, people wonder how does creativity happen. It has been seen that creativity become another nature of some people whereas others have to spend hours on road or on a mountain to think of a tiny idea.

What kind of people called creative?

- People who are thought-provoking, curious and have a variety of uncommon thoughts are known to be creative people. Sometimes these people don't even know what they are doing and how much importance does that innovation holds. Therefore, they usually fabricate new ideas, which leave people flabbergasted.
- People who had important self-discoveries, who view the world with a fresh perspective and have insightful ideas. These people make unique discoveries which they don't share with the outer world.
- People who make great achievements which are known to the world. Inventors and artists fall under this category.

Qualities of Creative People:

They are Energetic:

Creative people tend to have a great amount of physical as well as mental energy. They utilize their energy to invent new ideas. These people spend a great deal of time in solitude to introspect and think.

They are intelligent:

It is believed that intelligence plays a key role in creativity. According to a study high IQ is important for creativity. However, not all people with high IQ are creative. To become creative, people should be smart and they should also have a child-like attitude to view things.

They are disciplined:

Most of the people have the wrong notion that creativity happens unexpectedly. Therefore, they usually spend their time sitting around and to wait for the creativity to happen to them.

Aren Dietrich has classified creativity in four domains using four discrete processing modes such as emotional, cognitive, deliberate and spontaneous. He created a quadrant of creative types using these four characteristics.

Types of creativity:

Deliberate and Cognitive creativity

People who possess deliberate and cognitive characteristics are purposeful. They have a great amount of knowledge about a particular subject and combine their skills and capabilities to prepare a course of action to achieve something. This type of creativity built when people work for a very long time in a particular area. People who fall under this type of category of creativity are usually proficient at research, problem- solving, investigation and experimentation. This type of creativity is located in the brain's prefrontal cortex, which is at the front part of the brain. These types of creative people spend a great deal of time every single day testing to develop new solutions. Thomas Alva Edison is one prominent example of this type of creative people. He ran experiment after experiment before inventing electricity, the light bulb, and telecommunication. Hence, deliberate and cognitive creativity requires a great deal of time, dedication and abundance of knowledge about a particular subject.

Deliberate and Emotional Creativity:

People who are categorized as deliberate and emotional let their work influenced by their state of emotions. These types of creative people are very emotional and sensitive in nature. These individuals prefer relatively quiet and personal time to reflect and they usually have a habit of diary writing. However, they are equally logical and rational in decision making.

Their creativity is always a balanced product of deliberate emotional thinking and logical actions. This type of creativity is found in the amygdala and cingulate cortex parts of the human brain. Amygdala is responsible for human emotions whereas cingulate cortex helps in learning and information processing. This type of creativity happens to people at random moments. Those moments are usually referred to as "a-ha!" moments when someone suddenly thinks of a solution to some problem or think of some innovative idea. For example, there are situations when you feel low and emotional which distracts you from your work. In those kinds of situations, you should take 5 minutes and point out the things which are making you sad and keep them aside and focus on the work in hand. It will help you to get improvised results and you will get work done easily. One should seek "quiet time" for deliberate and emotional creativity to happen to them.

Spontaneous and Cognitive creativity:

There are times when you spend a long time to crack a problem but can't think of any solution. For example, when you want to make a schedule for a month to get a job done, but

you can't seem to think of any possible way and when you are watching television and having your relaxed time and suddenly you think of a solution and everything falls in place. The same case happened with the great scientist Isaac Newton. He got the idea about the law of gravity when an apple hit his head while he was sitting under a tree and relaxing. This is the "Eureka!" moments for Newton and an excellent example of a spontaneous and cognitive person. This type of creativity happens when one has the knowledge to get a particular job done, but he requires inspiration and a hint to walk towards the right path. This type of creativity usually happens at the most inconvenient time, such as, when you are in bed with your partner or having a shower. Spontaneous and cognitive creativity takes place when the conscious mind stops working and go to relax and unconscious mind gets a chance to work. Mostly, this type of creative person stops conscious thinking when they need to do "out of the box" thinking. By indulging in different and unrelated activities, the unconscious mind gets a chance to connect information in new ways which provide solutions to the problems. Therefore, to let this type of creativity happen one should take a break from the problem and get away to let conscious mind overtake.

Spontaneous and Emotional Creativity:

Spontaneous and emotional creativity takes place in the "amygdala" part of the human brain. Amygdala is responsible for all emotional type of thinking in the human brain. Spontaneous ideas and creativity happen when conscious and Prefrontal brain is resting. This type of creativity is mostly found in a great artist such as musicians, painters, and writers etc. This type of creativity is also related to "epiphanies". Epiphany is a sudden realization of something. Spontaneous and emotional creativity is responsible for a scientific breakthrough, religious and also philosophical discoveries. This allows the enlightened person to look at a problem or situation with a different and deeper viewpoint. Those moments are defined as rare moments when great discoveries take place. There is no need to have specific knowledge for "spontaneous and emotional" creativity to happen but there should be a skill such as writing, musical or artistic. This type of creativity can't be obtained by working on it.

GOAL SETTING

What is Goal Setting?

Goal setting can look very different depending on an individual's lifestyle, values and definition of success. Your goals are unique to you and don't need to look like anyone else's. The classic goal setting definition boils down to the process of identifying something you want to accomplish and establishing measurable objectives and timeframes to help you achieve it. Goal setting can help you in any area of your life, from achieving financial freedom to adopting a healthy diet. When you learn how to set goals in one area of your life, it becomes easier to set them in other areas. Setting progressive goals that allow small wins helps you move on to larger achievements. These small goals lead to progress, which is the only thing you really need to feel fulfilled and happy.

Why is Goal Setting Important?

Goal setting is vital because it helps you decide and focus on what's really important to you. Effective goal setting also lets you measure progress, overcome procrastination and visualize

your dreams. If you don't know what you want to accomplish, you can't create a plan to get there. Setting goals is the vehicle that will drive you to your desired destination. Goal setting also keeps you accountable. Whether you're learning how to set goals at work or in your personal life, telling others about your goals makes you more likely to establish the patterns that will accomplish them.

How to Set Goals:

Effective goal setting is the fundamental key to success. Whether it's increasing your intelligence, taking up a new hobby or rekindling a relationship, setting goals lets us create our future. It also helps us grow and expand, pushing ourselves to transform in ways that we never imagined. In order to feel truly fulfilled, we need to know and feel like we're working to achieve something. Tony Robbins says, "Progress equals happiness," and setting goals is what gets us there.

- What is goal setting to you? When you set goals, are you used to seeing them disappear in the rearview mirror? We're willing to bet if you're reading this page, you've set a goal or two in your life. But did you see them through?
- You're much more likely to put time and energy into something that excites you, so your goals must reflect that same level of momentum. Think of a goal as a dream with a deadline. Now all we have to do is create a blueprint to achievement.

Perform a brainstorming session.

Give yourself six minutes to brainstorm a list of anything you'd like to achieve, create, do, have, give and/or experience in the next 20 years. Write as many things down as fast as you can in this time.

Refine your goals.

Setting deadlines is crucial to the goal-setting process. Go back through your list and write one, three, five, 10 or 20 years next to each goal to indicate how long it will take to achieve them.

Review your list.

Go over what you've written. Choose your top four one-year goals. These are goals that truly excite you. Write a paragraph for each goal explaining why you will absolutely achieve this goal within the next 12 months.

Evaluate your goals.

Are your goals specific? Measurable? Achievable? Realistic? Do they have a specific timeframe? These are the components of a Smart goal. You set Smart goals with purpose and intention, making them more concrete and easier to achieve.

How to Achieve Your Goals?

Visualize accomplishing your goals.

Visualization is a powerful activity. When you visualize your goals on a daily basis as if you've already achieved them, you align your purpose and values with your actions.

Share your goals.

Find a friend, family member or another person you trust and share your list of goals with them. You can also share the list with a mentor or life coach. Sharing your list will make you more accountable and give you a partner who will work with you through frustrations or roadblocks. The right partner can help you transform obstacles into opportunities and stay on track.

Keep your goals visible.

Where focus goes, energy flows, so it's critical to focus on your goals. Tape them on the mirror in your bathroom or pin them to the wall next to your computer. If your goals involve adopting a healthy diet and losing weight, put them on the front of your refrigerator or a kitchen cabinet.

Regularly review your goals. Have a set schedule to review both short- and long-term goals. This helps you track progress as well as determine what activities are helping you and which are hindering you. It's important to know when alterations to your course are necessary: Stay flexible and make changes where necessary.

LATERAL THINKING

What is lateral thinking?

It essentially means being able to think creatively or "outside the box" in order to solve a problem. Usually, logical thinking is used to solve problems in a direct, straightforward way (also known as vertical thinking). Lateral thinking however, looks at things from a sideways perspective (also known as horizontal thinking), in order to find answers that aren't immediately apparent. The term was first coined by psychologist Edward de Bono. These skills are often required in creative careers like marketing or advertising. If you study graphic or art and design at school, there's a good chance that you will have developed some of these skills already, which can be useful in your future career.

Examples of lateral thinking

These questions are particularly popular with job interviewers. Not only do they test your ability to think creatively, but they can also reveal your problem solving skills as well. If you're someone who enjoys playing puzzles or working out brain teasers, then you may already be good at answering these types of interview questions.

This type of interview question can sometimes be difficult to identify. If you're ever asked a question in an interview that seems a bit odd, or perhaps doesn't make sense upon first hearing, there's a chance it could be a lateral thinking question. The University of Kent has a great resource that provides a list of these types of questions. Here are some examples of lateral thinking based questions:

- Name an ancient invention still in use in most parts of the world today that allows people to see through walls. *Answer:* The window.
- An Australian woman was born in 1948 but only celebrated her 16th birthday quite recently. *Why? Answer:* She was born on February the 29th.
- Or you may simply be asked: *Can you give us an example of a difficult situation where you had to think laterally to get out of it?* This question is actually more difficult than it might seem. A good place to start could be to think of a time when you did something creative and came across a problem, then explain how you resolved it by using some sideways thinking.

How to improve your lateral thinking skills

Mind mapping can be a great way to improve your lateral thinking skills

Improving these skills can be challenging as lateral thinking comes more naturally to some people than others.

However, like everything else, practice makes perfect, and setting yourself lateral thinking examples can help.

Because this type of skill is "situational" and displays a thought process rather than something physical (like IT skills for example), it can be tough to come up with ways of boosting your ability.

Here are some exercises you could try:

Mind mapping

Mind maps can be a great way of solving a problem when logical thinking just doesn't help. Because mind maps are visual aids, they require your brain to adjust its thought processes, which can often help you find answers unexpectedly. Mind maps give you the opportunity to put all your ideas down on paper and then take a step back to gather your thoughts.

Using your senses

We all have five senses – sight, touch, hearing, smell and taste – yet we very rarely use all of them to solve problems. Typically, you use our visual senses to work things out but making use of our other senses can sometimes have useful results.

For example, when faced with a problem, why not speak your thoughts aloud and record them on your mobile phone? When you listen back, you may find something that you would have missed otherwise.

Reverse thinking

Reverse thinking involves analysing what people normally do in a situation and then doing the opposite. If you find yourself only getting so far into a problem and then becoming stuck, you might want to start at the end and work backwards. For example, look at the problem and then describe what you'd ideally like the solution to be. From there, you can begin working backwards to find the starting point to your solution.

What careers use lateral thinking?

Lateral thinking is a useful skill whatever job you end up doing, but there are some career paths where it can really come in handy. Here are some examples of lateral thinking career choices:

Advertising

People who work in advertising use this type of thinking to persuade us to buy products. If it's often those adverts that make us think or a little different that we remember the most.

Marketing

Marketers often have to come up with novel or creative ways to promote products and services. Although there are some rules in marketing, it's often the campaigns that bend the rules slightly that are successful.

Media

Working in the media, you may have to use these thinking skills to deliver a message in a creative way. Whether you're a journalist, filmmaker or press release writer, some sideways thinking can come in handy.

Techniques for developing Lateral Thinking:

Awareness:

Being aware of the way the brain processes information is the first step to improving the lateral thinking process. It's important to recognize the brain's tendency to rely on established patterns of thinking before starting to work on a new problem.

Random stimulation:

Often when we're trying to think about some issue, we shut out all outside stimuli so we can focus. However, allowing unplanned, outside stimuli can disrupt our reliance on imperfect frameworks. Paying attention to randomness can propel our thinking to new insights.

Alternatives:

de Bono argued that even if there is an apparently suitable solution to a problem, it can be useful to set it aside and deliberately consider alternative approaches, regardless of how ridiculous they might seem. Doing so will help you to consider a problem from all possible angles.

Alteration:

This technique consists of the deliberate alteration of available options, like doing the opposite of an implied direction or reversing any relationship between elements of the problem. This can include denying elements that are taken for granted, breaking large patterns down into tiny fragments, or translating a relationship to an analogy and then translating it back again just to see what changed. Arbitrarily altering elements of the problem space can produce novel tools to build a solution with.

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

What is Effective Communication?

Effective communication is a process of exchanging ideas, thoughts, knowledge and information such that the purpose or intention is fulfilled in the best possible manner. In simple words, it is nothing but the presentation of views by the sender in a way best understood by the receiver. We can say that it generally involves;

Sender: The person who initiates the process of communication by sending a message;

Receiver: The one to whom the message is to be delivered.

Characteristics of Effective Communication:

- **Clear Message:**
The message which the sender wants to convey must be simple, easy to understand and systematically framed to retain its meaningfulness.
- **Correct Message:**
The information communicated must not be vague or false in any sense; it must be free from errors and grammatical mistakes.
- **Complete Message:**
Communication is the base for decision making. If the information is incomplete, it may lead to wrong decisions.
- **Precise Message:**
The message sent must be short and concise to facilitate straightforward interpretation and take the desired steps.

- **Reliability:**

The sender must be sure from his end that whatever he is conveying is right by his knowledge. Even the receiver must have trust on the sender and can rely on the message sent.

- **Consideration of the Recipient:**

The medium of communication and other physical settings must be planned, keeping in mind the attitude, language, knowledge, education level and position of the receiver.

- **Sender's Courtesy:**

The message so drafted must reflect the sender's courtesy, humbleness and respect towards the receiver.

Effective Communication Skills:

Conveying a message effectively is an art as well as a skill developed after continuous practice and experience. The predetermined set of skills required for an influential communication process are as follows:

- **Observance:**

A person must possess sharp observing skills to gain more and more knowledge and information.

- **Clarity and Brevity:**

The message must be drafted in simple words, and it should be clear and precise to create the desired impact over the receiver.

- **Listening and Understanding:**

The most crucial skill in a person is he must be a good, alert and patient listener. He must be able to understand and interpret the message well.

- **Emotional Intelligence:**

A person must be emotionally aware and the ability to influence others from within.

- **Self-Efficacy:**

He/she must have faith in himself and his capabilities to achieve the objectives of communication.

- **Self-Confidence:**

Being one of the essential communication skills, confidence enhances the worthiness of the message being delivered.

- **Respectfulness:**

Delivering a message with courtesy and respecting the values, beliefs, opinions and ideas of the receiver is the essence of effective communication.

- **Non-Verbal Communication:**

To connect with the receiver in a better way, the sender must involve the non-verbal means communication too. These include gestures, facial expressions, eye contact, postures, etc.

- **Selection of the Right Medium:**

Choice of the correct medium for communication is also a skill. It is necessary to select an appropriate medium according to the situation, priority of the message, the receiver's point of view, etc.

- **Providing Feedback:**

Effective communication is always a two-way process. A person must take as well as give feedback to bring forward the other person's perspective too.

Significance of Effective Communication in Business

You must be wondering, what is the role of effective communication in business? To answer this question, let us understand the following importance of effective business communication:

- **Employee Management:**

Effective communication ensures self-discipline and efficient management since the employees are heard by the top management, and there is open communication in the organisation.

- **Team Building:**

People in the organization work as a team to accomplish common goals, thus effective communication boosts the morale of the whole team.

- **Growth of the Organization:**

It ensures better decision making, intensifies public relations and enhances problem-solving ability. All this leads to corporate growth and development.

- **Build Strong Relationships:**

Interactions often simplify things; they positively motivate the employees to perform better and maintain long-term relations with others in the organisation.

- **Ascertain Transparency and Develops Trust:**

Effective communication is considered to be a base for building trust and assures sharing of complete information.

- **Facilitates Creativity and Innovation:**

It creates an environment where employees are free to share their ideas by exploring their creative and innovative side.

- **Reduces Misunderstanding:**

- Effective communication eliminates the possibility of confusion and misunderstanding by conveying the message clearly and appropriately.

- **Organizational Growth:**

By maintaining cordial relations between the employees and the management, it enhances the functioning and leads to the achievement of corporate goals and objectives.

Barriers to Effective Communication

There are certain obstacles which sometimes hinder the process of communication, making it less useful for the sender as well as the receiver. These barriers are categorized under three groups. Let us understand these in detail below:

- **Barriers Involving Words:**

Words play an essential role in the process of communication. Any disturbance or distraction in the way a message is presented may lead to miscommunication.

Following are the different types of communication barriers related to words:

- **Language:**

It is a medium of communication. If the sender is making excessive use of technical terms, it will become difficult for the receiver to understand the message clearly.

- **Ambiguity and Overuse of Abstractions:**

Even if the message is presented in a non-realistic or vague context involving a lot of notions, the receiver won't be able to connect with the idea properly.

- **Disorganised Message:**

When the words are not organised systematically to form a powerful message, it loses its efficiency and meaning.

- **Information Overload:**

The effectiveness of communication reduces when a person keeps on speaking for an extended period. Thus, leading to the receiver's exhaustion, who won't be able to keep track of everything that is conveyed.

Barriers Involving People's Background:

People belong to different backgrounds, i.e., culture, education level, gender, etc. These attributes majorly affect the efficiency of the communication process. It involves the following related obstacles:

- **Attitudinal Differences:**

At times, people are resistant to understand or change their mind when they have set their views about a particular topic. Their attitude obstructs meeting the purpose of the communication.

- **Demographic Differences:**

The difference in age, generation, gender, status, tradition, etc., creates a lack of understanding among people and thus, hinders the process of communication.

- **Lack of Common Experience or Perspective:**

The experiences of a person develop their perspective of seeing things in a particular way. This perspective varies from person to person. Therefore, it becomes difficult for a receiver to relate with the sender's experience or views as he might have never gone through it himself.

- **Jumping to Conclusions:**

Some people lack the patience of listening to others and often jump to conclusions between the communication, thus neglecting the motive of the message.

Physical Barriers:

These barriers can be experienced directly but challenging to overcome. These include:

- **Physical Distance:**

When people communicate over long distances, they miss out the non-verbal aspect of communication, since the gestures and expressions of the receiver cannot be interpreted.

- **Noise:**

The environment or the communication system sometimes involves unwanted noise which interrupts the process of communication making it inefficient.

- **Physiological Barriers:**

One of the most common barriers to effective communication is the physical disability of the people involved. Some of these are hearing impairment, poor eyesight, stammering, etc.

Thus, we can say that the significant purpose of communication is to pass on the information to the receiver in such a manner that it does not lose its significance. At the same time, the message must be received in its purest form.

INTERPERSONAL SKILLS

NEGOTIATION SKILL AS A SOCIAL SKILL

What are Negotiation Skills?

Negotiations are formal discussions between people who have different aims or intentions, especially in business or politics, during which they try to reach an agreement. They try to reach a common ground eliminating their differences. Negotiation is a dialogue between two parties to resolve conflicts or issues so that both parties find the solution acceptable. Usually, it is a compromise involving give and take. Negotiation results when each party compromises to resolve a conflict for everyone's benefits. In the workplace, negotiations may take place between managers, departments, colleagues or between a team member and a manager. Even before you join the workplace, you may negotiate the job offer with the interviewer or HR manager.

Negotiation in business has become one of the most important skills and abilities. While negotiation will happen between two parties for reaching an agreement, it is said that the most effective negotiator will be both competing as well as collaborating. An effective negotiator is one who creates value for the other while claiming value for the self. There must be meaningful give and take that should happen in negotiation.

Negotiation should always be win-win, where agreements are created by taking care of the interests of both the sides. Negotiation requires interpersonal skills, communication skills as well as problem solving skills.

Types of Negotiation

There are broadly two types of negotiation namely distributive negotiation and integrative negotiation.

In distributive negotiation, the parties are only looking for their gain. It leads to a win-lose kind of outcome. In distributive negotiation, negotiation is carried out more as an one time transaction, not keeping in mind any kind of long term relationship.

While in integrative negotiation, the negotiators look for long term relationships and they try to ensure value for both sides. It leads to a win-win outcome.

Approach for Negotiation

Negotiation can always be sensitive and should be carried out in a planned manner keeping in mind the end goals to be achieved. We should take care to ensure that negotiation does not get into an argumentative situation.

The negotiations process is made up of five stages:

- Preparation and planning
- Definition of ground rules
- Clarification and justification

- Bargaining and problem solving and
- Closure and implementation

In order to achieve the desired outcomes from negotiation, it will be extremely important to do the initial homework. We must identify what we are looking at achieving from the negotiation.

- What are our best alternatives to a negotiated agreement?
- What are the expectations of the other party?
- What are the procedures for carrying out the negotiation?

Then the actual information and offers must be exchanged between the parties. Arguments and confrontations must be avoided in the process. At this stage the required bargaining should be done keeping good faith. Negotiation should always be done as a win-win outcome for both sides. Once agreement is reached, the same should be implemented.

Skills in Negotiation:

An effective negotiator will be using some of the below skills during the process of negotiation.

- Active listening
- Asking good questions
- Communication skills (Specially verbal communication)
- Decision making ability
- Emotional control
- Interpersonal skills
- Preparing BATNA (Best alternative to a negotiated agreement, your alternatives)
- Problem solving
- Smart trade-off development
- Ethics and collaboration

Emotional Intelligence in Negotiation:

Negotiations always involve people, so it stands to reason that it is necessary to have a good social skills and strong emotional intelligence when negotiating. When you have emotional intelligence or EQ, you are able to define and respond to other people's emotional states. As we have discussed before on Negotiation Space, everyone comes to the negotiating table with a hidden agenda. Some people are looking to fulfill some emotional need like validation or appreciation. Having the emotional intelligence to pick up those cues from others may give you an edge. In the first chapter of his book *Working with Emotional Intelligence*, Daniel Goleman writes the following:

“The rules for work are changing. We're being judged by a new yardstick: not just by how smart we are, or by our training and expertise, but also how well we handle ourselves and each other.”

Emotional intelligence, in other words, is just as important as “book” intelligence and experience. We could argue that In business negotiations emotional intelligence may be even more important. Having the ability to scan a situation, and adapt yourself to it is a very important skill in a negotiation, and one that could give you an edge.

You should be aware of others' emotions, but it is essential to understand and assess your own emotions.

Negotiation skill is one of the most important skills. It is through effective negotiation we are able to eliminate differences and we arrive at common agreements. While we can adopt a structured approach for negotiation, negotiation is an art that one can master only with time and experience.

ASSERTIVE SKILLS

What are Assertive Skills?

Being assertive is a core communication skill. Assertiveness can help you express yourself effectively and stand up for your point of view. It can also help you do this while respecting the rights and beliefs of others. Being assertive can also help boost your self-esteem and earn others' respect. This can help with stress management. It may especially help you reduce stress if you tend to take on too many responsibilities because you have a hard time saying no. Some people seem to be naturally assertive. But if you're not assertive, you can learn to be.

Why assertive communication makes sense

Assertiveness is based on mutual respect, it's an effective and diplomatic communication style. Being assertive shows that you respect yourself because you're willing to stand up for your interests and express your thoughts and feelings. It also demonstrates that you're aware of others' rights and willing to work on resolving conflicts. Assertive communication is direct and respectful. Being assertive gives you the best chance of successfully delivering your message. If you communicate in a way that's too passive or too aggressive, your message may get lost because people are too busy reacting to your delivery.

Assertive vs. Passive behaviour:

If your style is passive or non-assertive, you may seem to be shy or overly easygoing. You may routinely say things such as "I'll just go with whatever the group decides." You tend to avoid conflict. Why is that a problem? Because the message you're sending is that your thoughts and feelings aren't as important as those of other people. In essence, when you're too passive, you allow others to ignore your wants and needs. Consider this example: You say yes when a colleague asks you to take over a project, even though you're already busy. The extra work means you'll have to work overtime and miss your daughter's soccer game. Your intention may be to keep the peace. But always saying yes can poison your relationships. And worse, it may cause you internal conflict because your needs and those of your family always come second.

The internal conflict that can be created by passive behaviour can lead to:

- Stress
- Resentment
- Seething anger
- Feelings of victimization
- Desire to exact revenge
- Doubting or questioning our own judgment

Assertive vs. Aggressive behaviour

If your style is aggressive, you may come across as a bully who ignores others' needs, feelings and opinions. You may appear self-righteous or superior. Very aggressive people embarrass, intimidate and scare others and may even be physically threatening. You may think that being aggressive gets you what you want. However, it comes at a cost. Aggression weakens trust and mutual respect. Others may come to resent you, leading them to avoid or oppose you.

Assertive vs. Passive-aggressive behaviour

If you communicate in a passive-aggressive manner, you may say yes when you want to say no. You may be sarcastic or complain about others behind their backs. Rather than confront an issue directly, you may show your anger and feelings through your actions or negative attitude. You may have developed a passive-aggressive style because you're uncomfortable being direct about your needs and feelings. Over time, passive-aggressive behaviour damages relationships and weakens mutual respect. This makes it difficult for you to get your goals and needs met.

Benefits of being assertive:

Being assertive is usually viewed as a healthier communication style. Assertiveness offers many benefits. It helps you keep people from taking advantage of you. It can also help you from acting like a bully to others. Behaving assertively can help to:

- Gain self-confidence and self-esteem
- Gain a sense of empowerment
- Understand and recognize your feelings
- Earn respect from others
- Improve communication
- Create win-win situations
- Improve your decision-making skills
- Create honest relationships
- Gain more job satisfaction

Learning to be more assertive

Learning to be more assertive can also help you effectively express your feelings when communicating with others about issues. People develop different styles of communication based on their life experiences. Your style may be so ingrained that you're not even aware of what it is. People tend to stick to the same communication style over time. But if you want to change your communication style, you can learn to communicate in healthier and more effective ways.

Here are some tips to help you become more assertive:

- **Assess your style.**
Do you voice your opinions or remain silent? Do you say yes to additional work even when your schedule is full? Are you quick to judge or blame? Do people seem to dread or fear talking to you? Understand your style before you begin making changes.
- **Use 'I' statements.**
Using I statements lets others know what you're thinking or feeling without sounding accusatory. For instance, say, "I disagree," rather than, "You're wrong." If you have a

request, say, "I would like you to help with this" rather than, "You need to do this." Keep your requests simple, specific and clear.

- **Practice saying no.**

If you have a hard time turning down requests, try saying, "No, I can't do that now." Remember that no is a complete sentence and you don't need to explain why you choose to say no. Don't hesitate — be direct. If an explanation is appropriate, keep it brief.

- **Rehearse what you want to say**

If it's challenging to say what you want or think, practice general scenarios you encounter. Say what you want to say out loud. It may help to write it out first, too, so you can practice from a script. Consider role-playing with a friend or colleague and asking for clear feedback.

- **Use body language**

Communication isn't just verbal. Act confident even if you aren't feeling it. Keep an upright posture, but lean forward a bit. Make regular eye contact. Maintain a neutral or positive facial expression. Don't cross your arms or legs. Face the person. Practice assertive body language in front of a mirror or with a friend or colleague. In addition to what you say, your body language and facial expressions are also important.

- **Keep emotions in check**

Conflict is hard for most people. Maybe you get angry or frustrated, or maybe you feel like crying. Although these feelings are typical, they can get in the way of resolving conflict. If you feel too emotional going into a situation, wait a bit if possible. Then work on remaining calm. Breathe slowly. Keep your voice even and firm.

- **Start small**

At first, practice your new skills in situations that are low risk. For instance, try out your assertiveness on a partner or friend before tackling a difficult situation at work. Evaluate yourself afterward and adjust your approach as needed.

When you need help being assertive

Learning to be assertive takes time and practice. If you've spent years silencing yourself, becoming more assertive probably won't happen overnight. Or if anger leads you to be too aggressive, you may need to learn some anger management techniques.

If despite your best efforts you're not making progress toward becoming more assertive, consider formal assertiveness training. And if certain issues such as anger, stress, anxiety or fear are getting in your way, consider talking with a mental health professional. The payoff will be worth it. By becoming more assertive, you can begin to express your true feelings and needs more easily. You may even find that you get more of what you want as a result.

MULTICULTURAL COMMUNICATION

The World Nowadays...

Regardless whether you are negotiating with your clients, working in a team at work, travelling or visiting a wedding abroad - it should be stressed that almost every conversation, discussion and other form of human interaction happens in some kind of a cultural overlap.

The Importance Of Multicultural Communication:

Multicultural communication skills are crucial. As the world is becoming a smaller and smaller place, differences that occur on both our professional and personal paths are increasingly bigger and more noticeable. While working and living across nations and cultures, the comprehension and awareness of the intercultural competency is the survival issue. Very much needed to thrive. The importance of cultural competency is becoming more recognized and materials helping to develop such are required. On many occasions, the cultural communication skill is enumerated as one of most needed to become a global leader, successful professional or grow as a person in general.

Link between Communication and Culture:

Communication in its' nature is simply a process of an intentional interaction between at least two people happening in a particular reality – context and culture – aimed at passing the message from one person to the other to elicit the response. Forbes contributor Carol Kinsey Goman once said:

“Every culture has rules that its members take for granted. Few of us are aware of our own biases because cultural imprinting is begun at a very early age. And while some of culture’s knowledge, rules, beliefs, values, phobias and anxieties are taught explicitly, most is absorbed subconsciously.”

Each of us is a part of different cultures (maybe to some extent we could even dare to state that one is a combination of multiple cultures) and at the same time no one is a perfect representation of any culture. Culture is something learnt and acquired and transmitted from generation to generation. No one is born ‘with’ a culture and yet, everyone is born ‘into’ so many of them. Cultural groups can be based on numerous identities, such as: gender, race, nationality, religion, sex orientation, geography, social status, age - to name just a few. Such groups create their own specific systems of beliefs, values, customs, lifestyles, behaviours and perceptions.

Victor D.A. says,

“Communication and culture are inextricably intertwined. Indeed, culture itself is one form of communication....”

The communication is a prerequisite for shaping cultures (or, from a different perspective, one of the processes through which cultures are created and shared). On the other hand, culture plays an enormous part in a way people express themselves, as well as understand the surrounding reality - in other words, how they communicate.

How to Become a Master of Multicultural Communication?

➤ **Change your attitude:**

Ethnocentrism or simplistic attitudes are bound to lead to miscommunication. Sophisticated worldviews embracing diversity among people, their various backgrounds, cultural differences and similarities foster the sense of a friendly, good-

faith communication environment. Curiosity and ultimate capability to distinguish statements and facts from opinions, contexts and values are critical.

➤ **Become a good listener:**

Equally important as making sure you are being understood properly is to ensure your reception of the other person's message is undisturbed. Sometimes the biggest problem in communication is that we listen to replay and not to understand. Learn to really listen, understand others and how to show them they are not speaking in vain.

➤ **Adjust your intercultural language competency:**

When we discuss language as a potential barrier in a communication process it is important to acknowledge that is not only about simple knowledge of vocabulary and grammar person, we are interacting with possesses. It is also about the pace we and that particular person are speaking, volume and accent. Our day-to-day language is filled with ambiguous words and phrases, professional jargon, abbreviations, colloquialism, references to current events, famous quotes, metaphors, phrasal verbs etc. There is no doubt 'language competency' in intercultural context is crucial for successful communication. At the same time in such a context, language competency should not be understood as simply a comprehensive knowledge and fluency in the language, but rather a competency to adjust usage of a language depending on a person one is communicating with. In most scenarios that might even be more difficult, as it is something one has to learn independently from simply learning the language.

➤ **Be curious – learn about other cultures:**

Communicating across cultures is often a foreign territory where it is easy to be taken aback by the other sides' words or behaviours that are particular to other cultures and uncommon to ours. Learn and show knowledge of other countries and cultures, try to familiarize yourself with customs in relevant regions. However, beware of stereotypes as you can never predict a person's behaviour based solely on their nationality or origin. Each individual is unique.

Why is Cross-Cultural Communication Important?

To be successful in any industry, organizations need to understand the communication patterns of employees, customers, investors, and other audiences. Awareness and willingness to adjust allow for the exchange of information regardless of cultural values, norms, and behaviors that may vary between audiences. Given the different backgrounds that each audience comes from, it is critical to understand how culture influences communication, and how this can impact organizational processes.

How to Improve Cross-Cultural Communication

➤ **Embrace Agility:**

The inability or unwillingness to adapt to change is a common barrier to cross-cultural communication. Often, people are reluctant to accept new things due to an unconscious fear that doing so will change their culture or belief system in some way, Goodman explains. If these assumptions are not questioned, actions can be detrimental to personal and organizational growth. By becoming aware of

unconscious barriers or subconscious biases, people can become more open to adapting.

“When an organization becomes too set in its ways, it can halt improvements because they are not open to trying different ways of doing things,” Goodman says.

Instead, organizations need to be focused on continuous improvement, which requires a certain degree of flexibility and willingness to try different ways of doing things.

Unfortunately, there is no one-size-fits-all solution to this problem. Rather, the best way to address the issue often involves getting started on an individual level.

To begin, consider stepping out of your comfort zone and trying new things in the workplace. In terms of cross-cultural communication, one of the best ways to embrace this idea is to try new methods of doing things in ways that can help you better understand the perspectives of others.

➤ **Be Open-Minded:**

Similarly, closed-mindedness is another barrier to cross-cultural communication that can hinder the success of an organization.

“People get caught in the trap of thinking that there is one right way to do things and everything else is wrong,” Goodman points out.

On a personal level, becoming more open-minded can be as simple as learning more about an idea that you wouldn’t have considered otherwise. Being exposed to new viewpoints and making the effort to understand them can have an impact on how you make decisions moving forward.

On the other hand, when you’re in a situation where you must work with a closed-minded individual, Goodman suggests you ask questions and look for opportunities to offer a range of thoughts for your audience by providing reliable and valid pieces of data. Leveraging accurate data can be a powerful tool when convincing someone to consider other ideas. By discussing options and listening, you can build trust. However, presenting this information in an effective way can be a challenge. If people feel overwhelmed by the information or do not trust its validity, it can have the opposite effect. Be sure to carefully identify and present the information to successfully encourage others to approach other ideas with an open mind.

➤ **Facilitate Meaningful Conversation**

A lack of communication in an organization can exacerbate cultural differences between individuals. In an environment that does not allow for open communication, people tend not to speak up or share comments and feedback with one another.

So, how might members of an organization facilitate open conversation and freely interact with each other? Although the organizational culture is unlikely to change overnight, making the effort to spark conversations on the individual level can be a step in the right direction.

“One of the best ways to get started is to connect with someone who might have a different perspective from your own,” Goodman remarks. “Start a conversation with someone in another department and ask questions, and try to gain a better understanding of their point of view by actively listening.” Not only will this allow

you to gain an understanding and appreciation for another person's perspective, but it will also help to build strong relationships in the workplace. Goodman recommends "being curious, asking questions, and being open to different points of view."

Encouraging meaningful interactions also has a significant impact on the overall environment by creating a comfortable space where team members can openly share their thoughts and ideas.

➤ **Become Aware**

Another important step to improving cross-cultural communication in the workplace is to become more culturally and self-aware.

On a personal level, you should make an effort to acknowledge your own implicit biases and assumptions that affect the way you interact with others. Although this may be easier said than done, you can start by making a conscious attempt to empathize with your audience and gain a better understanding of their point of view.

At the organizational level, Goodman recommends starting with an audit of internal communications. Throughout this process, you should be asking how your mission and company values are defined, whether or not they are inclusive, and whether the team's various cultures have been taken into account. Performing this analysis will give you a good idea of the state of your corporate culture, including areas in your organizational communication strategy that you can improve to better serve your team members and achieve your goals.

PRESENTATION SKILLS

SMALL TALK

What is Small Talk?

It is normal and necessary to make "small talk" in certain situations. Small talk is a casual form of conversation that "breaks the ice" or fills an awkward silence between people. Even though you may feel shy using your second language, it is sometimes considered rude to say nothing. Just as there are certain times when small talk is appropriate, there are also certain topics that people often discuss during these moments.

Who makes small talk?

People with different relationships use small talk. The most common type of people to use small talk are those who do not know each other at all. Though we often teach children not to talk to strangers, adults are expected to say at least a few words in certain situations. It is also common for people who are only acquaintances, often called a "friend of a friend", to use small talk. Other people who have short casual conversations are office employees who may not be good friends but work in the same department. Customer service representatives, waitresses, hairdressers and receptionists often make small talk with customers. If you happen to be outside when the mailman comes to your door you might make small talk with him too.

What do people make small talk about?

There are certain "safe" topics that people usually make small talk about. The weather is probably the number one thing that people who do not know each other well discuss. Sometimes even friends and family members discuss the weather when they meet or start a conversation. Another topic that is generally safe is current events. As long as you are not discussing a controversial issue, such as a recent law concerning equal rights, it is usually safe to discuss the news. Sports news is a very common topic, especially if a local team or player is in a tournament or play off or doing extremely well or badly. Entertainment news, such as a celebrity who is in town, is another good topic. If there is something that you and the other speaker has in common, that may also be acceptable to talk about. 'or example, if the bus is extremely full and there are no seats available you might talk about reasons why. Similarly, people in an office might casually discuss the new paint or furniture. There are also some subjects that are not

considered acceptable when making small talk. Discussing personal information such as salaries or a recent divorce is not done between people who do not know each other well. Compliments on clothing or hair are acceptable. However, you should never say something good or bad about a person-s body. Negative comments about another person not involved in the conversation are also not acceptable/ when you do not know a person well you cannot be sure who their friends are. Oou do not talk about private issues either, because you do not know if you can trust the other person with your secrets or personal information. It is not safe to discuss subjects that society deems controversial such as religion or politics. Lastly, it is not wise to continue talking about an issue that the other person does not seem comfortable with or interested in.

Where do people make small talk?

People make small talk about anywhere, but there are certain places where it is very common. Most often, small talk occurs in places where people are waiting for something. For example, you might chat with another person who is waiting for the bus to arrive, or to the person beside you waiting to get on an aeroplane. People also make small talk in a doctors or dentists waiting room, or in queues at the grocery store. At the office, people make small talk in elevators or lunchrooms and even in restrooms, especially if there is a line up. Some social events such as a party requires small talk among guests who do not know each other very well. For example, you might talk to someone you do not know at the punch bowl, or at the poolside. It is called "mingling" when people walk around in a social setting and talk to a variety of people.

When do people make small talk?

The most common time for small talk to occur is the first time you see or meet someone on a given day. For example, if you see a co-worker in the lounge you might say hello and discuss the sports or weather. 3owever, the next time you see each other you might smile and say nothing. If there is very little noise, that might be an indication that it is the right time to initiate a casual conversation. Oou should only spark up a conversation after someone smiles and acknowledges you.)o not interrupt two people in order to discuss something unimportant such as the weather. If someone is reading a book or writing a letter at the bus stop it is not appropriate to initiate a conversation either. Another good time to make small talk is during a break in a meeting or presentation when there is nothing

important going on. It is important to recognize the cue when the other person wants the conversation to stop.

Why do people make small talk?

There are a few different reasons why people use small talk. The first, and most obvious is to break an uncomfortable silence. Another reason, however, is simply to fill time. That is why it is so common to make small talk when you are waiting for something. Some people make small talk in order to be polite. You may not feel like chatting with anyone at a party, but it is rude to just sit in a corner by yourself. After someone introduces you to another person, you do not know anything about them, so in order to show a polite interest in getting to know them better, you have to start with some small talk.

Tips for becoming a better, more respected conversationalist:

➤ **Become more social.**

For many, lacking conversation skills boils down to their lack of confidence in social or business settings. Reading up on how to develop better communication skills can be helpful, but experts advise putting yourself in social situations as often as possible. Pay attention to the flow of conversations within your business or social circles. Observe those who seem to be the most effective communicators. What techniques do they use? How do they relate to others in the group? Listen to what they say and notice what they don't say. Instead of arriving late to a Toastmasters meeting and leaving at the drop of the gavel, show up early and strike up a conversation with whomever is there. Ask if you can help set up for the meeting. Stick around afterwards, even for a few minutes, and talk to someone before leaving. Once you feel more comfortable in this friendly environment conversing with a stranger, practice your skills by attending a social event.

➤ **Be a good listener.**

This is not to say you should stand on the outskirts of a conversation and just listen. Engage in the conversation. Be attentive to whomever is speaking, and respond accordingly by nodding or smiling. Let the speaker know you have been listening by commenting on the message. You will gain more respect in social and business circles when you demonstrate good listening skills. A good listener is someone who is genuinely interested in what others have to say. Likewise, when we are thinking about our next comment instead of paying attention to the speaker, we are not demonstrating good listening skills.

➤ **Encourage the other person to talk.**

If you want to be considered a wonderful conversationalist, just invite others to talk about themselves. We are all more comfortable speaking about a subject that is familiar, and what is more familiar to you than you?

➤ **Ask questions.**

Start a conversation or demonstrate your interest in what a person is saying by asking questions. Open-ended questions elicit more interesting responses. That's why they are called "conversation starters." Crackerjack conversationalists—those people with whom others love to converse—generally have good memories. They pay attention to others. They take in what they learn about others and use that information to engage them in conversation. You might say, "Hi Brad, how was your Hawaiian vacation last

month?” Follow up by asking, “What impressed you most about Maui?” or “As I recall, the last time I saw you, you were applying for a new job. How did that go?” or “Hey Sally, how’s that grandbaby? Did you have a good visit with her in Atlanta?” A follow-up question to keep this conversation going might be, “What does it feel like to be a grandmother?”

➤ **Use body language to express interest in the conversation.**

This seems elementary, but if you’re observant, you’ll notice that not everyone follows this good advice. Face the speaker with unfolded arms. Lean forward slightly, if you are seated. Make eye contact. Acknowledge statements with a nod, comment or question when appropriate.

➤ **Know when to speak and when to listen.**

Conversation should involve give and take. Each person in a conversation should speak and listen. Participate, but don’t monopolize. Sometimes, someone else puts you in the position of monopolizing a conversation. This person asks question after question about you without offering any information in return. Having someone express that much interest in you may be the height of enjoyment and flattery but after a while, it will begin to feel like an interrogation rather than a conversation. Avoid interrogating others.

➤ **Be prepared.**

A good conversationalist engages the listener and stimulates the conversation. Keep up with trends and current events so you’ll have something to talk about. Take a keen interest in others, but also live an interesting life of your own. Try new things. Accept unusual invitations. Volunteer for causes that interest you. Go back to school. Read. Meet new challenges, and then share your experiences within social circles.

➤ **Model yourself after someone whose conversation skills you admire.**

Who is your favorite conversation partner? We all know someone who gets positive attention at social events and business meetings. Consider the people you look forward to talking with. What makes them stand out in a crowd? What are some of his most endearing qualities? How does she make you feel when you’re talking? Study her body language, opening and closing statements and speaking style. To improve your conversation skills, mimic someone you consider successful in this area.

PREPARING AND PRESENTING REPORTS AND SPEECHES

Fundamentals of Presenting

The fundamentals of public speaking remain the same in any context, be it classroom, conference, parliament or crowded city square. Good public speakers use simple and clear language to communicate complex points. They pause when they speak, and they deliver their message with confidence derived from their knowledge and preparation.

A good presentation:

Has a focused and relevant message

- Is clearly organized and supported by evidence
- Demonstrates understanding and analysis of ideas
- Is delivered calmly and confidently

Plan a Presentation

Focus and Purpose

A presentation is not a dry list of disconnected facts. Like lab reports or essays, it makes a specific point. Start by asking yourself “So What?” Determine the most important point you wish to make and identify why it is important.

Audience

Plan your presentation to suit your audience. Consider their familiarity with the subject and their purpose for listening to your presentation. Classmates will likely have some background on the topic, and because they are keenly aware that they will eventually present to you, they are usually quite generous in their reception of your talk.

Structure

A logical structure supports a clear and focused message, and it stops you from leaping from idea to idea, which can make it difficult for your audience to understand your talk.

Introduction:

- Tell the audience who you are and present your main argument with key background information.
- Explain why your presentation is important.
- Build a rapport with the audience to help them follow what comes next.

Body of your presentation:

- The largest section of your presentation
- It supports your main argument with specific examples.
- Visual aids clarify your points and lend credibility to your presentation.

Conclusion:

- A strong conclusion summarizes your main points.
- Use key words from your introduction to briefly re-state your argument.
- End your presentation with a simple, strong statement.

Preparation

Rather than prepare a script, create a plan for each section or idea with point form notes. A good presentation is not written down word for word or memorized but instead is a discussion of a subject you know inside and out. Speaking from point form notes keeps your delivery fresh. Remember, you are talking to people, not reading at them.

Key technical details can be written down, but it make sure that you include only essential information as too many technical details may confuse your audience and cause them to tune out.

Visual Aids

Visual aids, like Power Point slides or printed handouts, offer structure for your presentation and help the audience follow the main points. Visual aids may be bulleted lists or outlines, charts or figures, or images that show important details that would take time to explain orally. Use visual aids to complement, rather than compete, with your presentation. If they are not necessary or helpful, don't use them.

And never read the exact words from slides that you present.

Delivery Practice

Rehearse! Focus on tone, volume, word choice, transitions, pauses and pacing. Note time limits. Time yourself and revise as appropriate. Practice your presentation before a friend or family member and ask for feedback.

Get to the room well ahead of time. Listen to some relaxing music if this helps you. Make sure the technology is all up and running if you need to use it.

Stay Calm

Chat with people in the audience before you present. This breaks the ice, creates connections, personalizes the encounter and helps you feel more confident. Experts often suggest that you focus your presentation on a group of individuals instead of the entire audience. This makes it seem as if you are speaking to a smaller group

Pace and Volume

Take it slow. The single biggest mistake inexperienced speakers make is going too fast. [SB1] Remember that your audience is hearing the material for the first time and isn't nearly as familiar with the topic as you are.

Speak loudly and clearly. Practice pronouncing difficult words in advance.

Body Language and Eye Contact

Make and maintain eye contact with your audience. Always face your audience; avoid reading from your slide presentation and try to look up from your notes regularly.

Stand tall at the front of the room. Don't sit down, lean on a desk or hide behind a lectern.

Try not to sway back and forth.

Answering Questions

Leave time to answer questions, and prepare in advance for possible questions your audience may ask. You can pause to gather your thoughts before you reply, and if something is outside of your comfort zone, simply (and confidently) say "that is outside the scope of this research."

Share your Personality

Try to have some fun, put your personality into the presentation while maintaining professional decorum. Make the presentation uniquely yours – people will remember you and your message.

PRESENTATION AIDS

What are Presentation Aids?

When you give a speech, you are presenting much more than just a collection of words and ideas. Because you are speaking "live and in person," your audience members will experience your speech through all five of their senses: hearing, vision, smell, taste, and touch. In some speaking situations, the speaker appeals only to the sense of hearing. They more or less ignore the other senses except to avoid visual distractions by dressing and presenting themselves in an appropriate manner. But the speaking event can be greatly enriched by appeals to the other senses. This is the role of presentation aids.

Presentation aids are the resources beyond the speech words and delivery that a speaker uses to enhance the message conveyed to the audience. The type of presentation aids that speakers most typically make use of are visual aids: pictures, diagrams, charts and graphs, maps, and the like. Audible aids include musical excerpts, audio speech excerpts, and sound effects. A

speaker may also use fragrance samples or food samples as olfactory (sense of smell) or gustatory (sense of taste) aids. Finally, presentation aids can be three-dimensional objects, animals, and people; they can also change over a period of time, as in the case of a how-to demonstration.

As you can see, the range of possible presentation aids is almost unlimited. However, all presentation aids have one thing in common: To be effective, each presentation aid a speaker uses must be a direct, uncluttered example of a specific element of the speech. It is understandable that someone presenting a speech about Abraham Lincoln might want to include a photograph of him, but because everyone already knows what Lincoln looked like, the picture would not contribute much to the message unless, perhaps, the message was specifically about the changes in Lincoln's appearance during his time in office.

Other visual artifacts are more likely to deliver information more directly relevant to the speech—a diagram of the interior of Ford's Theater where Lincoln was assassinated, a facsimile of the messy and much-edited Gettysburg Address, or a photograph of the Lincoln family, for example. The key is that each presentation aid must directly express an idea in your speech.

Moreover, presentation aids must be used at the time when you are presenting the specific ideas related to the aid. For example, if you are speaking about coral reefs and one of your supporting points is about the location of the world's major reefs, it would make sense to display a map of these reefs while you're talking about location. If you display it while you are explaining what coral actually is, or describing the kinds of fish that feed on a reef, the map will not serve as a useful visual aid—in fact, it's likely to be a distraction.

To be effective, presentation aids must also be easy to use and easy for the listeners to see and understand. In this chapter, we will present some principles and strategies to help you incorporate effective presentation aids into your speech. We will begin by discussing the functions that good presentation aids fulfill. Next, we will explore some of the many types of presentation aids and how best to design and utilize them. We will also describe various media that can be used for presentation aids. We will conclude with tips for successful preparation and use of presentation aids in a speech.

Types of Presentation Aids:

Charts and Graphs

Charts and graphs are a form of presentation aid used to visually compare statistics and figures. These are some of the most used forms of visual aids in the business world. Listening to long strings of numbers can be a challenging task. Comparing long strings of numbers without reference can be near impossible. Overwhelmed with this type of data, most audience members will mentally check out. Comparing simple shapes or lines is an easier task for most people. Consider adding a chart like the one below as a presentation aid for your audience. A simple chart or graph will drastically help your audience comprehend numbers in a way that is easier to understand.

Handouts

Handouts are physical objects given to the audience that contain information related to the presentation. The greatest advantage of using a handout is the physical interaction your audience has with your presentation. Your audience has the freedom to interact with these handouts during the presentation — they can touch, smell, read, etc., giving them an edge in

actually retaining the information. The more senses your audience uses during a presentation, the better. A handout also lets your audience revisit parts of your presentation that were not clear. This helps everyone stay on the same page. A bonus to using handouts is that these objects don't just magically disappear. Long after the presentation is over, the handout will still be around. Your audience will remember your presentation every time they see your handout.

Demonstration

Demonstrations are actions performed to exhibit or illustrate a point. The goal of a demonstration is to take an abstract point and anchor it in reality, as well as to ensure your audience comprehends a speaking point. Demonstrations aren't limited to just physical demonstrations. Demonstrations may also include allegorical stories or proofs used to prove a point. Sharing personal stories or case studies could be categorized as a demonstration. Demonstrations are also powerful communication tools. They have the potential to make your presentation go from mediocre to memorable. While powerful, demonstrations can work for or against you. Adding too many, too large or unrelated demonstrations can distract your audience from the actual topic. Ensure that your demonstrations are connected to and accentuate your main points.

Diagrams

A diagram is a visual graphic or sketch focused on presenting the inner workings or relations of a subject. A diagram is different from a basic sketch. While a sketch aims to accurately depict an object's shape, a diagram aims to explain and define its functions and relations. Diagrams give you the freedom to list, describe, explain and map out your subject matter in a way that is not limited to its physical form. While mixing a diagram and physical sketch together can be cool, it's not necessary. Diagrams ought to be chosen based on their effectiveness in explaining the subject's construction and relation to other objects. Diagrams are also great for describing and defining things that do not have form. Instead of giving a long and complex definition that no one will remember, consider using a diagram. Diagrams can show how this new thing relates to something familiar to your audience. This will help your audience understand and remember complex portions of your presentation.

Video or Audio

Audio and video clips are presentation aids used to expand the dynamic range of input in your speech. Your audience will find it easier to engage with your presentation when you diversify your method of delivery. An easy way to increase audiences' sensory input is by transitioning from a simple speech into a video or audio clip. Videos allow you to convey information in a fast and rehearsed manner. Professional camera work captures prearranged images, audio and speech. This means video is capable of conveying emotion and information more effectively than speech. For this reason, a short video clip may do a better job at summarizing the main points of a presentation than a speech alone. While the benefits of video are high, there are also some potential problems. The most common issue with video usage in presentations being technical compatibility issues. A smooth transition between speech and video is necessary for your presentation. Rough or elongated transitions can be a major distraction for your audience. If this happens, your audience may find it difficult to reinvest in your presentation. To ensure smooth transitions, your presentation software must be capable of integrating videos clips directly into your presentation.

Quotes

Quotations are a type of presentation aid that appeal to outside authority and expertise. Quoting others helps establish a positive rapport with your audience. Many people fear quoting others makes them appear unoriginal. The opposite is actually true. Quoting outside sources tends to drastically improve the overall appeal of your presentation. Quoting others shows that you have listened to others on this subject. This makes the presenter appear as a well thought out and considerate listener. It's recommended that you quote those who both agree and disagree with your conclusion. By doing so, you establish a sense of trust and expertise with your audience. Quoting those who disagree with your conclusion shows that you have taken the time and effort to engage their thought process. Quoting those who agree with you shows your conclusion to be a recurring conclusion.

Maps

Maps are visual representations, generally two-dimensional diagrams, that show the relative position and orientation of something. Maps are powerful presentation aids capable of showing valuable information beyond basic geography. Because maps are a form of diagram, they can deliver valuable relational information. This is especially true when used in combination with animations or graphical overlays. Proper presentation software will allow you to update your dataset for your map. The changes should immediately update the output of your map without having to manually manipulate the image.

Photographs

Photographs are still images captured on a film or digital medium and are a powerful visual aid. When used correctly, photographs can add colour and shape to the speech in your presentation. The saying "a picture is worth a thousand words" is a true statement. A picture is priceless when it's able to capture and accentuate a point relevant to your presentation. Photographs are unique presentations aids that give you the power to make a window for your audience to look through. This allows your audience to see and experience particular aspects of your presentation. While the color red can be described with many words, there's an experiential gap. Once seen, you can experience the color red. When a presentation is given, words can help describe an idea, but not experience the idea. Presentation images give you the possibility to close that visual experiential gap. Even in a world that sells pocket-sized HD 4k 60fps video cameras, the photograph is still the visual aid of choice for most people. While videos are powerful in their own right, photos give you the power to capture and highlight one particular moment.

Volunteers

Volunteers are people selected from the general population to participate in a demonstration. Using volunteers in demonstrations is one of the most effective presentation aids available. Using this tactic efficiently comes with all the advantages of a classic demonstration, and so much more. Human interaction is hardwired into us. We tend to remember faces, body shapes, expressions and emotions. A demonstration with volunteers lets you instantly change the dynamic of the speech. Demonstrations with volunteers encourage audience interaction with your subject matter. When the audience sees a volunteer interact with your presentation, the barrier to entry is lowered — plus, it gives your audience the chance to become a volunteer that's doing the interaction themselves. This makes your subject more approachable and your call to action more likely to succeed. Be sure your

interactions with the volunteer are somewhere between professional and semi-professional. Most people are already afraid to be on stage. An unprofessional or condescending demeanor will only make things even more uncomfortable. Ensure that our volunteer's role has a strong connection to your main point. Like all good demonstrations, make sure it is contributing to your presentation. If a particular portion of the presentation is not related to the main point, your audience's mind may begin to wander. At the end of the demonstration, be sure to thank and dismiss your volunteers when they are done contributing. There is nothing more distracting for the audience than having an extra person nervously lurking around on stage. Diagrams help explain complex relations between objects without the need for physical properties. Diagrams are great to use when sketches, photographs and videos cannot capture all the attributes of an object. Before settling on which diagram to use, it's best to experiment with different types of diagrams. Your decision should rely upon which diagram will aid your audience the most.

INFLUENCING OTHERS

What Are Influencing Skills?

Influencing abilities help persuade someone to agree with one's opinion or think about a topic, without coercion, while also acknowledging their viewpoint. Being influential in the workplace can help you be an outstanding leader and accomplish important business goals. Knowing and developing essential influencing abilities can help you encourage and convince colleagues to support your goals and ideas and become a better professional. In this article, we explain what influencing abilities are, list some examples, explore how you can use these skills and also provide tips to use them in your workplace.

Influencing skills are abilities that encourage and persuade others to adopt or support your ideas. The skill to influence others can be beneficial for leaders to motivate people and make their teams more productive. These skills are especially important in leadership or senior positions, as these individuals are key to motivating the workforce and uniting them to fulfil organisational goals effectively. With these skills, one can impact the attitude, behaviour, choices and opinions of other people positively.

Examples of Influencing Skills

Influencing abilities can be of different types. Some of these skills help an individual instil trust in their colleagues, while some others help them develop meaningful relationships with them, both of which are necessary for being an influential personality. Some important such skills include:

- **Active listening**

Active listening is essential to understanding the speaker's perspective and opinion. This also creates a positive impression on the speaker, as it conveys sincerity and respect towards the individual and the conversation. Doing this can help build a rapport, which is important to influence them and lead effectively.

- **Assertiveness**

Being assertive is a skill very useful for leaders and people in a position of authority. Assertiveness means being able to communicate one's thoughts and opinions in a confident and effective manner. Often, an assertive person can command respect and

communicate on the behalf of others. Earning respect from peers can encourage them to accept one's ideas and motivate others to listen to them.

- **Communication**

Communication skills include non-verbal, verbal and active listening skills, which help one interact with others. Being able to communicate with other people in an open and truthful manner is key to influencing them. Articulating the ideas and goals clearly can help effectively convey your views and achieve the desired results.

- **Critical thinking**

Thinking critically in certain scenarios can help one analyse and effectively interpret information. One can use this ability to understand one's own personality and beliefs and also interpret the behaviour of other people. This understanding can help one efficiently decide the course of action to achieve their goals.

- **Empathy**

Empathy is a primary requirement for being influential. Empathy is a trait that helps one relate to and understand another person's emotions and feelings. Understanding other people is key to learning the most effective ways to influence them. The skill can help one be reliable and lead to deeper and more meaningful relationships.

- **Interpersonal skills**

Interpersonal skills are also an important trait for any successful professional. It fosters lasting and understanding relationships. The ability to hold meaningful conversations according to the person or audience involved is essential to motivating and influencing them.

- **Innovation**

To influence people, one requires a considerable amount of creativity and innovation to accomplish certain goals to demonstrate proficiency. Innovation can help one earn attention and respect from one's colleagues and be more reliable in the workplace. Being ingenious can inspire others to value one's ideas and rely on them for creative solutions.

- **Leadership**

Leadership is an important ability to be an influential professional. Having this skill can help in earning proficiency in a role where one can exercise their authority to influence others in the workplace. Though being in charge of other people is not mandatory to influence them, being an efficient leader can help better translate thoughts and ideas to others.

- **Negotiation**

Negotiation skills can help involved parties arrive at a favourable conclusion in a dispute. These skills can help you influence others to accept your viewpoint in a way that is respectful and benefits all. To develop negotiation skills, it is important to be prepared and to understand everyone's opinions and their stake in the dispute.

- **Time management**

Time management refers to the ability to stay organised and accomplish tasks on time. The ability to manage one's time and resources correctly can enhance their planning

and strategising skills as well. Being punctual can show professionalism and mutual respect and make it easier for others to trust them.

How to Improve Influencing Skills

- **Be aware of yourself and your surroundings**

Awareness means an ability to assess your surroundings as well as yourself. It requires being constantly aware of the people with whom you work, your workplace and your reactions to different situations. This helps you be conscious of your actions and to ensure your reactions are productive and can set an example for those around you.

- **Be resilient in your efforts**

While influencing others, resilience and endurance are important for sustainable success as a leader. Endurance is the ability to stay persistent despite challenges or hardships. It is necessary to approach colleagues persistently and adopt various techniques to motivate them to consider your views.

- **Improve your interpretation skills**

Good interpretation skills are essential to making educated assumptions and understanding people and situations. One can also use interpretation to understand an individual's non-verbal behaviour like body language and facial expressions, to guide their actions. Understanding people on a personal level can make it easier to interact with them and eventually influence them.

- **Build up your confidence levels**

Self-confidence is an attractive quality that encourages others to emulate and listen to you. Feeling confident about your abilities and accepting who you are is essential to succeeding in your professional endeavours. When you are confident, you exude a sense of authority and expertise, allowing people to follow you and rely on you.

- **Develop your persuasion skills**

Persuasion involves using facts and arguments to convince someone to agree with your point of view. Influencing and persuasion skills can be useful in a variety of situations in the workplace for several industries and job roles. With good persuasion skills, you can reduce conflict and inspire others to take action for the benefit of the organisation for which you work.

Influencing Abilities in the Workplace:

- **Build trust.**

You are in a better position to influence your peers when you gain their trust. You can earn your colleagues' trust by being honest and transparent with them at all times and by being a dependable team member.

- **Focus on actions.**

It is important to prove your words through your actions to build influence over your coworkers. You can devise a strategy and implement it to test its effectiveness.

- **Deliver reliable results.**

Consistency in performance is also important to building a reputation as a professional. This makes reliability in performance instrumental to becoming influential in the workplace.

- **Be dynamic.**

Having the ability to adapt to changing situations whilst keeping in mind the best interests of the organization for which you work is important to demonstrate your versatility. This includes accepting others' opinions whenever required to achieve the desired results, which subsequently earns the trust of your team members.

How to Highlight Influencing Abilities:

- **On a resume**

You can list your influencing abilities in the skills section of your resume. The summary section can also include a few words about your accomplishments reflecting your influencing abilities. The work experience section can include instances where you utilised these skills to accomplish quantifiable outcomes in your previous roles.

- **In a cover letter**

Use your cover letter as an opportunity to elaborate on your influencing abilities. You can also explain how your ability to influence coworkers can help you be effective in the role for which you are applying. You can mention future aspirations that you plan on realising with the help of these skills.

- **During a job interview**

Interviews are great opportunities to show your influencing abilities. Prepare a list of instances and scenarios from your previous roles that reflect your ability to influence peers. Understand what the employer is looking for and customize your responses to match their expectations to increase your chances of impressing the recruiting managers and getting shortlisted for the job.

LEADERSHIP

There has been a misconception that the only thing required to work in the Social Sector is the will to make a difference. While passion is definitely important, people also require the right kind of knowledge, expertise, tools, and skills in order to work effectively in the Development Leadership and Management space. While the hard skills that one needs may vary from role to role, it is essential for everyone in the space to have the requisite soft skills.

What are Soft Skills and Hard Skills?

Hard Skills refer to the knowledge and ability that an individual needs in order to do their job. Hard Skills can range from knowing how to code in C language to being well-versed in how to argue in a courtroom. In the social sector, more specifically, hard skills may mean the ability to conduct research in the field, fundraise, design and implement projects, create curricula, or even undertake marketing for an NGO and their cause.

Soft Skills, on the other hand, are the interpersonal skills that people need in order to do well in their jobs. This can mean having the ability to work well in teams, manage time, and multitask. While soft skills are a necessity if one wants to do well in any field, they are especially important for Social Work.

Much of the work that is done in the social sector involves multiple stakeholders, all of whom might have different interests. In scenarios such as these, it is imperative to have the right kind of interpersonal skills in order to reach a positive resolution.

Soft skills necessary for Development Management and Leadership Professionals:

- **Teamwork**

Unlike the Corporate world, where people may work in silos momentarily, much of the work that is done in the social sector requires collaboration between people from different backgrounds, specializations, teams, and even domains. It is a given that the ability to work in a team is vital for people working in NGOs and other Social Purpose Organisations (SPOs). As simple as the term teamwork seems on the surface, it is a skill that often needs to be learnt and practised. Good teamwork involves communication, active listening, and the ability to understand the other's point of view, all of which are important soft skills as well.

Communication is important in all walks to life. In the social sector, it is vital to communicate with all the stakeholders involved in a manner that is clear and easy to understand. Bad communication can and will lead to projects that are either stalled, unfinished, or never take off from the ground. Effective communication involves not just making sure that you are understood, but also understanding the people you are talking to as well. This includes, at least in part, the ability to empathise with and relate to the person you are speaking to. Active listening plays a key role here. Active listening is essentially the practice of listening to comprehend instead of listening to respond. Like many other soft skills, this is also something that can be picked up by people if they put in the time and effort.

- **Critical Thinking**

The nature of the social sector is such that it is difficult for anyone to approach only a single issue at one time. Many issues that the sector engages with are interrelated and tend to amplify each other. Trying to increase attendance rates at schools, for instance, can mean having to provide food during lunchtime. Understanding the interrelated nature of these issues and thinking of solutions that can address these problems requires Critical Thinking. Critical Thinking is the ability to look at a problem from multiple perspectives using the data, evidence, and accounts that are available in order to arrive at a solution that covers different aspects of the issue. In the social sector, Critical Thinking can give development professionals the ability to analyse the situation from a neutral viewpoint before making hasty conclusions. It's an essential skill for working in an NGO or in the development space.

- **Networking with stakeholders and partners**

While networking might seem like an off-shoot of communication, it is important in its own right. There are many reasons why this is the case. The first is that it opens up avenues for knowledge exchange. Many people in the social sector work on similar problems in areas that are geographically distant. Networking and being open to making these connections can allow people to share their ideas with each other and even arrive at conclusions that may be mutually beneficial. Networking with stakeholders, on the other hand, can allow development professionals to understand the problems they might be working on in a more holistic manner. Stakeholders often have varied perspectives and understanding of solutions when viewing the same issues. Considering all these aspects before they start working on the problem will help the development professional to arrive

at a more complete solution. Networking with stakeholders can also help ensure participation of the desired stakeholders leading towards robust implementation of projects.

- **Work under Pressure**

Working in the social sector can, and often does, mean working on very sensitive issues. It can also mean working on very many things at the same time. While on the one hand this gives people excellent opportunities to learn new skills and grow in their career, it can also lead to people feeling stressed or having to work under pressure. One of the advantages of working in a SPO is that it often offers a community and working environment that helps mitigate much of the pressure arising from job demands.

- **Willingness to learn and unlearn**

This might perhaps be the most important soft skill for NGOs. It is easy enough to understand the importance of learning. Learning new things can allow development professionals to reorient themselves according to the situation at hand and use the new skills they might have picked up along the way to be better at their job. Unlearning is the process of realizing that some of the concepts or ideas that we may have encountered at an earlier stage in our life may be incorrect or outdated, and deciding to erase these misconceptions from our mind. In the social sector, unlearning and relearning is a vital process. It is inevitable that while working in the Development Management and Leadership space one might stumble across an idea that feels antithetical to their way of thinking. The process of unlearning and relearning is required at junctures such as these.

Soft Skills, like Hard Skills, are abilities that people can learn over time. The first step of course is to be aware of the skills and the urgency and proficiency you need in these skills to undertake work in the social sector.

SOCIALIZING

What are Social Skills?

Social skills are the skills we use to communicate and interact with each other, both verbally and non-verbally, through gestures, body language and our personal appearance.

Human beings are sociable creatures and we have developed many ways to communicate our messages, thoughts and feelings with others. What is said is influenced by both verbal language and the way we use it - tone of voice, volume of speech and the words we choose - as well as by more subtle messages such as body language, gestures and other non-verbal communication methods. The fact that some people are better '*social interactors*' than others has led to detailed investigations into the nature and function of interpersonal interaction. Developing social skills is about being aware of how we communicate with others, the messages we send and how methods of communication can be improved to make the way we communicate more efficient and effective.

Advantages to having well developed social skills.

- **More and Better Relationships**

By developing your social skills you become more charismatic, a desirable trait . People are more interested in charismatic people as charismatic people are (or at least appear to be) more interested in them.

Most people know you cannot advance far in life without strong interpersonal relationships. Focusing on relationships will help you get a job, get promoted and make new friends. Well honed social skills can increase your happiness and satisfaction and give you a better outlook on life. More relationships can also help to reduce the negative effects of stress and boost your self-esteem.

➤ **Better Communication**

Relating with people and being able to work in large groups naturally develops one's communication skills. After all, you cannot have great social skills without good communication skills and being able to convey one's thoughts and ideas may be the single most important skill that you can develop in life..

➤ **Greater Efficiency**

If you are good with people, you can more easily avoid being with the people you do not like as much as others. Some people dread social interactions because they do not wish to spend time with individuals who do not have similar interests and viewpoints. It is a lot easier to attend a meeting at work or a party in your personal life if you know at least some of the people who will be there. If you are in a social situation and do not want to spend time with 'John' because you don't like him or he cannot help you with a particular issue, a good set of social skills will allow you to politely convey that you need to spend time with other people at the get together.

➤ **Advancing Career Prospects**

Most worthwhile jobs have a 'people component' and the most lucrative positions often involve a large amount of time spent interacting with employees, media and colleagues.

It is rare that an individual can remain isolated in their office and still excel in their job. Most organizations are looking for individuals with a particular, tactical, skill set: the ability to work well in a team and to influence and motivate people to get things done.

➤ **Increased Overall Happiness**

Getting along and understanding people will help to open many personal and career-related doors. Having the confidence to start a conversation at a work-related conference may lead to a new job offer with a higher salary. A smile and 'hello' in a social situation may lead to a friendship being formed.

Characteristics of Social Skills

- Social skills are goal-directed.
- Socially skilled behaviours are interrelated in the sense that one person may use more than one kind of behaviour at the same time, for the same goal.
- Social skills should be appropriate to the situation of communication. Different social skills will be used for professional and personal communication.
- Social skills can be identified as certain types of behaviour whereby an individual can be judged on how socially skilled they are.
- Social skills can be taught, practiced and learned.

- Social skills should be under the cognitive control of the individual - learning them involves learning when to use particular behaviours, as well as what behaviours to use, or how to use them.

MANAGING SKILLS TIME MANAGEMENT

What is Time Management?

Time management is the method of planning and balancing your time between different activities. Good time management helps you to complete a given task in a specific time frame amidst challenges and tight schedules. When you manage your schedule and deadlines, strong time management skills help you better your reputation and move ahead in the workplace.

Time Management Skills:

Time management skills are those that help you use your time effectively and achieve desired results. These can help you allocate your time properly and accomplish tasks efficiently. Some of the most important skills related to successful time management include:

- **Organisation**

Staying organized helps you to keep track of your responsibilities and priorities, like what you need to do first and when to do the rest of it. An organised list of tasks acts as a map to guide you from morning to evening and helps increase your productivity. A well-organised plan helps you break down large goals into smaller, easily achievable tasks and enables you to complete those tasks on time.

- **Prioritisation**

Prioritisation is the key to successful time management. When you prioritise your daily tasks, you ensure that you will complete the important tasks first. Write down every single task starting with the top priority. For instance, you can break down your tasks as the following:

A-level tasks: Things that will lead to major consequences if not done today

B-level tasks: Activities that may have a negative effect if not completed today

C-level tasks: Activities that have no consequence if not completed today

- **Goal setting**

Goal setting is the process of defining your aims and objectives with a certain plan to help you achieve the set goals. Setting goals is a key step in excelling as a professional. Without goals, you may find it challenging to complete your tasks in a well-organised manner. Setting both short- and long-term goals can lead to success in your career. An example of a short-term goal may be to increase sales in your department by 40%. A long-term goal could be something like completing law school or starting your own business.

- **Communication**

Communication skills are a major component of success in life. Effective communication promotes trust and makes your plans and goals clear to people you work with. It plays a crucial role in resolving conflicts and preventing potential

conflict situations. Strong communication helps you delegate more work, which lets you focus more on the important tasks that support your goals.

➤ **Planning**

Planning is the core of time management. With a proper plan, you can prioritise your tasks accordingly, which can help avoid confusion and unnecessary stress. A planned work schedule helps you complete the tasks in the given time frame. For example, a plan for a project manager might include ordering supplies, scheduling labour, acquiring the proper permits and so on.

➤ **Delegation**

It is an important process to manage multiple tasks satisfactorily. While managing a project, you can delegate some of the tasks to your subordinates. This will help in reducing your workload so that you can focus more on important tasks, such as planning, business analysis and others.

➤ **Stress management**

Positively handling stress keeps you motivated and helps you complete tasks at the scheduled time against all adversities. Exercise, yoga or having snacks during breaks can help you reduce stress. In fact, including stress-relieving activities or self-care rituals into your daily schedule can positively impact your productivity on work-related tasks throughout the day.

➤ **Flexibility**

It is vital that you maintain some flexibility in your schedule. Often, a task will take longer than you expect or your supervisor will give you a priority task you were not expecting. Clearly note in your daily schedule where you have space to adjust in preparation for last-minute changes.

Why are Time Management Skills Important?

If you want to excel in life, you have to respect the importance of time and find a way to manage it efficiently. Time management skills help you systematically organise your tasks and accomplish them by their deadline. For example, if you are looking for a job, you need to devote time to updating your resume, searching for job openings, researching good companies for openings, applying and preparing for interviews. Setting aside some specific time daily for the job-related tasks can help you in getting the right job. For example, managing your time properly can give you more time to read job postings thoroughly and finding the ones that best suit your needs. Proper time management allows you to be creative and proactive with your goals. With a well-defined time frame for each workplace task, you can ensure you are contributing to the company in a reliable way.

How to Improve Your Time Management Skills?

With limited time at your disposal and numerous tasks to accomplish in your professional and personal life, time management is a challenging task. Whether you are an executive or a job aspirant, better time management skills can not only help you become a better employee but also a strong candidate while applying for new opportunities. Some ways to improve your time management skills are given below:

- **Prepare a schedule and follow it strictly**

Organize your days and weeks well in advance. There might be unforeseen circumstances, so take into account the kinds of challenges that may arise in your

work and budget time around your tasks and responsibilities. Spend some days tracking everything you do. This will help you identify recurring tasks, which you can include in your schedule.

- **Set some boundaries for yourself**

If you want to accomplish tasks on time without any distraction, you need to inform your team and family members about your limitations and when you are not available. Be sure to communicate your limits in a polite, direct manner. Make it clear to everybody which hours of the day you prefer not to be disturbed at all, except in case of an emergency. During these times, set your phone to do-not-disturb and close any chatting applications on your computer to help you focus exclusively on the task at hand.

- **Fix deadlines**

When you have a task, set a realistic deadline and strictly follow it. The deadline should be a few days before the delivery date whenever possible so that you can review the tasks and implement corrective measures. Keep an eye on the progress of the work and provide timely feedback to ensure that the project is not deviating from its course.

- **Set long- and short-term goals**

Set at least one long-term goal that you wish to achieve. These goals give an idea of what direction you want your life to go in. However, every long-term goal needs related short-term goals as well, as they keep you on track and motivate you to realise your long-term goals. For example, if your objective is to get a promotion within six months, you need to set the short-term goal of improving certain skill sets related to the new position. Your goals should follow the SMART goal strategy to be Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-based.

- **Manage your calendar effectively**

A calendar is one of the most important tools to manage your time, productivity and effectiveness. A calendar allows you to stay caught up on your appointments while giving you a physical space to plan what you need to do first and when, why your involvement is required and what you can complete at a later date. You might consider reserving certain brackets of time regularly for meetings or important tasks.

- **Prioritise your assignments**

Prioritization is one of the cornerstones of productivity as it can help with everything from time management to work-life balance. You can practise prioritisation by including tasks in one master list then breaking it down by daily goals, weekly goals and monthly goals. One way to help you prioritise your schedule is to separate time-bound and important tasks:

- **Important, but not time-bound tasks:**

Decide when you will do these and schedule them in your calendar.

- **Time-bound tasks:**

Add these to your immediate to-do list. If necessary, find colleagues to assist you to ensure these tasks meet their deadlines.

STRESS MANAGEMENT

Definition of Stress Management Skills:

We are all familiar with the word 'stress'; nowadays, it has become a fashionable concept. The mental stress that doesn't get noticed leads to physical stress. Most people cannot cope with their stress properly or deal with it sufficiently. Doctors, scientist, psychologist confirm that a high percentage of diseases have a psychosomatic cause; these diseases are induced by tensions, pressures or a negative attitude towards life that influence the body and the mind and, in due course of time, lead to a medical disorder. In addition, a highly stressed mind lose the ethical values like humaneness, respect, compassion and caring for others. So stress is a very high-risk factor we are dealing with in our day to day life. It is important to understand the cause of stress and learn effective measures to make our stress as eustress rather than distress. In this topic, we are going to learn about Stress Management Skills.

What is Stress and Stress Management?

Stress is a mental reaction to our body experiences due to the demanding circumstance or event that requires immediate action and attention. This reaction initiates our nervous system to produce adrenaline and cortisol hormone and release it in our blood system; gradually, it suppresses the functions of our immune, digestive and reproductive system. That is why it becomes essential to handle our stress level effectively to keep ourselves physically and mentally fit. Stress management is a process that helps an individual to control stress level by practicing self-care, relaxation and also imparts some techniques to handle stress when it occurs. It is a "set of techniques and programs intended to help people to deal more effectively with stress in their lives by analyzing the specific stressors and taking positive actions to minimize their effect"

Causes of Stress

The actual cause of stress varies from person to person; a situation may be stressful for an individual, but for others, it may consider as challenging. The various stressful conditions and situations which plague the mind of many people are called 'stressors'. The stressors are generated by our own perception depending on our personal traits, thought process, habits, available resources and so on. Some people consider financial issues, health problem, conflict in the relationship, job satisfaction, etc., as the source of conflict while another person becomes stressed for some mundane issues like a busy schedule, time pressure. Actually, when the challenges are greater than our ability to encounter them, we feel stress.

Effects of Stress

We always consider stress as a negative impression on our mind. But a certain amount of tension is helpful for triggering a stimulus to overcome the challenging situation. A certain amount of positive stress, which is known as eustress, is vital to enhance our positive energy. On the other hand, the negative stress, which we call distress, is responsible for all kinds of physical, mental, behavioral problem. The below diagram clarifies the various patterns of stress level on ourselves.

Importance of stress management

If we start to live with a high level of stress, it impacts on our mental equilibrium as well as physical health. We detract from a healthy lifestyle, and even a high amount of stress hampers our productivity level also. The ultimate purpose of our life is to enjoy a balanced life with timely work, healthy relationships, relaxation, and fun. That is why effective stress management is essential to handle our stress level efficiently when it occurs, that we can think clearly, perform our professional role productively and relish healthy life.

Various skills or techniques to handle stress

In the process of stress management, it is our skill to find the source from where the stress begins; in order to prevent the stress from occurring at the outset, we should follow some strategies. But the strategies of stress management vary from person to person based on the individual's stressors. There are various stress management techniques that can implement to handle the stress effectively. Some approaches address stress physically and psychologically and help to develop the skill of resilience.

Some useful stress management techniques include:

- **Time Management:**
Time limitations can elicit stress in people's lives. Work schedules sometimes become overloaded, which causes some individuals to feel overwhelmed. In order to manage this kind of situation, one can make a plan of priorities to do the work accordingly. This will help to reduce the stress and even a manageable schedule which can complete within the time frame.
- **Self-limitations:**
Knowing your own limitation and performing your work accordingly helps to alleviate the unnecessary stress. Creating your own boundaries is essential for healthy, stress-free living. Boundaries mean we create some internal rules for ourselves to take care of our well-being. Sometimes it is good not to involve in any kind of racing thoughts which may also aggravate stress. It is suggestible to deviate your mind from that kind of thought and involve yourself with some activities which give relaxation and refreshment to your mind.
- **Friendly social network:**
Sometimes, a supportive network of friends and relatives help to face the challenging situation with stability and less stress. Their encouraging words and listening ears become supportive.
- **Reduce the noise:**
You may try to distract yourself from all kinds of technologically advanced gadget and manage some time to stay in quiet. You can notice that those things which you consider most important for day to day life are very trivial.
- **ABC technique:**
The well-known ABC (A – Adversity or stressful situation, B – Beliefs or the way response to the situation, C – Consequences or the result of your belief) technique was first introduced by psychiatrist DR. Albert Ellis, and later it was adopted by Martin Seligman. The purpose of the technique is to think optimistically.
- **Healthy Diet:**

A healthy balanced diet gives fuel to the body and mind function; it helps us to cope up with any stressful situation. Reducing the consumption of alcohol, caffeine, and sugar is a proven way of decreasing stress or anxiety. If our body gets proper nutrients, stress can likely occur in our everyday life.

- **Exercise:**

Maintaining a consistent routine exercise is a sign of following a healthy lifestyle. Exercise helps our body to reduce tensions and relax muscles.

- **Meditation:**

Use the techniques of deep breathing, breathing exercise, yoga, yogic sleep, meditation to control our physical and mental being. Meditation helps to calm down our body and mind to awaken our inner power.

- **Sleep habit:**

Adequate sleep is necessary to rejuvenate ourselves. It is helpful to boost our immune power and also increases mental alertness, memory, and concentration.

Conclusion

Actually, stress comes about because our mind is everywhere, either regretting the past or glorifying the future. That is why we should develop certain stress management skill to cope up with stress in our daily activities and be able to adore healthy life.

MANAGING TEAMS

What is team management?

Team management is a manager's ability to organize and coordinate team members to execute tasks against a common goal. Leaders with effective team management skills know how to support, motivate, and engage their team. When done effectively, good team management unlocks teamwork in the workplace, boosts productivity, and reduces burnout. Team management is a soft skill composed of a variety of other soft skills, like leadership, problem solving, emotional intelligence, empathy, active listening, communication skills, and teamwork—just to name a few. Becoming a better team manager is all about investing in your soft skills to become a more supportive leader.

Team management vs. Project management

Project management is the process of organizing, managing, and executing projects. Good project managers organize all of the details of their work in one place so their project team has clarity and visibility into who's doing what by when. Project managers are in charge of project initiatives—but they aren't necessarily people managers or team leaders.

Team management, on the other hand, is focused on supporting and coordinating your team. Depending on your organizational structure, you may also be called on to manage projects that your team is working on. Even if you also lead or manage projects, your focus as a team manager is to support your team members.

Team management vs. Team Building

Team building is a way to foster collaboration, camaraderie, and trust among your team members. Effective team building games give team members a chance to get to know one another and improve their teamwork skills in the long term. Good team managers run team

building activities in order to facilitate teamwork on their team. But, depending on your organizational structure, you may have larger department-wide team building opportunities, or your team members may be encouraged to get to know cross-functional team members.

Team management vs. Task Management

Task management is a way to track work from beginning to end. Effective task management software helps you organize your priorities, track your to-dos, and hit your deadlines.

Team managers can empower their team by providing task management tools that provide clarity on individual priorities and keep work organized. However, task management isn't necessarily a requirement for team managers. Depending on your organizational structure, a project manager may be in charge of task management, rather than a team leader.

Is team management important?

Good team management elevates your entire team and unlocks possibilities that wouldn't otherwise be possible. When you have good team management skills, you:

- Set the standard for effective communication in the workplace
- Inspire team members
- Boost team morale and engagement
- Increase productivity
- Reduce burnout
- Unlock teamwork
- Build team synergy

Skills to develop as a team manager

Be transparent

One of the best ways to support your team is to give them the context and information they need to succeed. By keeping your team informed in real time, you ensure everyone knows exactly who's doing what by when. Do this by creating and maintaining a source of truth for all of your team's information. Naturally, we think Asana is a pretty good tool for that. Asana is a work management platform that organizes work so your team knows what to do, why it matters, and how to get it done. Not only can your entire team track their work in Asana, but you can also track and share priorities, so everyone can get their highest-impact work done efficiently and effectively.

Establish good communication practices

The average knowledge worker spends 60% of their time on work about work—things like searching for information, chasing approvals, or compiling project status updates. Work about work takes time away from skilled, meaningful work that drives impact for your team. To reduce work about work, give your team clarity on where information lives and how they can access it. Creating a shared source of truth for all project information is a good start. But it's also critical to clarify which communication tools you're using for what. Use a communication plan to outline when team members should use different tools. For example, you might decide that they should use Slack for real-time communication, and Asana for asynchronous communication about work.

Give and take feedback

Being able to effectively give and take feedback is a critical team management skill. As a manager, you'll need to get comfortable sharing constructive criticism with your team in order to help them grow and achieve their goals. At the same time, soliciting and receiving feedback is a great way for you to grow as a team manager.

Where possible, try to do feedback sessions face to face (or over video call) to reduce any potential miscommunication. Even if you work on a remote team, there are great conflict resolution practices you can begin applying to support your team members.

Invest in collaboration

Collaboration is the grease that makes teams work. But teams aren't necessarily collaborative by default. A critical management skill is enabling team collaboration.

The best way to build a collaborative team is to value collaboration. Model the behavior you want to see in your team members by encouraging feedback, embracing teamwork, and inviting co-creation. Collaboration doesn't always mean perfect team synergy—in fact, disagreement is often a sign of a collaborative team because it means your team members are willing to speak their minds.

Lead by example

As a team manager, your actions and words have a huge impact on the rest of your team. To build trust, try leading by example and modeling the behavior you want to see in your team. This includes getting involved with your team's work, jumping into the details if necessary, and being flexible based on team feedback. To lead by example, show your team you trust them. In a word—be the example your team wants to see. There are a variety of ways to lead by example, but if you're just getting started, try:

- Giving team members the opportunity to get involved in team decision making processes.
- Checking in with team members about which skill sets they're interested in developing, then delegating tasks to help them do just that.
- Clarifying time management expectations about when team members should—and shouldn't—be online and available, and then emulating those expectations yourself.
- Modeling the communication and collaboration practices you want to see in your team.

Promote balance instead of burnout

Burnout is the feeling of emotional, physical, or mental exhaustion that happens as a result of overwork. In 2020, 71% of knowledge workers reported feeling burnt out at least once. But as a team leader, you're empowered to support and prevent burnout on your team.

Regardless of the type of work you do, burnout happens because team members deal with too much for too long. To prevent this from happening, and promote balance instead, be proactive about workload management. Use capacity planning tools, like t-shirt sizing, to get a good sense of what's on everyone's plate. Then, create a resource management plan to clarify where each team member will be spending their time—and ensure no one is spread too thin. If necessary, redistribute tasks to prevent overwork.

Develop your team management style

There is no one way to manage. As you develop and mature as a team manager, you'll gravitate towards different preferences and practices. Even if you already have a good sense

of what you want your team management style to be, it's important to name and recognize your management style in order to get the most out of it.

Establish group norms

Group norms are the spoken—and often unspoken—rules that guide your work interactions. Every team has group norms, even if you've never defined them or written them down anywhere. As the team manager, it's critical that you don't just let group norms develop on their own. This could lead to negative team dynamics, where team members feel uncomfortable speaking up or taking time off, just to name a few examples. Instead, purposefully craft group norms to model your organizational culture. To get started, read our article on how to create group norms for high-performing teams.

Foster intrinsic motivation

As a team manager, the way you motivate your team is critical. There are two types of motivation: intrinsic and extrinsic. Extrinsic motivation is focused on external rewards or punishments, whereas intrinsic motivation focuses on internal satisfaction, regardless of reward.

Part of developing yourself management skills is learning when to use intrinsic motivation vs. extrinsic motivation. Where possible, aim for intrinsic motivation—this type of motivation is harder to instill, but it emphasizes problem solving, creativity, and curiosity.

Connect work to team goals

Teams get their best work done when they understand why their work matters. But too often, our work is siloed and disconnected from larger goals.

As a team manager, a critical but often overlooked skill is connecting your team's daily work to the bigger picture. When team members understand how their work impacts larger team or company goals, they can effectively prioritize their most important work and ensure that they're getting their high-impact work done. To get started, try using a goal tracking tool to connect daily work to company goals.

DECISION-MAKING

Decision-making skills are the soft skills that you can use to help solve every problem at a company. Whether an employee needs to choose what font is best for a brand logo or what growth marketing tactic to use, making good decisions is crucial to company success.

Definition

Decision-making skills are all of the skills you need to make an informed, rational decision. Someone with good decision-making skills at work can assess all the facts, understand the company's current state and goal state, and choose the best course of action.

In the workplace, this can look like:

- Facilitating a brainstorming session to decide on a new product feature
- Choosing a candidate to give a job offer to
- Collecting feedback from team members to ideate a new team workflow
- Researching market trends to understand how they'll impact company strategy
- Networking with an external person to learn how they approach workplace problems at their company
- Collaborating with a team member who disagrees with you to find a joint solution

- Identifying a data reporting issue and digging in to remedy it

Examples

Decision-making is about much more than the final result. Numerous types of skills go into decision-making, including analysis, creativity, collaboration, and leadership skills.

Analytical Skills

Analytical skills help you collect and assess information before you make a final decision. An analytical person zooms out on the problem, looks at all the facts, and tries to interpret any patterns or findings they might see. These kinds of skills help you make fact-based decisions using logical thinking.

Creativity Skills

Decision-making isn't just all facts and figures; it also requires creative thinking to brainstorm solutions that might not be so straightforward or traditional. Creative decision-makers think outside of what's been done before and develop original ideas and solutions for solving problems. In addition, they're open-minded and willing to try new things.

Collaboration Skills

Good decisions take into account multiple ideas and perspectives. Collaboration skills help you find a solution by working together with one or more teammates. Involving numerous people in the decision-making process can help bring together different skillsets, exposing you to other problem-solving methods and ways of thinking.

Leadership Skills

While collaboration is often crucial for good decision-making, someone must take the lead and make a final decision. Leadership skills can help you consider all perspectives and decide on a singular solution that best represents your team members' ideas.

You don't need to be a manager to take the lead in decision-making. Even if you don't have the final say, speaking up and sharing your ideas will not only help you stand out at work but prove you can be an effective leader.

How to Demonstrate Decision-Making Skills in an Interview

Hiring managers will generally ask straightforward interview questions to get you to demonstrate your decision-making skills. According to Belinda O'Regan, a global HR and remuneration specialist who has helped create Forge virtual work experience programs, hiring managers will "often use the STAR method of probing for the information they want to check for." They want you to give a step-by-step account of how you made a critical work decision.

"First, start by explaining the situation and clearly what the decision was that you personally had to make," O'Regan advises. "Stay away from a time when you were part of a decision. They are interested in when you had to make the decision independently. Then, talk about why the decision had to be made. From there, describe the action you took. Be clear on the basis on which you made the decision. Do not just skip to the decision you made but lay out the facts that you used, the people you consulted, the research you did etc. The interviewer wants to see if you make decisions based on actual information or you make them without much thought. End your answer with what the final result was, which hopefully was positive!"

How to Improve Decision-Making Skills

Decision-making skills improve as you're required to make more decisions, but you don't need to be in a high-stakes work environment to practice these skills. You can even improve

your decision-making with exercises like what you're making for dinner — it's all about how you slow down, consider the facts, ask for help, and reflect on your decision.

Decision-Making Strategies: Making Dinner



Start Slow

- How can I assess what resources I have to make dinner?
- Who am I making this decision for? Does it just impact me, or do I have guests?

Consider the Facts

- What ingredients do I have in my kitchen?
- What energy and resources do I have to make dinner?
- Am I even hungry right now?

Ask For Help

- Can I consult a recipe?
- Can I ask the person I'm eating with what they might want?

Reflect

- Did I make enough food?
- Did I enjoy my dinner?
- Next time, can I plan ahead and buy the ingredient I missed?

Start Slow

Making fast decisions is a valuable skill, but you won't make the best decisions if you move quickly — at first. So start slowly by zooming out and looking at all the factors of your decision-making process. You don't need only to consider big decisions; things like what outfit to wear or what to do this weekend count too. Next, consider:

- What facts are you taking into account?
- How many solutions do you come up with?
- How do you arrive at your conclusion?

When you break down the decision-making process slowly, you'll become accustomed to the steps it takes to make an effective decision — which over time and with practice, can help you become a more efficient, faster decision-maker.

Consider the Facts

It's easy to make decisions based on our assumptions, yet digging deeper and searching for facts is the best way to be an effective, rational decision-maker. Practice taking a step back and assessing the information you have to make a decision. Do you know all of the facts? Are you leaning toward a conclusion because of an assumption? Focusing on the facts is a great way to learn and identify your biases.

Ask for Help

Some decisions can be made alone, but when you ask someone to weigh in, they can help show you perspectives and ways of thinking you might not have previously considered. In addition, this will help expose you to different problem-solving methods that you might not have used before.

Reflect

The best way to get better at decision-making is to reflect on the decisions you've already made. Then, in hindsight, you can see where you might have mis-stepped. Reflecting can help you identify problem patterns within your decision-making and, over time, help you become a better decision-maker.

Decision-Making: The Bottom Line

Employers want employees who can help solve their problems, so strong decision-making will always be a valuable workplace skill. Yet it's not enough to be able to make decisions on the fly; you need to make smart, rational decisions that consider all the facts, understand the company's resources and goals, and lead to practical solutions.

If you can show off your strong decision-making skills by describing how you've made critical decisions at work before, you'll make it an easy decision for the employer to hire you.

PROBLEM-SOLVING

What are problem-solving skills?

Problem-solving skills help you determine the source of a problem and find an effective solution. Although problem-solving is often identified as its own separate skill, there are other related skills that contribute to this ability.

Some key problem-solving skills include:

- Active listening
- Analysis
- Research
- Creativity
- Communication
- Dependability
- Decision making
- Team-building

Problem-solving skills are important in every career at every level. As a result, effective problem solving may also require industry or job-specific technical skills. For example, a registered nurse will need active listening and communication skills when interacting with patients but will also need effective technical knowledge related to diseases and medications. In many cases, a nurse will need to know when to consult a doctor regarding a patient's medical needs as part of the solution.

Examples of problem-solving skills

To solve a problem effectively, you will likely use a few different skills. Here are a few examples of skills you may use when solving a problem.

Research

Researching is an essential skill related to problem solving. As a problem solver, you need to be able to identify the cause of the issue and understand it fully. You can begin to gather more information about a problem by brainstorming with other team members, consulting more experienced colleagues or acquiring knowledge through online research or courses.

Analysis

The first step to solving any problem is to analyse the situation. Your analytical skills will help you understand problems and effectively develop solutions. You will also need

analytical skills during research to help distinguish between effective and ineffective solutions.

Decision-making

Ultimately, you will need to make a decision about how to solve problems that arise. At times (and with industry experience), you may be able to make a decision quickly. Solid research and analytical skills can help those who have less experience in their field. There may also be times when it is appropriate to take some time to craft a solution or escalate the issue to someone more capable of solving it.

Communication

When identifying possible solutions, you will need to know how to communicate the problem to others. You will also need to know what communication channels are the most appropriate when seeking assistance. Once you find a solution, communicating it clearly will help reduce any confusion and make implementing a solution easier.

Dependability

Dependability is one of the most important skills for problem-solvers. Solving problems in a timely manner is essential. Employers highly value individuals they can trust to both identify and then implement solutions as fast and effectively as possible.

How to improve your problem-solving skills

There are several methods you can use to improve your problem-solving skills. Whether you are searching for a job or currently working, improving your problem-solving skills and associated abilities will help make you a strong candidate and employee.

Acquire more technical knowledge in your field.

Depending on your industry, it may be easier to solve problems if you have a strong working technical knowledge. You can gain more technical knowledge through additional coursework, training or practice.

Seek out opportunities to solve problems.

By putting yourself into new situations, you are more likely to be exposed to opportunities to solve problems. You may find there are opportunities to volunteer for new projects in your current role, on another team or outside the workplace for another organisation.

Do practice problems.

Practice and role-play can be useful tools when learning to develop your problem-solving skills. You can find professional practice books for your industry and problem-solving scenarios online. Practice how you might solve those problems and determine if your potential solutions are viable.

For example, in customer service, you might find a scenario like, “How would you handle an angry customer?” or “How do you respond when a customer asks for a refund?” Practicing how you might handle these or other scenarios common in your industry can help you call upon solutions quickly when they arise on the job.

Observe how others solve problems.

You may have colleagues who are skilled problem solvers. Observing how those colleagues solve problems can help you improve your own skills. If possible, ask one of your more experienced colleagues if you can observe their techniques. Asking relevant questions can be helpful in applying them in your own career.

How to highlight problem-solving skills

Showcasing your problem-solving skills on your resume and cover letter can help employers quickly understand how you might be of value to their team. You might consider only showcasing problem-solving skills on your resume if it is particularly relevant to the position you're applying for. Customer service, engineering and management positions, for example, would be good candidates for including problem-solving abilities.
