People Skills
ABP Intermediate Award

Accredited by Association of Business Practitioners
I hear and I **Forget**

I see and I **Remember**

I do and I **Understand**

“**Confucius**”

Chinese philosopher & reformer (551 BC - 479 BC)
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Address conflicts and disagreements
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Follow agreed conventions and procedures
Five models of Conflict Management
Communicating difficult decisions

Section 4 – Teamworking

Optimal use of teamwork
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Section 5 – Communication

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Introduction

People Skills are often referred to as a combination of technical competence, human skills and social skills that are required by managers to carry out the process of management and the execution of their work. They are a vital component of management and of ensuring that you connect with people at work in a positive way. Connecting with people doesn’t mean that you behave and act in a way that does not reflect your particular unique personality, it is about making that positive link between your personal values and beliefs and the external world where we live and work. You will often face a number of difficult challenges in your workplace and have to draw on your personal resources and skills to respond to the demands of the job. Work is rarely simple or straightforward and can sometimes be difficult in so far as it may touch on some hurtful experiences we have had in our own lives. By having an understanding of different people skills we can learn from our experiences and develop knowledge of the skills that will help us to achieve objectives. These skills which we need to deal with other employees and customers sensitively and constructively are crucial in achieving success and their absence may prove detrimental or even disastrous.

In addressing the question of people skills, it is imperative that you recognise that many of the skills that are sometimes mistakenly seen as ‘qualities’ and ‘characteristics’ should not be taken as a relatively fixed aspect of a person’s character or personality.
Such an approach may be both incorrect and self-defeating since we can create artificial barriers to progress and development. By treating and thinking of them as ‘skills’ you can learn to have a positive attitude towards them.

Learning new ‘skills’ often invariably means giving up old habits. Studying this module will help you to understand such skills and how best you can deal with many situations that will inevitably arise. On completion of the module, you will have an improved understanding of getting along better with others in both your personal relationships and in the workplace.

This module is a core component of the ABP intermediate Diploma in International Business Skills programme.
Module Learning Outcomes

After successfully completing this module students will be able to:

- L1 - understand why people skills are vital to your organisation’s success
- L2 - appreciate the importance of self management and working with differences
- L3 - ability to identify and deal confidently with conflict
- L4 - work effectively with and in teams
- L5 - understand how to communicate effectively with people

Module design

The module is subdivided into 5 sections. Each of these five sections deals in greater depth with one of the overall module’s learning outcomes, L1 to L5 listed above. Thus Section 1 corresponds to L1, Section 2 to L2, and so on. The following table provides a brief description of each section in the People Skills module.
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• Understand the importance of your own self-management  
• Acquire techniques for, and appreciate the value of having positive work attitude  
• Appreciate the value of and having a good rapport with your team |
| **Section 2:** Self Management and Differences     | • Appreciate your particular style of management and leadership  
• Be able to determine which style is best suited to particular business environments  
• Be aware of the ways in which you can develop your potential  
• Understand and be aware of working with people with different styles and methods |
Section 3:  
**Dealing with Conflict**

- Understand why it is important to address conflict and disagreement in work
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Section 4:  
**Teamworking**

- Be able to determine when teamwork is the optimal solution for a project
- An ability to select the most suitable members for a team
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- Ensure that a team remains focused on the task at hand
Section 5: Communication

- Understand what the range of communication options available to a business
- Be aware of the importance of selecting the correct modes of communication
- Appreciate the importance of getting relevant feedback as part of the communication process
- Be aware of your own communication strengths and weaknesses
Section 1
The Vital Role of People Skills in an Organisation

Learning Outcomes

The learning outcomes covered in this section are:

- Understand why employees are a vital asset to a business.
- Understand the importance of your own self-management.
- Acquire techniques for, and appreciate the value of having positive work attitude.
- Appreciate the value of and having a good rapport with your team.
Introduction

Recent research carried out by the American Institute of Stress suggests that in the U.S.A. companies lose nearly $300 billion a year—or $7,500 per worker—in employee absenteeism. Stress results in diminished productivity, a higher rate of employee turnover and more direct medical, legal and insurance fees related to workplace stress. Many issues that cause stress are a direct result of a lack of people skills in dealing with employees.

Establishing an engaged workforce is now a high priority for many organisations in both the private and public sectors. Research shows that engaged employees outperform others by showing a heightened interest in their work and being prepared to ‘go the extra mile’ for their organisation. In return, employees also benefit by seeing their work as more meaningful and fulfilling since the rewards for strong engagement are being mutually shared between employer and employee. Employees are in many ways the most precious assets of any organisation. The attitudes and loyalty of employees are directly influenced by their skills and behaviours which has a direct influence on how they treat customers and clients, which in turn leads to growth of the bottom line of the company.
Employees are vital assets to organisations

You could argue that employees are the frontline soldiers who provide products and services that define organisations, companies and business entities. They are the lifeline that allow businesses to grow and develop, in fact without employees not many businesses would survive. Employees talk about their workplace and they can be ambassadors for a company or they can portray a negative image of the company. They can act as a powerful intellectual capital that gets traded alongside company stock shares in the marketplace. When employees leave the office at the end of the day, they act as their corporations’ and organizations’ ambassadors in the community. Even after their retirement, a soldier remains a ‘soldier’ who is always proud of the organisation they served. In the same way some ex-employees talk in positive ways about their old employers.

Example

In the UK the famous ‘John Lewis Partnership’ has 70,000 partners who collectively own this leading UK retail businesses that comprises of, Waitrose (food), John Lewis (general retail store) and Greenbee (insurance). The company’s vision of a successful business powered by its people and its principles define their unique business and corporate model. The profits and benefits created by all the three companies are shared by all the partner organisations. In fact what many organisations call employees, John Lewis call partners as everyone employed in the partnership is in fact an owner.
You would not be likely to hear many ex-employees of this business referring to the partnership in a negative way.

In ensuring happy staff and smooth relationships between employees and employers, good people skills are needed. It requires the confidence and communication skills to deal in a calm and tactful manner with a variety of situations, balancing the needs of the individual employee against the business interests of the organisation. When organisations get this right they end up with good relationships within and outside of the organisation which help them to win respect and trust.
Example

ConstructionCo is an international consultancy and construction firm. Founded in 1990, the organisation has experienced rapid growth to a turnover in excess of £500 million in 2007. The firm has been responsible for several high-profile construction projects in the UK, Asia and the Middle East. The company employs close to 2,900 people and operates in 28 countries around the world. The company offers services that span the entire property life cycle, including planning and building, maintenance and facilities management, waste management and ICT consultancy. On the people side, there are considerable growth projections, with the workforce expected to grow by 300 to 400 people per year for the next five years. The company is particularly proud of its relationships with clients and suppliers; over 70% of contracts come from returning clients. The company has also established a good reputation for employee experience. It has been listed in the ‘Sunday Times Best Companies to Work For’, been named in the Top 50 in Building magazine’s ‘Good Employers Guide’ and holds Investors in People recognition across the UK business.
Activity

It has been said that people management done through the Human Resource (HR) function in organisations is all about taking care of employees and making them happy. List arguments in support of this statement and arguments against? Overall, do you agree or disagree

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The importance of self management

People skills encompasses a range of interpersonal and intrapersonal communication competencies in the workplace. In relation to the business and organisational human relations, the emphasis is on social-emotional awareness, self-presentation, management, getting along with others, negotiation, conflict resolution and decision-making skills and abilities. Such interpersonal skills might include empathy, understanding personalities and ability to work together as part of a group or team. Some of the interpersonal skills include forms of self-communication and understanding personal emotions, goals and motivations. Recent research suggests that young people who develop their speaking and listening skills have improved self-awareness, social-emotional adjustment and classroom/work behaviour and it also helps in decreasing self-destructive and violent behaviour. An understanding of what motivates us is an important first step in self management.
Activity

Stop now and think about what it is that motivates you at work. Is it just money? Is it the chance of being promoted and impressing your peers? Is it that you really believe in what you are doing is generally a good thing for society?
Coaching experts state that the most common response they get when they ask managers about their leadership or management styles is either a ‘focus on tasks and results’ or ‘focus on people’. It can take a while to convince them that to be really successful, they have to master both sides of this equation, tasks and people.

The best companies reinforce this by promoting and developing managers who have a strength in both sets of these ‘people’ and ‘task’ skills. An important part of the companies’ staff development work is for managers to develop good relationships with their key staff and stakeholders. This is much harder to teach than task skills.
The recent financial crisis has undermined some of these good ‘people skills’ practices. There is increasing evidence that the recession has allowed some managers and leaders to jettison everything they have learned about people management in favour of a more instrumental style. Particularly prevalent is the belief that those who have survived layoffs should be doubly motivated and harder working simply because they have kept their jobs. The economic environment makes it more challenging to do the right thing by people, especially when cuts are required and tough decisions have to be made. It is critically important that companies develop strategies to manage their people through the crisis if they are to survive and prosper in the long term.
There are some simple tips of self-management that will help you to be more effective:

1. You should always try to be as open, honest, fair and decent as possible in your dealings with your colleagues and friends. Be serious and realistic but remain positive and hopeful for the future to get the most out of your situation.

2. Sharing all information unless there is a good reason not to do so is generally the best tactic. Share as much information as you are able to about the challenges the company is facing and how it is performing. If you don’t know what’s going on, say so.

3. Always give people frequent opportunities to discuss and ask questions about the situation.

4. Aim to be a role model. Do your job well and stay positive. This will ensure there is a positive mood in the office and that morale is high so that people can work with fewer distractions.

5. Engage your staff using their expertise by involving them in decisions and remind them of the shared responsibility in the organisation.

6. You must let your people know how much you value them. This can be done through positive feedback, recognition and rewards such as small gifts or flexible working. If people feel they are valued, you will have their loyalty and support.

7. Maintaining good training and development programmes and opportunities are a good investment for the future and will pay dividends in fostering self-reliance and self-worth by keeping staff motivation high.
Activity

Think about and identify some of the current skills shortages as presented in a variety of media, e.g. journals, newspapers, radio, television news reports and advertisements, and billboards. Now in small groups consider the possible remedies for these skills shortages?
Having a positive work attitude

Unless you have won a major lottery or inherited a huge fortune you may find yourself working at something you don’t really enjoy, or in a job that is tiring and stressful. Most of the working population feel this way but many who do have a positive attitude which helps them to achieve more and get more out of life.

Many people cannot control what happens to them or alter the situation they find themselves in, but you can control your attitude toward what happens to you, and in that, you will be mastering change rather than allowing it to master you. Khalil Gibran, the noted philosopher once said “Your living is determined not so much by what life brings to you as by the attitude you bring to life; not so much by what happens to you as by the way your mind looks at what happens.”

A positive attitude may not solve all your problems, but it will affect enough people to make it worth the effort. For Winston Churchill, attitude is the little thing that can make a big difference. You cannot change the fact that people will act in a certain way. Neither can you change the inevitable. The only thing you can do is play on the one string that you have and that is your attitude.

Developing a positive attitude at work can determine how successful you are in your career and for many is the difference between failure and success. Developing a positive attitude is not always easy or straightforward. This can be tough especially when things seem to go wrong all the time or when you feel everything is working against you. However there are some guidelines to help to develop a positive approach to work which can help you in becoming a valued employee in your organisation.
Some of the techniques you could use include:

**Find the positives.** Start by looking at your job with kind eyes. Make a list of all the positive aspects of your job: perhaps you work in an office and don’t have to suffer the weather; perhaps you deal with people that you can learn from. When you focus on the good aspects of your job and feel thankful for them, you will naturally attract more things to be thankful for.

**Give it your best shot.** As in every job, not everything is perfect or goes well. But as you may already have realized, some people at work talk about what does not work. You can choose to make a difference and talk about what does work: the way the new software has made a certain task easier, the good relationships with whatever manager, the last accomplishment of the company.
Try to be diligent and proactive. If you don’t like your tasks don’t try and put them off. You will “suffer” more from them for longer if you delay in doing them. On the other hand, when you finish all you have to do you can achieve a sense of accomplishment and the inner peace that comes from knowing everything is done.

Choose the most difficult thing. That might not only make you feel great about your capabilities, but also help you grow as a person. Personally it gained the author of this book a promotion and a pay rise within six months. Much more than he had bargained for!

Remain positive. Whether you have problems at home or in any other area, or feel negative for any reason, don’t be the complainer that goes around telling how difficult your life is. Everyone has difficulties in life and if you have a general feeling of despondency them this will affect others around you. Much better to be seen as someone who accepts what life has to offer and who has a positive attitude to what they do.
Activity

What is your experience of managing or being managed by someone with a positive attitude? Have your boss and company been supportive to you? If so, what have been the effects?

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Good rapport with the team

The late American President Roosevelt once remarked famously. “The single most important ingredient in the formula for success is knowing how to get along with people.” Rapport can be described as a feeling of being on the same wavelength as another person and the ability to appreciate one another’s feelings with an understanding of someone else’s viewpoint. It is a harmonious or sympathetic workplace can help to open the way to creating a positive work environment where positive teamwork develops and grows.

One way of thinking about building rapport is analogous to that of strengthening a bridge over a river: the stronger the bridge, the more it can carry. That is, the better rapport that you have in a relationship with someone, the more you can ask and rely on them. Rapport within a team is built upon open communication, a positive attitude in the interest of the other person, and exploration of and empathy with their interests.

Experts suggest building a rapport often involves doing simple things such as asking a few questions and actively listening to the responses, thus creating an atmosphere of open communication and increasing rapport within the team. In today’s competitive business world, the key to better tasks, challenging assignments or promotion is often achieved on being able to work and get along with others. Good communication skills and the ability to build relationships will continue to be important in our workplace lives.
A simple formula for building rapport can be summarised by the ‘**The ‘Five C’ model**’ approach which highlights the importance of the following factors:

1. **Communication**: Often people mistake communication as being restricted to only written and verbal skills (the ability to speak clearly or write without grammatical errors). But communication also involves active listening as well as good observation skills. Experts suggest that to develop rapport through communication, people must match another person’s body language such as posture, gestures, breathing and vocal qualities such as pitch, tempo or rhythm.

2. **Commonalities**: Good teamwork involves finding and/or building on commonalities such as those experiences, traits, interests, or values that team members have in common. You then develop a relationship grounded on understanding and alignment.

3. **Connectivity**: Once you have identified commonalities, you typically develop a connection or bond. This connectivity can lead you to greater empathy, stronger communication, and a furtherance of team rapport. By doing this, you are able to freely and openly exchange ideas and work together toward common team goals.
4. Collaboration: This is at the heart of good team work. Team members that have developed solid rapport are able to collaborate and work effectively within their team. Building solid work relationships by developing rapport with co-workers is the cornerstone of teamwork.

5. Commitment: You won’t be able to sustain a rapport if there is no real commitment to working as a team. This often involves making compromises, agreeing with others in the team and, importantly, listening to other members of the team.
Activity

Applying the ‘**Five C**’ model, identify how you score on each of the five components using the following grid. If you tick 1 or 2, present a counter-argument how you can be more positive?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>My score on each of the following ‘C’:</th>
<th>4- not an issue for me</th>
<th>3- occasional issue</th>
<th>2- major issue</th>
<th>1- always true for me</th>
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<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commonality</td>
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<tr>
<td>Connectivity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Collaboration</td>
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<tr>
<td>Commitment</td>
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Overview

In this section you have learned the important role played by you as an employee in a given organisation. This is an important first step in understanding how you could contribute positively to your organisation. You have also learned some of the various techniques that help to maintain a positive attitude in the workplace and how to develop effective rapport within a team situation.

The section has also given some practical tips in how to be a better employee that can contribute in a positive way towards organisational goals. We have shown how you can develop your skills and keep a positive frame of mind in your workplace.
Notes ....