Interpersonal skills

What will you learn in this module?

In this module you will learn about …

- The concepts communication, emotional intelligence and networking.
- The effectiveness of communication.
- The role of emotional intelligence in collaborative environments.
- Basic tips for developing networking skills in collaboration activities.

Communication

Communication consists of sharing information between individuals to reach a common understanding. It implies sharing and understanding.

Communication is key for:

- Controlling: Establishing rules and enforcing them
- Motivation: All motivation-reinforcement elements (goal-setting, feedback…) require effective communication
- Expression of emotions by individuals
- Transmission of knowledge, information, and decisions
- Persuasion

The communication process can be described as in figure x. The sender encodes a message and sends it through a channel to a Receiver who then decodes the message. Communication is effective when the sender receives a feed-back from receiver. Hence, for effective communication, the process has to be bidirectional. When communication does not produce correctly, it is necessary to figure out the cause. These causes are called "noise" and can be due to problems from the sender, from the receiver or from the channel used to transmit the message.

☞ Tip for HEIs

- *Hold face-to-face meetings*

- *Develop in-depth knowledge of the audience you are communicating to, do not use specific terminology*

- *Create a receptive atmosphere*

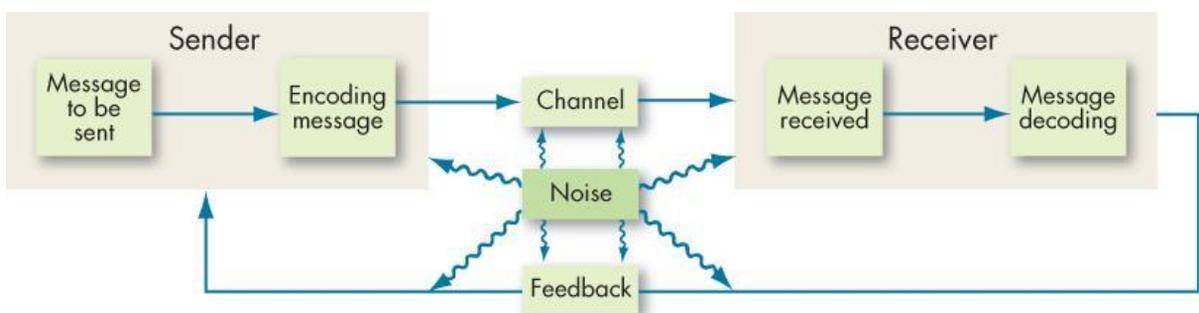- *Combine verbal and non-verbal communication*

Figure x Communication Process. Source: Organizational Behaviour (see References)

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☞ **Tip for SMEs**

•   *Listen carefully, ask whether something is not clear*

•   *Use silence as a conversation tool*

•   *Identify possible conflicts and handle them with diplomacy*

Suggested readings

"Communication Tips & Tools" from European Commission – link

In this article, the EC summarises the main activities and tools to consider for a best practice in communication among different partners. The scope of the document is to present a series of methodological and operational information to help programmes monitor and evaluate their communication activities.

The Power of Communication – link

This video talks about the main communication skills to develop for an effective conversation

Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence (EI) is a person's ability to perceive emotions in one's self and in others, understand the meaning of these emotions and, regulate one's emotions accordingly in a cascading model.

David Goleman (1995) was the first author to reveal EI as an important factor in interpersonal relationships. In his book, Goleman describes and claims the importance of EI for our lives in which we interrelate, trying to get to know other people better. In terms of collaboration, EI plays an important role in activities such as negotiation, leadership, team working, etc.

Figure x illustrates the Cascading Model of Emotional Intelligence. Here we see the suggested relationship between Conscientiousness, Cognitive Ability, and Emotional Stability, and the outcomes of detecting one's own and others' emotions, understanding what they mean, and regulating the emotions successfully.

Several studies suggest that EI plays an important role in job performance. EI has been a controversial topic, with supporters and critics. It is important to consider the practice of Emotional Regulation when we interact with others. Emotion regulation means to identify and modify the emotions you feel.
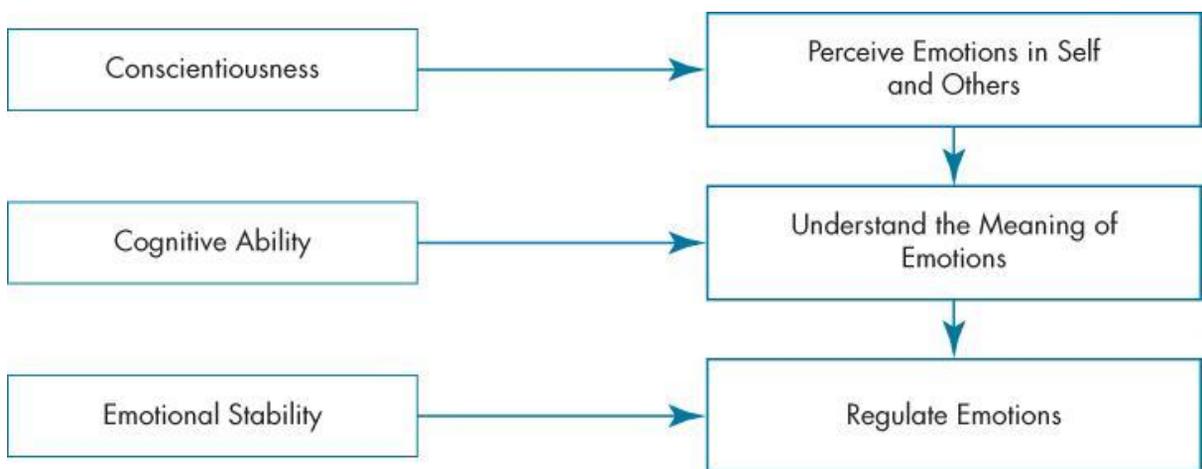
Figure x. A cascade Model of EI

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As you may suspect, not everyone is equally good at regulating emotions. Individuals who score higher in the personality trait of neuroticism have more trouble doing so and often find their moods are beyond their ability to control. The workplace environment also influences an individual's tendency to employ emotion regulation. In general, diversity in work groups increases the likelihood that you will regulate your emotions. Racial diversity also has an effect: if diversity is low, the minority will engage in emotion regulation, perhaps to "fit in" with the majority race as much as possible; if diversity is high and many different races are represented, the majority race will employ emotion regulation, perhaps to integrate themselves with the whole group.

These findings suggest a beneficial outcome of diversity—it may cause us to regulate our emotions more consciously and effectively. However, changing your emotions takes effort, and this effort can be exhausting. From another perspective, research suggests that avoiding negative emotional experiences is less likely to lead to positive moods than seeking out positive emotional experiences.

Researchers of emotion regulation often study the strategies people employ to change their emotions. Some Emotion Regulation Techniques are:

1. Surface acting and deep acting.
2. Emotional suppression.
3. Suppressing initial emotional responses to situations.
4. Cognitive reappraisal or reframing our outlook on an emotional situation.
5. Social sharing, or venting.
6. Mindfulness.

Suppressing initial emotions facilitates practical thinking in the short term. However, it appears to be helpful only when a strongly negative event would illicit a distressed emotional reaction in a crisis situation. Thus, unless we're truly in a crisis situation, acknowledging rather than suppressing our emotional responses to situations, and re-evaluating events after they occur, yields the best outcomes.

Cognitive reappraisal, or reframing our outlook on an emotional situation, is one way to effectively regulate emotions. Cognitive reappraisal may allow people to change their emotional responses, even when the subject matter is as highly emotionally charged as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Social sharing, or venting shows that the open expression of emotions can help individuals to regulate their emotions, as opposed to keeping emotions "bottled up." Social sharing can reduce anger reactions when people can talk about the facts of a bad situation, their feelings about the situation, or any positive aspects of the situation.

A final emotion regulation technique, mindfulness—receptively paying attention to and being aware of the present moment, events, and experiences— has started to become popular in organisations. While emotion regulation techniques can help us cope with difficult workplace situations, research indicates that the effect varies. Thus, while there is much promise in emotion regulation techniques, the best route to a positive workplace is to recruit positive-minded individuals and train leaders to manage their moods, job attitudes, and performance.

☞ Tip for HEIs

- *Practicing active listening.*

- *Being open-minded.*

- *Being receptive to feedback.*

☞ Tip for SMEs

- *Self-awareness: your value, your limits, your expectations.*

- *Recognize how others interest and feeling and circumstances*

- *Communicate clearly.*

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together to achieve particular objectives. Groups can be either formal, those defined by the organization's structure or informal, alliances that are neither formally structured nor organizationally determined. A team, on the other hand, is a group whose individual efforts result in performance that is greater than the sum of the individual outputs.

For effective networking we need to develop: a good environment for relationships to flourish, a climate of trust, specific goals, team cohesion, and diversity, etc.

What exactly can networking do for us? Here is a list of direct benefits derived from this practice:

- Strengthen working relationships, for example with customers or suppliers.
- To make our product or service known in an efficient way.
- Access to people or entities, which may be of interest for our business or for the development of our professional career.
- Acquire a greater degree of knowledge about the work environment that surrounds us and learn to assess its risks and opportunities with a better developed perspective.
- To acquire new clients or partners.
- Increase the range of commercial possibilities of the business.

Networking

Networking is an activity with an objective to expand one's network of professional contacts. Through this activity, business and/or employment opportunities are generated. In other words, networking means developing a social circle with people with whom you can start a business with or get access to job opportunities through.

The fundamentals of networking are in team working and team building. Moreover, a team is different from a group. First, we need to define a group to understand the main differences:

A group is defined as two or more individuals, interacting and interdependent, who have come

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Tools

Networking Guide – link

Step 3 covers the creation of an action plan for effective networking. On this website you will also be able to find the others steps of effective networking.

☞ Tip for HEIs

- *Try to reach out to contacts who were lost during the pandemic.*

- *Find alternative ways of engaging, connecting, and networking.*

- *Make yourself available for connection.*

☞ Tip for SMEs

- *Develop empathy.*

- *To build a network in this setting, it is necessary to find opportunities to show our authentic self and display interest in others. Try to call in to the meeting a couple of minutes earlier and use the time to get to know your teammates.*

Are you an educator?

You can click here to go to the syllabus on page xx. This syllabus includes suggestions on the delivery of the module.

References

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