

Interpersonal Relations in the Business Office

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Interpersonal relations can make or break an editorial office. Effective communication is key to the success of a project, and more than 90% of project failures result from communication breakdowns. The goals of interpersonal communication are to understand the exact meaning and intent of others, to be understood by others, to gain acceptance for yourself or your ideas or both, and to produce action or change.

Interpersonal communication can be divided into six categories: listening, self-presentation, problem-solving, decision-making, negotiating, and conflict management. Listening “between the words” (akin to “reading between the lines”) helps us to identify problems in negotiating effectively, resolving conflict, and making decisions and helps in problem-solving.

Self-presentation can be verbal or non-verbal, written or graphic. The effectiveness of oral and written messages varies. For example, a general overview is best conveyed both orally and in writing, but a dispute should be settled orally. Project managers are expected to integrate the efforts of all project participants (or “stakeholders”) and manage all interfaces effectively.

The elements of interpersonal relationships include creating cohesive project

teams; developing effective communication skills; emphasizing the importance of listening; delegating effectively; achieving a balance among authority, responsibility, and accountability; negotiating to achieve a win-win outcome; respecting each other’s opinion; helping each other succeed; using power and influence effectively; and managing corporate politics.

What is the main reason a project fails? Lack of trust and the resulting lack of communication. Conversely, as the level of trust increases, the level of communi-

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cation rises, and the chances for success improve. When a conflict occurs, how it is managed can determine whether the project will be salvaged or continue to disintegrate. Six conflict-management styles have been identified: withdrawing and avoiding, smoothing and accommodating, compromising, forcing, collaborating, and confronting and problem-solving.

The withdrawing-and-avoiding style constitutes a retreat from the actual or potential conflict; nothing is resolved, and the problem festers. The smoothing-and-accommodating style focuses on accepting the situation as it is and emphasizing areas of agreement; this is only a short-term solution. Compromising is bargaining; if both sides agree, a definitive solution can be achieved. Forcing is an authoritarian style that results in the promotion of one viewpoint at the expense of others, a

win-lose situation not based on consensus. Collaborating reflects an “all-the-time-in-the-world” philosophy; once everyone “buys in”, a long-term solution is possible. The confronting-and-problem-solving style defines and addresses the core problem, looks at alternatives via open dialogue, and provides the ultimate solution. In determining the best approach, we must consider the importance of the conflict, time pressures, the positions of the players, and how the approach relates to the desired goals.

English is our common language, but we don’t all speak the same English. Communication accounts for 90% of a project’s success, affects every aspect of it, and is used by all participants. The correlation between the communicative abilities of the project’s stakeholders and project performance is direct and positive.

Trust can take months or years to build and minutes to lose. A project participant who lacks important information becomes frightened and demoralized. We all want to feel valued, important, and as though we are living up to our potential. As early as possible in the process, the effective project manager provides all employees with the information they need to perform their jobs. When a problem arises, the effective manager addresses it promptly and solves it, preventing it from becoming a long-term issue that can doom the project. We may not all speak the same English, but a caring, capable manager-translator can bridge the language gaps and ensure the success of a project. 🗣️