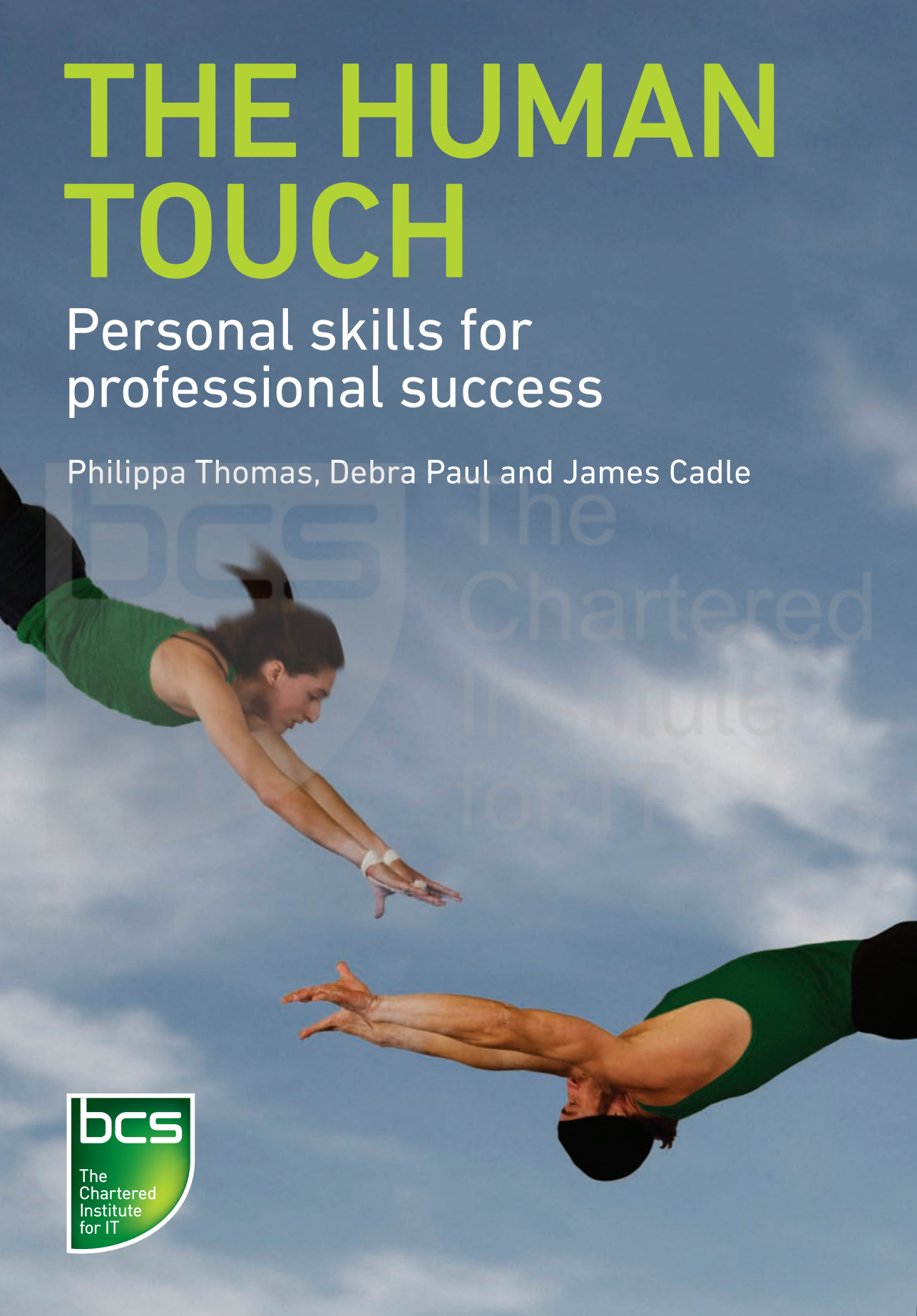
THE HUMAN TOUCH

Personal skills for professional success

Philippa Thomas, Debra Paul and James Cadle



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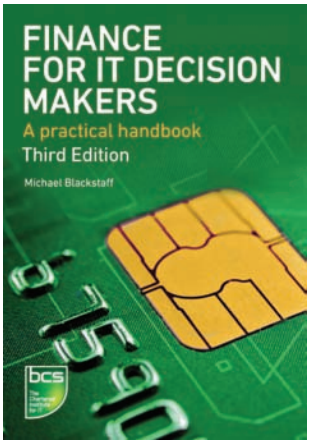

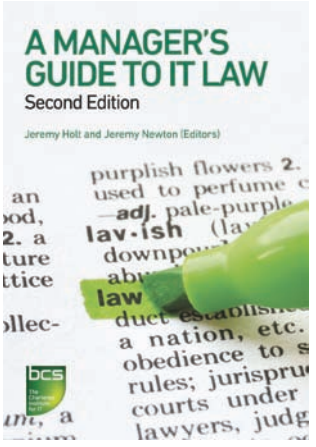

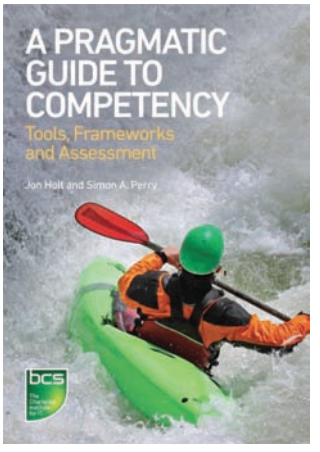

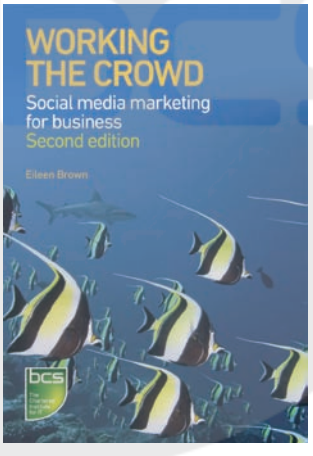

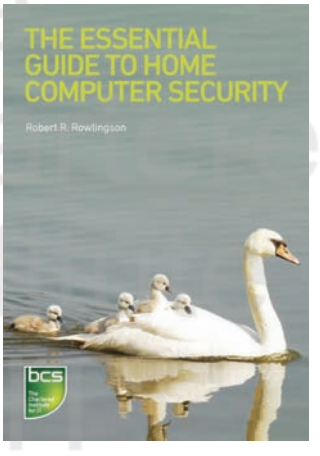

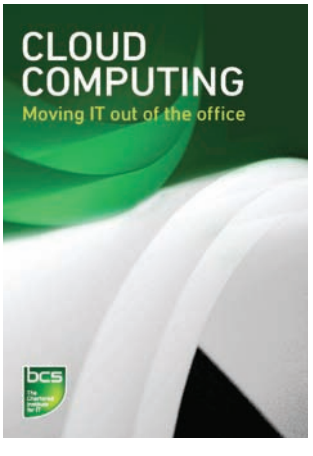

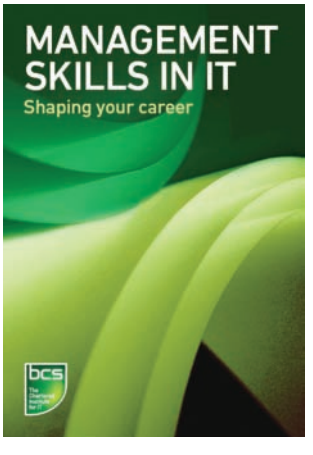

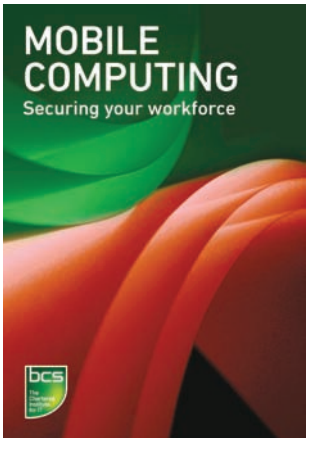

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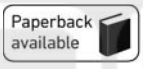

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Our vision is to be a world-class organisation for IT. Our 70,000 strong membership includes practitioners, businesses, academics and students in the UK and internationally. We deliver a range of professional development tools for practitioners and employees. A leading IT qualification body, we offer a range of widely recognised qualifications.

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AUTHORS

Philippa Thomas has specialised in learning and development for twenty years. With both commercial and operational experience of providing a range of IT training services to blue-chip organisations in the private and public sector, Philippa gained a unique insight into the people skills challenges arising from business change. As a director of The Celyn Group, one of the UK's leading companies specialising in leadership, management and performance improvement, she is committed to providing her clients with creative but pragmatic solutions to such challenges. Philippa is also passionate that people skills become an integral part of professional qualifications.

Debra Paul is the Managing Director of Assist Knowledge Development, a training and consultancy company specialising in business analysis, business change and solution development. She has specialised in all aspects of business analysis and business process improvement, and also in organisational competency development. Debra jointly edited and wrote the best-selling BCS publication, *Business Analysis*, and is also the co-author of the BCS publication *Business Analysis Techniques*. Debra is a Chartered Fellow of BCS and is the BCS Chief Examiner for Business Analysis. She is a regular speaker at business seminars and is a founder member and director of the BA Manager Forum.

James Cadle has been involved in business systems improvement for over 30 years, in both the public and private sector. He is a director of Assist Knowledge Development, a specialist training and consultancy company. James has conducted a range of business improvement projects and has led teams developing and maintaining corporate IT systems. James presents training courses in business analysis, consultancy skills and project management to a variety of clients, as well as contributing to various publications, including the BCS publications *Business Analysis* and *Business Analysis Techniques*. He is a Chartered Member of BCS and a member of the Association for Project Management.

FOREWORD

The world we live in is increasingly competitive, global in nature, and it is becoming more and more difficult to differentiate products and services to ever more demanding customers and consumers.

Not only in the future, but today, the application of technology will make the difference between success and failure. Technology continues to advance at phenomenal rates, but it is the use of this technology and its application to solving problems, developing new products, marketing and sales activities and serving customers' needs that will differentiate companies.

Successful companies and organisations of the future will harness technology to the customer's requirements better than anyone else. To do this requires a new combination of technological competence and people skills. For many years the IT profession has concentrated on the first of these sets of competence but increasingly it is the people skills that will make the difference.

The Human Touch focuses on all the aspects of people skills that are going to be so important in the future. These skills don't of course just apply to the IT profession, just maybe that this skills gap within the IT profession has been more pronounced than in the past.

Most people bring technical skills of one kind another to play in serving customers, but it will increasingly be their ability to communicate, to build relationships, to work as teams, to negotiate, to lead and to influence that will result in successful partnerships that will deliver real results.

The Human Touch brings practical advice and very useful models and frameworks for all of these very important areas, and I certainly recommend it in helping people develop these really critical skills.

***David Clarke** MBE,*
Chief Executive, BCS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Writing this book has required almost as much time spent researching our favourite guidelines and frameworks, and obtaining permission to use them, as it has crafting the written word. In the process, we have had a lot of assistance from colleagues and family. We would like to thank Matthew Flynn, Jutta Mackwell and Florence Leroy of BCS publishing for keeping us on the right track and making sure permissions were granted; our families for their support during the many hours spent thinking and writing; Charlotte Parke for providing artistic skills; Laura Whitworth for being an early proofreader and a source of encouragement; Martin Pearson from AssistKD for giving much needed clear, specific feedback; and Alan Paul for reviewing every chapter extremely thoroughly and providing so many invaluable comments.

ABBREVIATIONS

APAC	Asia–Pacific
BATNA	best alternative to a negotiated agreement
CATWOE	customer(s), actor(s), transformation, *Weltanschauung*, owner, environment
CEO	chief executive officer
CF	completer–finisher – Belbin team role
CFO	chief finance officer
CIO	chief information officer
CIPD	Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development
CO	coordinator – Belbin team role
CXO	chief 'something' officer
E	extraversion – MBTI® personality category
EI	emotional intelligence
EQ	emotional quotient
F	feeling – MBTI® personality category
GROW	goal, reality, options, will
HR	human resource
I	introversion – MBTI® personality category
ILM	Institute of Leadership & Management
IMP	implementer – Belbin team role
IQ	intelligence quotient
IT	information technology
J	judging – MBTI® personality category
MBTI®	Myers–Briggs Type Indicator®
ME	monitor–evaluator – Belbin team role

N	intuiting – MBTI® personality category
NLP	neurolinguistic programming
P	perceiving – MBTI® personality category
PESTLE	political, economic, social, technological, legal and environmental
PL	plant – Belbin team role
POPIT™	people, organisation, process, information and technology
RI	Resource investigator – Bebin team role
S	sensing – MBTI® personality category
SCAMPER	substitute, combine, adapt, modify, put to other uses, eliminate, rearrange/ reverse
SH	shaper – Belbin team role
SMART	specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, time-framed
SP	specialist – Belbin team role
STEER	spot, tailor, explain, encourage, review
T	thinking – MBTI® personality category
TKI	Thomas–Kilmann conflict mode instrument
TW	team worker – Belbin team role
UML®	Unified Modeling Language™
VAKOG	Visual, auditory, kinaesthetic, olfactory, gustatory (NLP senses)
WIIFM	what's in it for me?

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1 THE IMPORTANCE OF PERSONAL SKILLS

INTRODUCTION

Working with people can be difficult. People hold different opinions and beliefs, and they have different experiences and knowledge. They may have concerns about the future, particularly in a time of economic difficulty, and these concerns may come to the fore when changes to working practices or job roles are under consideration. As a result, anyone working in a business change role needs to be alert to their business colleagues' beliefs and concerns. Failure to do this can result in resistance or, even worse, objections, causing unnecessary additional work or even derailing a project completely.

Business change projects bring a unique set of pressures when working with people. We may be defining business changes to be implemented, developing new processes and systems, or supporting staff to learn and perform new work practices; all of which require us to work effectively with people. Often, we are required to identify where efficiency savings can be made, which in all likelihood will involve changes that impact upon people.

Whatever our business change role, the majority of our customers are 'internal' (i.e. they work for the same organisation). There is often a need to negotiate funding with decision-makers or influence senior management to convince them of our worth; to bring together disparate groups and try to find consensus; to gain agreement to proposals and requirements; to convince colleagues that we have similar aims and objectives, and that we need to work together to achieve business success.

This can seem an impossible task as personal agendas come to the fore and are defended robustly, or, even worse, internal politics and hidden agendas arise resulting in passive resistance and unhelpful behaviour. Coordinating different, often competing, needs, while trying to ensure that everyone is working together to improve the business, can be extremely difficult. However, to perform our business-change roles effectively, it is essential that we are able to work successfully with a variety of people.

THE IMPORTANCE OF PEOPLE

Successful businesses strive constantly to develop and grow. Senior management decide on the strategies needed to move the organisation forward and define objectives the organisation needs to achieve. They keep a close eye on the business

environment within which they operate. They may introduce new products or services in order to capitalise on market demand and improve their quality, their customer support or any other relevant aspect of their business performance. They may launch business change initiatives aiming to achieve the twin key competencies of effective business performance and cost-efficiency.

But, to make all of this happen you need people. People who can handle difficult problems or customer complaints; people who can work with dedication and accuracy; people who can communicate clearly with a diverse group of individuals; people who can examine business intelligence information and find trends, opportunities and insights; people who can manage other people.

We often hear the phrases 'our people are our key resource' or 'our staff are the secret of our success', but sometimes we suspect these are empty words, spoken without any sense of real meaning behind them. However, in successful organisations, there is a strong basis for these phrases. We could also add to them:

- People have different priorities and concerns.
- People value different things.
- Senior managers are people.
- Our customers are also people.

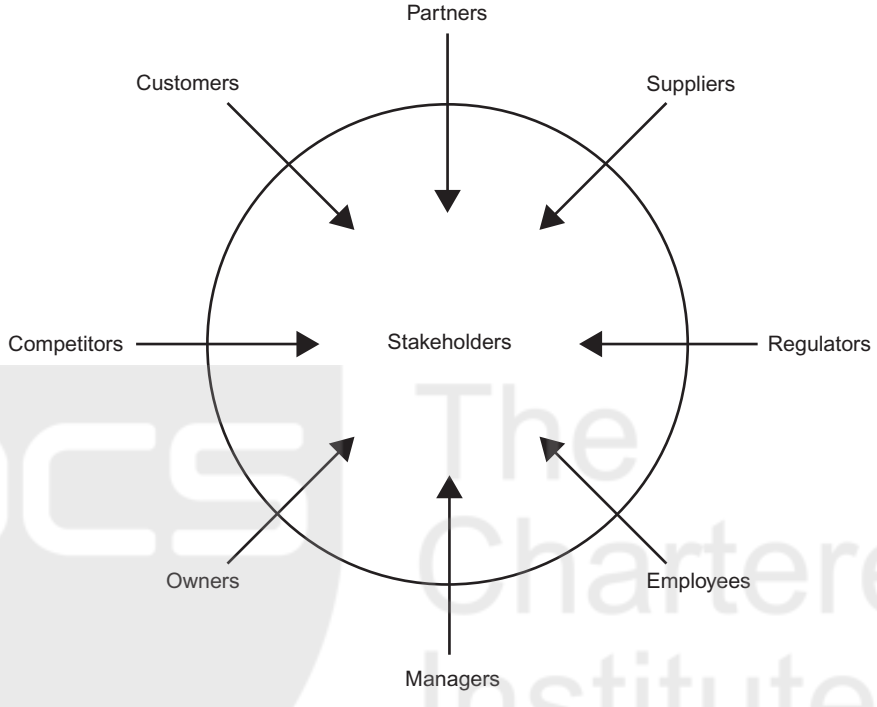
CATEGORISING PEOPLE

Somewhere, over the last couple of decades, we seem to have lost our focus on the individual. The introduction of categories such as customers, suppliers, managers, regulators and, the favourite in the business change world, 'end-users', or worse, just 'users', has removed us quite a way from thinking about the individuals within these groups. We might consider their needs and values, but often for the group as a whole. Along the way we have lost the sense of the individual. This seems an obvious statement, but recently, perhaps in the last couple of decades, we have stopped talking about 'people' to an even greater extent. We have deployed a new term, a 'catch-all', so that rather than talking about people as individuals, whether managers or customers, we are now concerned with a new super group, 'stakeholders'.

Stakeholders are suddenly everywhere. Rather than engaging with 'people', we engage, analyse and manage 'stakeholders'. And there are so many of them. Look at any document, such as a business case, project brief or requirements document, and the list of stakeholders can be endless. The stakeholder wheel, shown in Figure 1.1, provides eight categories of stakeholder and each category can represent numerous individuals.

When reading or reviewing documents, it sometimes feels like anyone who might possibly be interested has to be included in the stakeholder list, but whether this results in real engagement with the people involved or if their comments are really required is often questionable. The involvement of so many people may be important,

Figure 1.1 The stakeholder wheel



although that can be a moot point in today's agile business world, but there is also the danger that this is merely paying lip service: a pretence of working with the stakeholders when in reality the numbers involved make this impossible.

People required to represent their group or function may have an individual perspective that is not shared by their colleagues or, perhaps, by only some of them. In practice, inviting such a range of people to participate means that we are treating this as a box-ticking exercise. And, there is more than a suspicion that the rationale for involving everyone possible is to ensure that we can cover ourselves, or justify our decisions, if anything goes wrong.

THE SENSE OF THE INDIVIDUAL

So, while the term 'stakeholder' is intended to give us a sense of people having an interest or 'stake' in the situation, the broad, open nature of the term, and the ubiquity of its use, has resulted in a diminished sense of the individual. We can easily forget, or ignore, that behind every identified 'stakeholder' is a person with a world view based upon strongly held values, life experiences and personal needs. While some of these may be highly positive world views, that offer insights and support to projects, others may have the potential to delay, disrupt or even derail the work. Hidden agendas can flourish if no one takes the time to look for them.

When working with people, or stakeholders, it is vital that we consider the individuals involved in the situation. We must understand the distinction between a stakeholder group, where we may need to adopt a broad brush level of understanding, and individual stakeholders where it is extremely important that we understand the need to connect with them on a personal level. To do this effectively, we need to develop keen behavioural skills that can be adapted to the needs of the individual.

THE NATURE OF BUSINESS CHANGE WORK

The customers

The majority of business change professionals need to engage with a wide range of people. Our 'customers' can include shareholders (or other forms of owner if this is not a commercial concern), managers, suppliers, regulators, business partners, internal purchasers and consumers. The list is very long and, noticeably, many types of customer are internal to the organisation.

This means that the nature of the relationship with those customers can be very different to the relationship where the customer is external. It will not be sufficient to declare that a change cannot be accommodated, a service not provided or a product not available. The customer supplies the funding to develop or procure the service and, rather than asking or enquiring, they may **require** it to be made available, which can bring many additional problems, if not outright conflicts. Our internal customers include those who have set the mission, objectives and strategy for the organisation and are looking to us to help achieve them. They also include the people who will ensure the successful deployment of the solutions we deliver. We provide the detailed systems and processes that are deployed to execute the strategy, enabling delivery of the organisation's products and services to the external customers. Non-delivery is not usually an option.

The engagements

The nature of the engagements can also vary widely. We may be required to engage at an early stage in the business change life cycle to evaluate what can be done in a particular situation to improve the business. On the other hand, we may need to deliver a service or product that will require the business staff to change their procedures and practices or assimilate new information. We may be required to consider whether the business staff meet the needs of the organisation and ask questions such as 'are fewer staff required for the new ways of working?'

Sometimes our work may provoke the need to challenge and convince people of an alternative course of action; sometimes it may need us to handle situations with empathy and care. These different situations have one thing in common: they all involve people and, as a result, will require an assortment of behavioural skills if they are to be handled well.

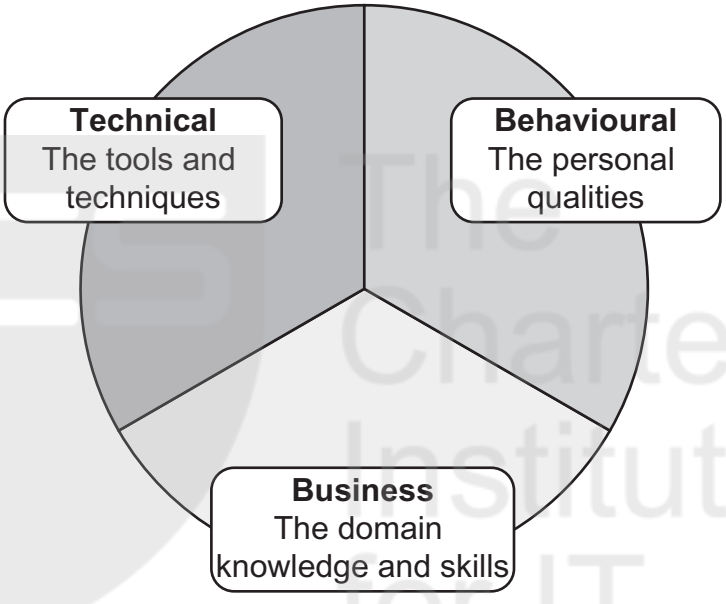
CATEGORIES OF SKILL

Working with colleagues, particularly when they are also customers, requires an extensive array of skills. We have to deal with a variety of business situations where the issues may be poorly defined and symptoms mistaken for fundamental

problems. We have to manage customer expectations and handle the pressures arising from them. We have to be persuasive and influential when offering advice or explaining ideas and options.

Given that these skills are so wide-ranging, it is helpful to organise them into the three categories shown in Figure 1.2: technical skills, business skills and behavioural skills.

Figure 1.2 Three categories of skill requirements



Firstly, we need to have the specialist technical skills relevant to our particular discipline and we need to keep up with the latest developments. Technical skills alone are insufficient for today's business world, so, next, we have to have 'commercial awareness': an understanding of the business issues relevant to our organisation and the ability to align our work with the requirements of the business domain. Finally, it is vital that we are able to deploy a range of behavioural skills in order to work effectively with our customers and colleagues. We need to use our skills from all three areas to 'deliver' the solutions and meet the needs of the customers who determine our budgets and allocate our funding.

The requirement for IT professionals to have skills in the business and behavioural areas, in addition to their technical skills, is explained in the white paper *The State of the IT Market 2011* (Modis, 2011) as follows:

> 'As IT moves from being a pure delivery function to a change management and transformational one the expectations around soft skills and commercial focus have also led to a sea change about what makes a good IT professional.'

The importance of soft skills was also highlighted by Pearson and Woodman (2011) in a report for the Chartered Management Institute in which managers from across the business spectrum identified coaching and mentoring (36 per cent) and negotiating and influencing (34 per cent) as key priorities for their personal development in 2012.

THE HUMAN TOUCH

While comprehensive business texts abound and technical skills reference books are widely available, we have often found that this is less the case with behavioural skills; each reference text focuses on an individual topic. You will find books that discuss communicating or influencing or presenting but, to work in a professional capacity, we don't need just one of these skills: we need all of them, and researching all of the books is time-consuming. Further, we have often found that the most useful information in any behavioural skills book is usually found in the few first chapters or needs to be filtered out from the lengthy descriptions.

For these reasons, the idea was born to develop this book to provide a holistic view of personal skills and to bring together the frameworks and techniques covering the range of behavioural skills that are so vital for professional success. We have referenced the behavioural skills books and articles that we have found useful. We have also added our own experiences to expand upon some of the frameworks and techniques and also to provide practical guidance in their use.

We may need to build rapport with internal or external customers (Chapter 2). There may be internal politics or other commercial factors at play (Chapter 9) and perhaps they will require careful negotiation (Chapter 4) or influencing (Chapter 6). It may be vital to show leadership (Chapter 5) or manage expectations (Chapter 11). Clear, confident presentations (Chapter 8) or persuasive reports (Chapter 7) may be needed to convince senior management to take action. We may need to work with our colleagues to build effective teams (Chapter 3) or support colleagues through coaching and mentoring (Chapter 10). Business problems may need creative solutions (Chapter 13) developed through effective facilitation (Chapter 12). Whichever it is, a business professional has to deploy all of the relevant behavioural skills in order to succeed.

The book reflects the importance of developing professional relationships built on mutual respect and trust. Given that the skills discussed in this book are behavioural in nature, some people will find that they apply them naturally and with ease, while others will struggle to succeed. However, we believe that these skills are vital if we are to work effectively within organisations. Everyone, no matter how talented, can improve.

CONCLUSION

Anyone working in business will encounter, over time, many different personalities and situations, each of which will need to be handled with care. People, whether they're customers, senior executives, suppliers or colleagues can

sometimes behave in inexplicable and seemingly illogical ways. As a professional you have a choice to make. You can dismiss their behaviour as ridiculous, ignore it or react negatively to it, then get frustrated that your initiative isn't moving forward, strapping yourself firmly to the wheel of blame. Alternatively, you can make an attempt to understand where they're coming from, accept that you need to adapt your own behaviour to align with the needs of others and begin to move things forward.

There are some excellent frameworks, techniques and models that can provide helpful insights into our behaviour and that of our colleagues and customers. These can enable us to develop strategies to cope with business complexity and personal diversity, and thus achieve successful outcomes.

The 'human touch' means having the humility to accept that our own behaviour has a part to play in many of the people issues we encounter; then having the courage to do something about it.

This book has been written to bring together the frameworks and models that we have found most beneficial. During our business careers, working with people across a range of business situations, we have used them to resolve problems and improve performance. We feel they have much to offer in helping us deal with the complex situations that arise when working with people. We hope you find them useful too.

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

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2 BUILDING RAPPORT AND SUSTAINING RELATIONSHIPS

INTRODUCTION

Ask a person to define what having rapport means and they are likely to describe it in terms of a feeling they have about someone. They will commonly use phrases such as: 'We're on the same wavelength'; 'We have a real connection'; 'Ours is a meeting of minds'; or even, 'They are my soul mate' (though perhaps not in a professional context!). In other words, the person with whom we feel rapport is 'just like me'.

> People like people who are like them.
> We like people who are like us.
> I like people who are like me.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED, 1999) defines rapport in similar terms as 'a close and harmonious relationship in which there is common understanding'. But taking a closer look at this definition, we see that the source of the word is the French verb 'rapporter', which in literal translation means to 'bring back'. The implication of this is profound for our interpretation of what rapport is.

We define rapport as a feeling certainly, but importantly, one which is created through the process flow of interactions between two people, helping them over time to build a sustainable relationship. Being able to manage that flow of communications to enhance rapport is not only possible but is a prerequisite skill for professional success. In our increasingly diverse business world, we need to be able to establish relationships with people who are 'not like me', in order to get things done; achieving rapport with them is the necessary first step. Somewhat ironically for such a critical skill, the only times we really think about rapport is when we find that it is not working or it stands in the way of us obtaining an outcome we want. This chapter aims to help change this attitude.

CONTENTS OF THIS CHAPTER

This chapter covers the following topics:

- the nature of rapport;
- why having rapport is so important in relationships;

- the business context for rapport;
- the psychology of rapport;
- a range of pragmatic techniques for building and maintaining rapport.

THE NATURE OF RAPPORT

As an emotional 'state' created from a flow of interactions with another person, it's important to understand that rapport is in a constant state of flux. Like the tide, rapport can ebb or surge, not just through the lifetime of a relationship, but also during a single conversation. Everyone can cite examples of where a conversation has suddenly and inexplicably veered off course or run out of steam even with good friends.

Natural rapport might therefore be a lot rarer than you think. Despite extensive research, we've not been able to find any published studies on the exact percentage of the workforce with whom you can reasonably expect to enjoy natural rapport. So, the next best we can do is to use the well-known Myers–Briggs Type Indicator® (MBTI®) personality preference principles to try and guesstimate.[1]

MBTI® (developed by Katharine Cook Briggs and Isabel Briggs Myers, and first published for practical application by CPP Inc. in 1975) is probably the world's most widely used personality assessment tool. Drawing on Carl Gustav Jung's *Psychological Types* theories, the tool assesses a person's preferences for each of Jung's four dichotomies:

- **Extraversion (E) or Introversion (I) –** People with the 'E' preference get their energy from interacting with others and are often recognised as good 'talkers'; those with an 'I' preference like to spend time thinking and reflecting and are often recognised as good 'listeners'.
- **Sensing (S) or Intuiting (N) –** People with an 'S' preference like working with hard data and are often considered to be practical and common-sense types; those with an 'N' preference respond best to more abstract or theoretical information and are often seen as creative types.
- **Thinking (T) or Feeling (F) –** People with a 'T' preference reach their decisions by using logic and their 'head'; those with an 'F' preference prefer to rely on their feelings and 'heart'.
- **Judging (J) or Perceiving (P) –** People with a 'J' preference like to plan, structure and organise their lives; those with a 'P' preference prefer spontaneity, freedom and variety.

Assessing these preferences determines a person's 'personality type', which is one of the 16 possible combinations of E/I, S/N, T/F and J/P. The theory says that you are most likely to have a natural affinity (rapport) with someone who shares your

[1] Myers–Briggs Type Indicator® and MBTI® are registered trademarks of the MBTI Trust Inc., in the United States and other countries.

personality type, for example an ESTJ is likely feel an immediate connection with another ESTJ, rather than an INTJ.

So how likely is it that we will encounter someone with the same personality type as us? Research, compiled from a variety of sources from over 30 years and available on the Myers & Briggs Foundation website (MBF, 2012), provides us with estimates on the frequency of the different personality types in the population of the United States. The percentage whose preference is for Extraversion versus Introversion is fairly evenly split, at 49.3 per cent and 50.7 per cent respectively. The balance tips slightly in favour of Feeling (59.8 per cent) and Judging (54.1 per cent) versus Thinking (40.2 per cent) and Perceiving (45.9 per cent). However, the most noticeable difference in preference is for Sensing versus Intuiting: 73.3 per cent of Americans apparently prefer to rely on concrete facts when making decisions, rather than trust their instincts.

When these results are extrapolated into the 16 MBTI preferences, we can surmise that if you're an ISFJ (13.8 per cent), you may have a better chance of finding someone 'just like me' than if you're an ENTJ (1.8 per cent). On average, however, across all types, you can expect to 'click' with just 6.25 per cent of the people with whom you come into contact. This means for the other 93.75 per cent, you're going to have to work actively on it. The good news is that now you're paying attention to rapport, you can start to use not only formal tools like MBTI® to improve your chances of connecting with people who aren't like you but also your own observations of their behaviour, which is the primary focus of this chapter.

In summary then, rapport is not just difficult (or unlikely) to achieve in the first place, it can also be a challenge to sustain, especially in the early stages of a relationship. Rapport can never be taken for granted, professionally or personally. It needs to be nurtured in order to develop into a strong, mature relationship.

WHY RAPPORT IS SO IMPORTANT IN WORKING RELATIONSHIPS

As a professional you will already know that the workplace is not just a network of systems, processes and tasks, it's a human network too. To enjoy success, you have to be able to work successfully with a wide variety of people from different backgrounds, with various life experiences and viewpoints, who may have little appreciation of your world. It's no coincidence that 'diversity' is high on the agenda for most corporate human resource (HR) departments. And the more senior you are, the more critical this skill becomes: chief information officers (CIOs) simply cannot function at executive level if they cannot communicate with their fellow colleagues on the board, whether they're a chief executive officer (CEO), chief finance officer (CFO) or sales director.

In some functions, most obviously sales, the ability to form rapport with others is critical to performance in the job. Without it, you are unlikely to win, or keep, any customers. However, in those functions traditionally regarded as 'support' or 'back office', such as finance and IT, this particular skill was not considered critical to your ability to deliver results. What mattered more was your technical expertise. But the old paradigms are changing rapidly. These functions are now seen as providers of professional services to the business and those working in the functions

find themselves with a range of customers who they need to keep satisfied, just like their counterparts in sales.

Getting people to like you, to trust you, to share information with you and to enjoy working with you, however, first requires you to be able to 'connect' with them *on their terms*. It then becomes easier to talk through and resolve any issues as and when they occur. You do not have to 'become' the other person to build rapport, adopting their behaviours, attitudes and (God forbid!) opinions. It doesn't mean you have to agree with them on every point. Rather, rapport is about making people feel respected, listened to and important. Good rapport means you can have healthy debates on contentious topics without falling out.

THE BUSINESS CONTEXT FOR RAPPORT

Before we take a look at specific techniques that you can employ to improve your skills, it's worth considering the business contexts in which you are presented with opportunities to build rapport.

One obvious context is the face-to-face meeting, particularly where securing a quick rapport is critical for a successful outcome, for example: job interviews; negotiations; formal presentations or pitches. The next most commonly cited context is the telephone, but in today's workplace, the first contact you have with someone new and influential (and perhaps remotely located) is very likely to be via email.

In the following pages, we will therefore consider how we can create rapport in all three of these contexts:

- face to face;
- over the phone;
- via email.

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF RAPPORT

> 'We see things not as **they** are, but as **we** are.'[2]

We stated earlier that the starting point for rapport was the sense that someone is 'just like me' and 'tuned in' to my model of the world, but what do we mean by the term 'model of the world'? Derived from cognitive psychology, the term refers to the internal thought processes that define a person's understanding (perception) of how the real world works. Each individual, therefore, has their own unique model of the world and it is a hugely powerful influence on their behaviour, the way they approach tasks, solve problems and interact with other people.

[2] Attributed to The Talmud by various authors, but unverified.

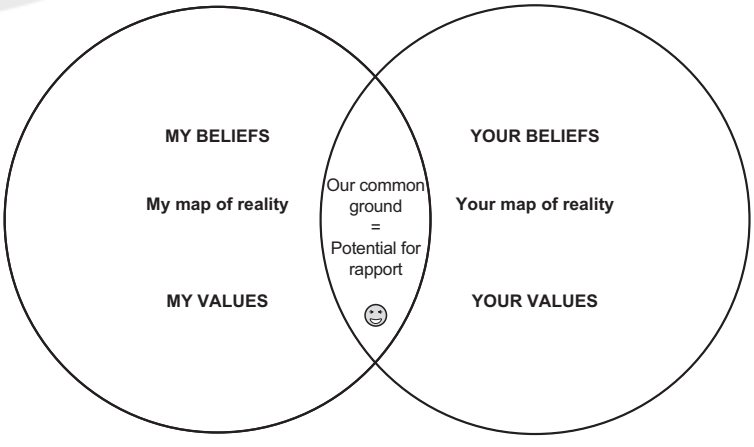
So how are our models of the world created? A full explanation would easily take up the rest of this book, but, in brief, we discover the world through our senses: what we see, hear, feel, smell and taste. However, we are bombarded with a vast, ever increasing, quantity of external information all the time. Without proper controls in place, our brains would fry attempting to process all this sensory data. So, to ensure we can cope with this onslaught, our conscious mind applies what are termed 'information filters': namely our values, beliefs, memories and decisions, which delete, distort and generalise the data we receive so we can respond to it effectively. Our models of the world are, in fact, survival mechanisms and there are as many variations as there are people; a fact that presents those of us seeking to build rapport with a tiny bit of a challenge, especially as these models are not usually visible to others.[3] However, there are clues if you know what to look for.

Psychology offers us the magnifying glass. Much in the same way as a computer does, our brains are constantly and continuously running a complex set of 'programs' that are controlling all aspects of our existence, such as breathing, sleeping, moving and speaking. The 'meta programs' are those that operate at a subconscious level and have most influence on our behaviours. They help us not only to understand **why** different people behave differently, but they allow us to predict **how** someone will react in a specific situation. And if we can predict a response, there are positive actions we can take to influence it in our favour (we expand further on this in Chapter 6 'Influencing').

TECHNIQUES FOR CREATING AND SUSTAINING RAPPORT FACE TO FACE

The first objective in a strategy for achieving rapport with someone new is to establish your areas of common ground (however small) between your respective models of the world (see Figure 2.1).

Figure 2.1 Rapport common ground



[3] Sigmund Freud, in his structural model of the psyche, likened these models to icebergs.

First impressions count

You never get a second chance to make a first impression. And first impressions last. **Like it or not, people will make a judgement on your credibility as a professional based on your appearance, demeanour, body language and your first interaction with them.** Furthermore, they will make that judgement in less than three seconds. These first impressions can be very hard for you to reverse and they set the tone for the relationship that follows.

It's worth pointing out that personal presentation (rather than looks) really does matter if you want people to take you seriously in the workplace. The purpose of this chapter is not to give you advice on how to coordinate your tie with your shirt or your shoes with your handbag; we will assume that if you've got this far in your career then you probably have the 'appearance' bit sussed and long ago assigned your Iron Maiden T-shirt to the bin (Monday to Friday at least.).

So let's focus instead on your demeanour. It needs to send immediate signals to the other person that you genuinely welcome the opportunity to engage in dialogue with them. For business change professionals, appreciating that some people in the business are predisposed to judging them as intimidating techies can come as a bit of a shock. The old adage 'smile and the world smiles with you' is never truer than in such situations. A warm, confident smile will put both you and the other person immediately at ease, but with one caveat: don't overdo it, or you'll risk coming across as insincere or an intellectual lightweight (to put it politely).

As well as your demeanour, **body language is also of vital importance to project appropriate confidence, self-assurance and professional credibility to the other person.** Stand straight, make eye contact, reach out and greet with a firm handshake. Oh, the handshake: a complete minefield for the professional and worthy of a paragraph or two. The three most common unpopular handshakes can be broadly categorised as:

- **The 'wet fish'** – Limp and flaccid. Perhaps a little damp. May imply the person lacks substance.
- **The 'boss'** – Palm downwards, on top of yours, taking the 'upper hand'. May imply a dominant power player.
- **The 'little me'** – Soft and gentle, lacking grip pressure. May imply submissiveness.

At the risk of being non-politically correct, it's fair to say that many women struggle with having too weak a handshake, whereas many men have to fight a 'bone crusher'. From personal experience, however, both sexes seem to be equally affected by the 'wet fish'.

There are two key ingredients for creating immediate rapport in a handshake. First, make sure that yours and the other person's palms are in the vertical position so that no one is dominant or submissive. Second, apply the same pressure you receive. Finally, make sure you end the handshake after three to four seconds, or two to three pumps. Any longer is normally considered a bit too intimate.

There is one more type of handshake that you may have encountered occasionally: the 'double hander', where the person takes your hand with both of theirs. A corporate favourite the world over, this is usually delivered with direct eye contact, a smile and a loud repetition of the receiver's first name, often accompanied by an earnest 'how **are** you?'. This handshake gives the giver control over the receiver by restricting their right hand. Sometimes called the 'politician's handshake', the 'double hander' is acceptable only in circumstances where a hug could also be acceptable (i.e. a high level of rapport already exists). In most business situations, therefore, it is best avoided.

However, exercising caution, you can use the 'double hander' to your advantage in some circumstances. Next time the CEO presents you with a 'boss'-style, palm-down thrust, respond with your hand in the palm-up position, then put your left hand over their right to form the 'double hander' and gently straighten the handshake. Then remove your upper hand. This switches the power from them to you and is a much simpler way of dealing with the situation.

Take the time to practise handshake styles with your friends and trusted colleagues and you can quickly learn how to deliver a positive handshake every time. Encourage their honest feedback. Remember, keeping the palms held vertical and matching the other person's grip is usually perceived by other humans as a solid, professional handshake.

Small talk is a great opener

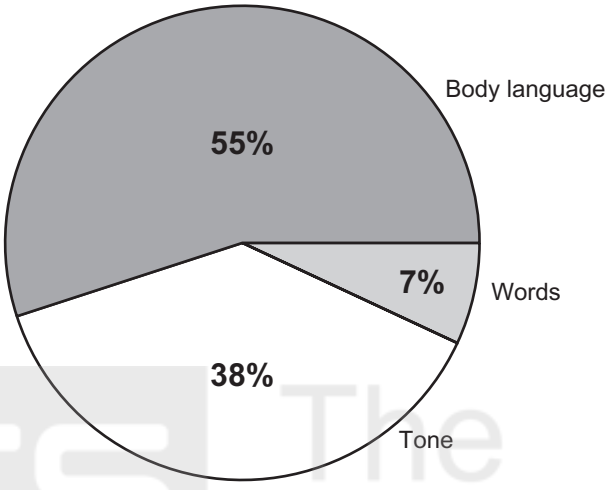
Rapport is a two-way process, so conversations are based on verbal 'give and take': you speak, I listen and vice versa. **It will therefore help the conversation flow if you prepare questions to ask a person you are meeting for the first time. Or, take a few minutes to learn something about the person before you get together.** For instance, does he play golf? Does she work with a local charity? Is there anything that you know of that you have in common with the person you are meeting? LinkedIn is a useful tool to see if you have any professional contacts or work experience in common. If so, this can be a great, informal way to open the conversation and keep it flowing naturally. Do this and you will be creating rapport effortlessly.

It's not just what you say, it's how you say it

What do you **consciously** pay attention to when you're having a conversation with someone for the first time? Probably only the words. However, just think of how many ways you can say the word 'hello' and deliver quite different emotional meanings through changes in your voice tone, body language and demeanour.

Professor Albert Mehrabian's 7–38–55 per cent rule defines three Vs (the core elements) in human face-to-face communications – verbal (words), vocal (tone of voice) and visual (body language) – and their respective importance to us in 'liking' and 'trusting' the person communicating their feelings to us (Mehrabian, 1981). Figure 2.2 shows Mehrabian's elements in communication.

Figure 2.2 Mehrabian's elements in communication



NOTE OF CAUTION

Mehrabian's rule is often misrepresented to suggest that words are of significantly less importance in conveying **any** message correctly than are body language or tone. His rule states clearly that unless a communicator is talking about their **feelings** or **attitudes** towards something, it is not applicable. (See also Chapter 8 'Presentation skills'.)

Our subconscious is always looking for congruence between the three elements. So, if someone is telling us they are passionate about our project, but their face is blank and they don't make eye contact with us, we won't trust the message or like the speaker. Ensuring congruence between our own three Vs is therefore a fundamental condition for building rapport, trust and empathy in a face-to-face conversation.

Mirror, match, pace

So how do you go about building rapport when language is only seven per cent of your communication of emotions? It is all about acknowledging how the other person is feeling in the moment, meeting them where they are, getting into 'rapport' with them. The good news is that there is a specific technique we can practise to develop our skills to get a positive response from another person. It's a neurolinguistic programming (NLP) meta-program known as 'mirror, match, pace'.

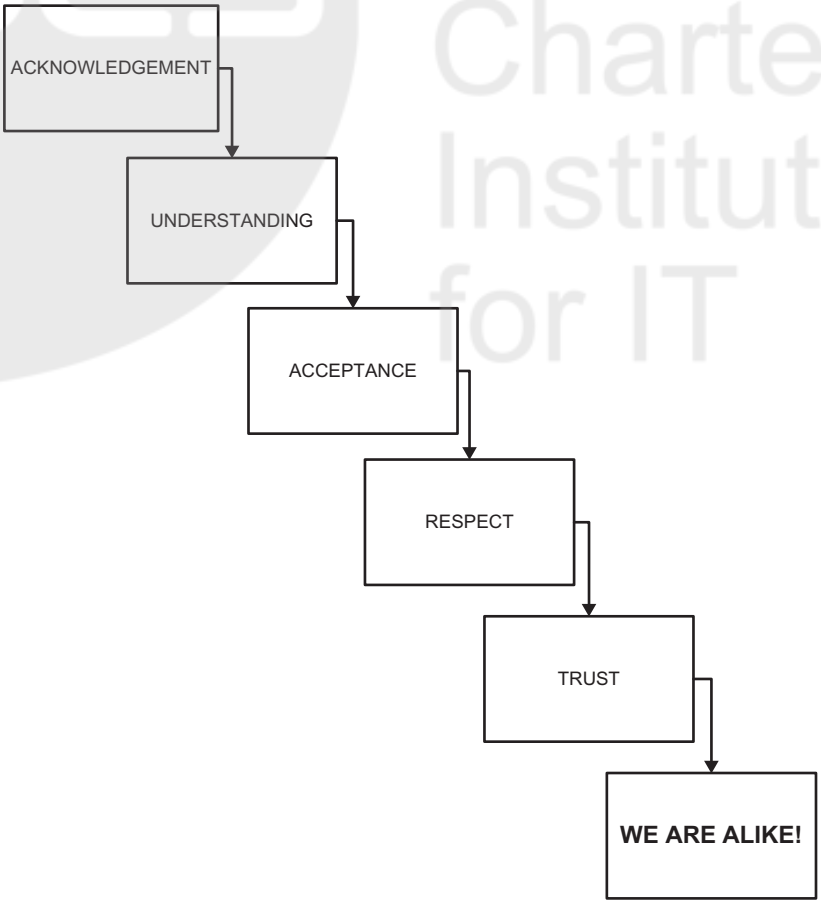
In overview, NLP is an approach to communication, personal development and psychotherapy created in the 1970s by Richard Bandler and John Grinder. They identified a connection between our brain's neurological processes of sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch and feeling ('neuro'), our use of language to order our thoughts and communicate ('linguistic') and our behavioural choices that have been learned through our life experiences ('programming'). In other words, NLP is the practice of understanding how we organise our thinking, feeling, language, ideas and behaviour to produce the results we do. NLP techniques are used widely in psychotherapy

and hypnotherapy, and it has gained popularity in the business world over the last decade as an advanced communications skills tool, particularly in the field of influencing. However, it's important to acknowledge here that NLP has its critics, some of whom dismiss it as 'pseudoscience'. Our view is that because it has helped many people become more confident in their communications with others in the workplace, then it is definitely worth knowing about.

So back to our discussion of 'mirror, match, pace'. You build rapport through a skill called 'pacing' achieved through 'mirroring' or 'matching' the communication channels of the person you are conversing with. (By 'channels', we mean their physiology, their voice and their language.)

At a subconscious level this matching sends the other person a very powerful series of messages saying that you acknowledge them, you understand them, you accept them, you respect them. It thus creates the relationship of trust between you. This can be illustrated as a thought process (shown in Figure 2.3).

Figure 2.3 Mirror-match-pace thought process



You are signalling these messages to the other person, so this leads them to accept you, which in turn means they are more receptive to your ideas and suggestions. **It is important that as a professional you are sincere in your use of these skills and that you use them with integrity.** If you do not you will deliver a mixed communication that will be unconsciously picked up by the other person and a state of rapport will not result.

So how do you 'match' the person you are conversing with? Matching posture means that if a person is gesturing with their right hand, you gesture with your right hand. If they have their left leg crossed over their right, then you have your left leg crossed over your right. You can experiment with matching the following physiology and see what results you can achieve:

- **Posture –** Upper body, spine curvature, head tilt, distribution of body weight, feet or seat.
- **Body movements** – Head, body, hands, eyes.
- **Gestures** – Match subtly and only when you are speaking.
- **Facial expression** – Smiling, laughter.
- **Breathing** – Rhythm, depth, speed, channel, volume.
- **Shoulders** – Notice position and any tension.

This matching needs to be subtle, sensitive and used with respect. It is not mimicry, exaggerated or offensive. It is almost as if you are entering into a dance with the other person. If you're not convinced by this, next time you're in a meeting with a group of people at work, notice how if someone folds their arms or leans forward, someone else will unconsciously copy them.

When matching their voice, you can try varying your own:

- **R** – hythm;
- **S** – peed;
- **V** – olume;
- **P** – itch.

Again this needs to be subtle. Mimicking an accent would be inappropriate and probably offensive. What you are aiming to do is to match their rhythm and inflection.

Mostly, people don't listen, they just take turns to speak. When matching words, we need to listen carefully and appreciate that every person has their own style of speaking, their own unique way of choosing the words and phrases that make up their verbal communications. When you can 'speak their language', it allows you to connect with them at a deeper level.

There are many factors that influence the words people use, but one of the most significant relates to their five senses (sight, hearing, feeling, taste and smell).

People 'think' using internal representations of their senses. In NLP, these five 'internal senses' are referred to as 'representational systems' and are commonly described using the acronym VAKOG.[4] If a person is primarily thinking in pictures (visual), this will be reflected in their language. They will use words like 'picture', 'focus' and 'perspective', and may employ phrases such as 'picture this', 'look at it from my point of view' or 'let's get this in proportion'. A person thinking mainly in sounds (auditory) may say things like 'sound', 'hear', 'ring', 'buzz' etc., and may use phrases like 'sounds good to me', 'we're on the same wavelength' or 'we're speaking the same language'. Other words and phrases point to feelings (kinaesthetic) such as 'he rubs me up the wrong way', 'hold on a minute' or 'get a grip'; smells (olfactory) such as 'I smell a rat', 'there's something fishy about this' or 'he's got a nose for business'; or tastes (gustatory), for example 'I can't swallow that', 'you're being very sweet' and 'let's get to the juicy bit'. **To match words, we therefore need to listen at a deeper level to what the other person is saying.**

When you are fully mirroring and matching, you will be sitting in the same posture, using the same types of gesture, speaking at a similar speed and volume, and in a similar voice tone range, as the other person. If you are completely mirroring the other person, you will even be breathing at the same rate and in the same part of the chest cavity as the other. Now you know what to look for, the next time this happens to you, notice what it feels like when you have reached this level of rapport.

TECHNIQUES FOR CREATING AND SUSTAINING RAPPORT OVER THE PHONE

How to go about creating immediate rapport over the phone, within the first five seconds, is a key component of any sales training course, but is often overlooked in other forms of communications training. You will see that the same rules apply as for meeting someone face to face (apart from body language because the person can't see you). The Mehrabian 'liking' rule referred to earlier, changes when we're engaging in a communication on the phone. When talking about feelings, the importance of your tone increases to 84 per cent and that of words increases to 16 per cent, in terms of gaining the like and trust of the person to whom you're talking.

There are a few simple techniques used by salespeople that will help you, as a professional, gain rapport over the phone:

- **Sit up straight** – Although your body language doesn't directly influence your conversation, **it's important to recognise that your posture can have a direct impact on your tone of voice, which is a *critical* tool when building rapport over the phone.** You want your tone to convey attentiveness to the other person, and sitting up straight helps you achieve this without having to think consciously about it.
- **Open the call with a smile** – Believe it or not, a smile can be heard and a 'smiling voice' is more welcoming and relaxing for the other person, so they will be predisposed to like you.

[4] VAKOG – visual, auditory, kinaesthetic, olfactory, gustatory.

- **Start the conversation with small talk** – A simple question such as 'how are you?' will let the other person knows they are speaking to a human being. Most people will respond to you in a friendly manner and it helps to break the ice. Reply to their answer with a relevant, but positive, response and then move the conversation forward. Unlike the face-to-face meeting, you will not usually have the luxury of spending five or ten minutes making small talk at this stage (unless you know them well).
- **Listen well** – Avoid distractions and allow yourself to concentrate on the other person and their conversation. Let them know you are listening by responding with gentle and soft 'uh-huhs' or 'mmms' as they speak (remember, they can't see you nodding in agreement). Do not, under any circumstances, interrupt them. Allow the speaker to finish what they are saying.
- **Match words** – As you would in a face-to-face context, use words that your caller uses in their conversation, especially any adjectives.
- **Show empathy** – To show empathy means to share in someone else's thoughts or feelings, and it is a great way of building rapport over the phone. Empathy can be shown by using phrases such as: 'I understand what you mean'; 'I can see where you are coming from'.
- **Be friendly, even when it's a difficult conversation** – Use good inflection and modulation in your voice. Do not raise your voice or withdraw from the conversation. Keep showing empathy, ask sensible questions and share in the light-hearted moments. Don't forget to laugh at any jokes.
- **Know when to close the conversation – There is nothing worse for rapport than trying to prolong a conversation that has run out of steam.** Summarise the key points of the conversation as you understand them, ask the other person whether they agree, then confirm the next action. Then politely say, 'Thanks for your time, I really enjoyed speaking with you' and put the phone down.

TECHNIQUES FOR CREATING RAPPORT VIA EMAIL

In your career, you've probably received at least one email from someone you've never met and instantly thought 'I really don't like this person'. Have you ever stopped for a moment to think why? Maybe it was the way they greeted you. Maybe the email was so long you couldn't be bothered to read it. Maybe it used 'text speak' or, even worse, emoticons (after all, we're not teenagers). Or maybe it was full of spelling, grammatical or formatting errors. Emails are discussed in detail in Chapter 7 'Written communication', but here we look at best practice for creating rapport through email exchanges.

Firstly, let's consider the opening greeting of an email. It's so important to create a great first impression, but there are no hard and fast rules. If you have already received an email from your new contact, your safest bet is to simply reflect back their own style of greeting. However, if you are the one reaching out, opening with a 'Hi' followed by their first name is almost universally acceptable. A 'Hello' followed by their first name comes a close second and may be more appropriate for more formal exchanges. Avoid opening an email with 'Dear' or even just their

first name at all costs. These latter two styles suggests excessive formality and coldness, which might be ok if the person is a lawyer, but it's not good for creating the interpersonal feeling of warmth you need to build rapport.

Secondly, almost everyone loves reading messages that are positive and affirming. With this rule in mind, always be warm and friendly in your opening sentence. For example:

> 'We've not had the opportunity to speak in person yet, so I thought I'd drop you a quick note to introduce myself and say how much I am looking forward to working with you on this project.'

Thirdly, emotive and sensory words (remember VAKOG) add texture and dimension to every message that you write. However, many people are so keen to appear 'business-like' and 'professional' they get straight to the point so quickly that they sound rude, bossy or even offensive. The irony is that this is a death sentence as far as rapport is concerned, so always try to use a selection of words in the main body of your email that paints a rich picture for the reader. It makes it more interesting for a start, which will reflect how they see you as a person.

Fourthly, **show empathy with the person in the email where you can, particularly when closing** the email. For example:

> 'Please let me know whether you have any questions. I look forward to hearing from you.'

Finally, always check the quality of your email before you press 'Send'. Use the spelling and grammar checker. Read the email out loud. If it's a business critical email, get a trusted colleague to read it through as well.

HOW TO DESTROY RAPPORT

We've spent this chapter looking at how to create rapport in order to build sustainable relationships, but before we conclude, it's helpful to consider what destroys rapport. Perhaps we are really talking about what breaks down relationships? Building the levels of rapport with someone to create a sustainable relationship can take months, even years; destroying it can take just seconds. Obviously, there are many conditions or situations that can lead to a breakdown in a relationship, but **here are our 'seven deadly sins of rapport'.**

When trying to create rapport:

- **Don't disagree vehemently** with the person you have just met, however trivial the point may be. On the way up in your professional career you will have encountered many people who believe that establishing credibility with others is about looking for any opportunity to correct their colleagues' wayward thinking. Ironically, they often end up becoming isolated as others try and avoid them.

- **Don't talk too much** – especially about yourself. Again, we will all have come across people like this. It often covers up for a lack of self-confidence and is an attempt to hide nerves, but it can become quite an unlikeable characteristic.
- **Don't deliver an uninvited sales pitch.** Hard sell might work in some industries, but in a professional environment it's quite simply annoying or, at worst, intimidating.
- **Don't be negative, critical or defensive.** However hard, to maintain rapport you must welcome the other person's input and not dismiss their views as invalid. Otherwise, you create the view in the other person's mind that you 'are not like me'.
- **Don't try to score points.** Some people like to prove that they're 'smarter than the average bear'. People who do this often lack confidence in their own professional abilities and so try to dominate the conversation. For rapport to exist, both parties need to perceive that they are equally important.
- **Don't fake interest.** Unless you're an Oscar winner, you will simply be unable to mask completely false emotion. The other person will spot it and will be disinclined to trust you, nullifying that key condition for rapport.
- **Don't be dishonest.** Even if you've established initial rapport with someone, if you've lied about something and they find out, that's it: relationship finished. It's very hard to repair a relationship once the trust is completely broken through the other's dishonesty.

CONCLUSION

We've established during this chapter that rapport is a fragile and beautiful state, created from a process of communication between two people that can be quickly and unwittingly destroyed if you possess only a simplistic understanding of how people communicate. To be great at rapport building, you first need to be aware of how your communication style might be perceived or interpreted by others. During the conversation (whether face to face, on the phone or online), you must be receptive to the subtle signals (or clues) that another person is sending to you, through their physiology, tone of voice and choice of vocabulary, to understand how they're feeling about your conversation. The good news is that you can make simple adaptations to your communication style to create a connection at a very basic human level, in order to create the rapport that will enable you to build and sustain a productive relationship, but still maintain your own personal and professional integrity.

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3 TEAM WORKING

INTRODUCTION

People organise themselves into groups for many reasons, whether it is to share some work, to uncover different experiences or knowledge, or to gain a range of views on a problem. While a family may be considered a form of group, most of the organised groups we encounter are work groups. Groups can often accomplish things that individuals acting alone would find impossible. As a result, working in groups is a fundamental feature of business and has been an essential element for its development.

Groups can be formal (set up and structured by management) or informal (developing naturally between individuals). However, much of the success of an organisation is not due to the development of its groups, but to how effectively they carry out their work; and a group's effectiveness is directly related to its ability to work as a team.

The act of setting up a group does not ensure that a team will result. Some groups do not 'gel' and may remain a collection of individuals who work together, but lack harmony and cohesion. Other groups may be more seriously dysfunctional, where active antagonism and dislike amongst the group members exists. In these cases, performance will be diminished and may be destructive rather than supportive of the organisation within which it is based.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED, 1999) provides the following definitions:

- **Teamwork** – The combined effective actions of a group.
- **Team spirit** – Feelings of camaraderie among the members of a team.

Teamwork and team spirit will enhance the capability of the individual group members, thus bringing additional benefit to the organisation. Understanding how a group develops into a performing team helps us to support this transition which, in turn, will improve the organisation's performance. Working within a high performing team is a memorable experience, one which lingers long after the team has been disbanded.

CONTENTS OF THIS CHAPTER

This chapter covers the following topics:

- groups and teams;
- team roles;
- team development;
- management and team building.

GROUPS AND TEAMS

Before we consider teams and team working, it is useful to define the term 'group'. One possibility might be to use a very simple definition such as 'a collection of people', but while this may have been the original definition of the term, it is not really sufficient when we apply it to the professional working world. A carriage on an Underground train contains a collection of people, but they are not really a group because there is nothing that unifies them – they do not feel that they belong together or have much in common. However, if the circumstances changed, for example if the train were stuck in tunnel for a very long time, the people would begin to talk, discover that they have similar issues regarding the train delay, and could begin to form into a group with concerns in common. **It is the unifying concerns and the interactions between members that cause individual people to form a group. Without these we just have a set of individuals who happen to be in the same location.**

So, for a group to be a group, and not just a collection of individuals, it needs to exhibit some characteristics. It must:

- consist of two or more people;
- involve interaction between the people (and not just casual, ad hoc contact);
- require people to be aware that they are members of a group;
- need people to acknowledge their interdependence and the fact that their individual goals are complementary;
- have some unifying concept, goal or objective.

In practice, the terms 'group' and 'team' are often used interchangeably, but there are differences between them. A group and its characteristics are described above, but the term 'team' implies an additional dimension because it involves a further level of cooperation and cohesion. When we think of a team, we visualise a group of people working actively to support each other. We expect the people within the team to be aware of others' needs and concerns, to coordinate their work and enable everyone to work as effectively as possible. They need to feel a sense of belonging to the team and a sense of ownership of the team's work deliverables. So, for a group to be an effective team it has to display the following characteristics:

- **Communication** – There is ease and flexibility of interaction between the group members.
- **Cooperation** – The people are comfortable working with and supporting the other members of the group.
- **Cohesion** – The members agree about the goals of the team and appreciate they need to work together to achieve them.

The Tuckman model (explored later in the chapter) sets out a framework for team formation and shows how there are stages through which a group must move in order to become an effective team. This model shows clearly that a group **can** become a team, but this should not be taken for granted and does not occur upon formation; a group needs to progress through the defined development stages in order to become an effective, high performing team. When we think about high performing teams, we often identify examples in the sporting arena, such as the top football or basketball teams. These teams did not just happen, there are reasons why they are high performing teams, and in this chapter we consider some of the research and approaches that underpin the development of such teams.

Informal work groups

As organisations grow and develop, they often divide into separate groups, each of which is allocated a particular area of work or specialism. The organisation then needs to depict these groups, usually using an organisation chart, so that everyone is aware of the different groups, knows how they relate to each other and communicate, and understands how the work is divided between the groups.

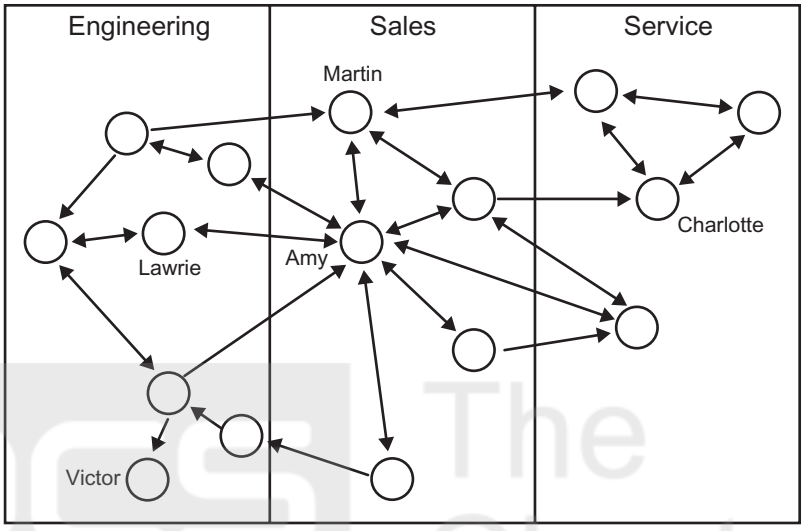
However, while the organisation chart shows the formal structure of an organisation there will also be informal groups in existence. These informal groups, sometimes known as social networks, may develop for many reasons, but are not formed as a result of management decisions. Typically these groups develop because of the shared concerns or interests of a group of people within the organisation. They may have been formed during non-working occasions, such as lunchtime discussions or evening social events.

Although these are informal groups, they can still be of great benefit to an organisation. They can facilitate cross-organisational communication, improve collaboration and provide additional insights to the formal work activities. They can provide fun and enjoyment to the working environment and, therefore, can help improve motivation and morale. So team leaders may want to influence these social networks, encourage their development into teams and harness the advantages they bring. The informal nature of these groups can make this difficult, so it can be helpful to build a social network analysis diagram, an example of which shown in Figure 3.1.

With an informal social network it is important to identify the prime organisers and the group's communication channels. The social network analysis shows this information clearly, enabling managers to identify the individuals who link the people in the network and pass information around.

If managers think the network is beneficial to the organisation they can cultivate it by organising events whereby connections can be made or by establishing communal

Figure 3.1 Example social network analysis



facilities where people can meet informally. **These steps will help to develop a social network, which in turn helps to build the cohesion and coordination of a team.**

Remote teams

Teams that are not collocated, sometimes working in widely dispersed locations, are a feature of the modern working environment. Within such teams, the individuals communicate via electronic mechanisms and rarely have the opportunity for physical discussions or meetings. In some organisations, the outsourcing of services results in team members having work locations across different countries and continents. These multinational teams, where the team members come from different cultures and hold a range of views, perspectives and beliefs, also have to work with different time zones and languages. These factors increase the pressures for managers who are building remote teams. Failing to provide opportunities to meet team colleagues face to face will limit the potential for team development. **Even if the group has a range of facilities for electronic communication, organising team events (such as seminars and workshops) is invaluable in helping the team to function more effectively in its detached mode. Later in this chapter** we discuss Tuckman's group development model; it is worth noting that failing to arrange face-to-face team meetings periodically risks keeping the team stuck at the forming stage resulting in a group of individuals with a common goal, but no sense of team spirit.

Virtual teams

As organisations expand their global operations, without increasing their carbon emissions, the virtual project team has become a fairly normal feature of the 21st century business landscape. Unlike a permanent 'remote team', a 'virtual' project team is both remote and temporary, which introduces significant additional complexities into the job of the team's manager. As members from different functional,

dispersed areas join a virtual project team, integration of work processes, technologies and overarching goals make collaboration more difficult – before you even consider the possibilities for cultural disconnects. But virtual teams can often deliver amazing results if certain conditions are met from the outset, at the heart of which is an effective communication plan aligned with the principles of *situational leadership* (see Chapter 5 'Leadership').

If you are the manager of a virtual project team, here are three suggestions that will help you steer a successful course through the complexities of this approach. Note that these are complementary to standard project management and team working principles such as setting clear goals, and defining roles and responsibilities.

1. **Select the right people** – In a virtual team, it is critical that the members can operate with a high degree of autonomy or self-leadership, the manager cannot afford to become a bottleneck through which every communication must be channelled. They must therefore be able to perform with limited direct supervision, feedback and social interaction. They must be self-motivated, able to manage their time effectively and organise their work, if they are to deliver good performance.
2. **Build trust** – Teams normally build trust in each other through regular group social interactions. In a virtual team, these opportunities will be very restricted. However, a 'rich picture' map of the project team, showing their names, nicknames if they have one, photos, responsibilities, contact data and brief biographies (human rather than purely professional) can be invaluable in quickly creating a sense of familiarity, a building block of trust. This will obviously need to be easily accessible to everyone in the team, for example via the company intranet.
3. **Communication** – The frequency and quality of communication between virtual team members is what really encourages trust. They need to know who is working on what and the progress that is being made. In creating your communication plan, consider what technology you have at your disposal – phone, email, Skype, virtual meeting – and which medium might be most appropriate for the conversation you need to have. Also consider the needs of team members as individuals, not just as a group and the level of direction they might need. Don't forget to consider when a genuine face-to-face meeting might be justified, at key milestones – or to celebrate a major success. It may be advisable to get the team to create a 'Code of Conduct', for example acknowledging emails on receipt or providing access to calendars, to avoid delays or misunderstandings.

In summary, it is safe to say that virtual project teams are successful because their managers and members put in the extra efforts needed to overcome the barriers to trust and communication that exist in a virtual environment.

TEAM ROLES

One of the major factors in generating the 'team' is that the individuals work together in a cooperative and collaborative way. If a team is to work effectively, the team members need to have a range of different skills. People have natural talents and these are manifested as behavioural preferences when performing their work. Some people enjoy research while others find it tedious and boring. Some love to

analyse every last detail while others just want to get the work finished. Some like to think while others like to act.

Research into this area has led to the identification of the roles and preferences that need to be available within the team. Without complete coverage of these roles, the team will not perform as well as possible; there will be gaps leading to unresolved issues and inefficiencies.

Belbin's team roles

Dr Meredith Belbin conducted lengthy experiments in order to analyse the nature of successful teams. Belbin's initial hypothesis was that team effectiveness is a product of intelligence, so that a team of very intelligent people should perform better than a team of less gifted individuals. However, he soon found that these 'alpha teams' were very often outperformed by groups with lower average intelligence levels. He concluded that factors other than raw intelligence were at work and that the way a person functions in a team is a product of their:

- intelligence;
- need for dominance over, or domination by, other people;
- extroversion/introversion – whether an individual tends towards the external world or prefers to dwell on inner thoughts and feelings;
- stability/anxiety – the extent of an individual's self-confidence and tendency to worry about the future.

Initially, Belbin's studies identified eight team roles, which were later supplemented by a ninth 'non-team' role. Belbin concluded that the most effective teams were those that had a balanced combination of the eight team roles. The eight team roles are described below, as is the ninth, non-team role, which Belbin discovered in his later research.

- **Implementer (IMP) –** Originally called the 'company worker', the implementer is someone who turns ideas into practical solutions, working for the good of the company and pursuing company, rather than personal, goals. The approach to the work taken by the IMP is organised, disciplined and practical. However, the IMP can sometimes be inflexible and slow to respond to new opportunities.
- **Coordinator (CO) –** Originally called the 'chairman', this is one of the two main leadership roles. The coordinator ensures the goals are clear and understood, delegates well and allocates the team's resources effectively. The leadership style is consensual, rather than directive. Some COs can be seen as prone to delegating personal work.
- **Shaper (SH) –** Shapers are the other main leadership style identified by Belbin. Shapers are proactive leaders who thrive on pressure and adopt a dynamic approach. They direct the team effort, overcome obstacles and are driven and focused. However, they can be too focused on their goals and can be unsympathetic to other's feelings.
- **Plant (PL) –** Belbin identified that successful teams required creative input. He placed (planted) people with a preference for creativity into the teams and

found that they could often help a team that had stalled to move forwards. 'Plants' are imaginative, creative and unorthodox; they are sometimes known as 'innovators'. These are the people who generate the ideas to resolve problems and address issues, but they can be less focused on practical detail.

- **Resource investigator (RI)** – The resource investigator is particularly adept at making contacts and finding resources to support the work. They tend to be extroverts who enjoy communicating with other people and exploring opportunities. Some RIs can be too optimistic on occasion and may lose interest once the initial enthusiasm has passed.
- **Monitor–Evaluator (ME)** – The monitor–evaluator is adept at judging the merits of the ideas brought to the company by the plant or the resource investigator. The ME is highly analytical and is able to evaluate options critically and rationally without being swayed by emotions. The ME is better at assessing solutions than creating them, but sometimes can be seen as overly critical.
- **Team worker (TW)** – The team worker cooperates with the other team members and has a good effect on morale. The TW tends to be a good listener and diplomat, often helping to avert friction within the team. TWs focus on team objectives rather than personal goals and help to improve team spirit. They can be easily influenced.
- **Completer–Finisher (CF)** – The completer–finisher ensures that all angles are covered and the tasks are fully completed. They have the ability to finalise anything that is started and do so with great thoroughness. CFs are painstaking in their attention to detail, searching out errors and omissions, but can fail to see the 'big picture'. They may be reluctant to delegate and can be perceived to be pedantic.
- **Specialist (SP)** – This role was not included in Belbin's original work. It was added as a result of later research. The specialist is someone who provides specialist knowledge and is rarely interested in working as part of a team, preferring to pursue the interests of the specialism. The SP is likely to be an expert who is consulted when necessary.

  SPs are not team players, so it is usually better to allow them to work individually rather than trying to integrate them into a team; they may only contribute to aspects that concern their specialist area. Sometimes a strong manager (e.g. a coordinator) can ensure the specialist conforms to the needs of the team.

Individual preferences

A person's preferred team role can be identified through the completion of the Belbin self-perception inventory questionnaire (Belbin, 2010a; 2010b). The results do not show that an individual is of one particular type. We all have preferences in certain directions and all of the Belbin team roles can apply to each one of us to a greater or lesser degree. As a result, someone may find that they are a natural SH and PL, average CF and TW, with little aptitude for ME or RI.

An individual's behavioural preferences can also depend on factors in the work environment and can be influenced by personal experiences and cultural factors. Further, someone's preferred role types can also vary depending upon their position in the team and the preferences of the other team members.

Missing roles

Most people are competent in a mixture of team roles. Some will be natural roles, others will be assumed when needed and some they would find difficult to adopt.

Experience has also shown that where a team lacks a role, other members often step in to cover the gap. They may have less success in the role or may need to deploy more effort for the same result, but sometimes this can generate an ability that was previously latent or hidden. An example could be the PL role. Many people feel they do not have creative thinking powers, yet, and as discussed in Chapter 13 'Creative problem solving', circumstances can arise where they are able to contribute suggestions. Such circumstances may be where a team lacks a natural 'plant' and so engages in creative problem-solving activities to generate ideas and innovations. Similarly, if a team lacks a natural monitor–evaluator, but the profiling shows that one of the team members has some affinity for the role, then it may be possible for that person to assume this role within the team. This 'role learning' phenomenon can also arise naturally where a team member agrees to take on a task, such as researching information, and finds a natural affinity for work that previously had not been an area of interest.

Using Belbin in practice

Although understanding Belbin's team roles can help us to understand why a team functions well (or badly), we also need to ask if knowledge of the roles can be used proactively to **plan** for effective team working.

It was thought initially that team role profiling could be used as part of the selection process for teams. Whilst theoretically a feasible idea, it does depend on the availability of a large pool of individuals, with the required business or technical skills, from which a balanced team can be selected. In practice, this is rarely the case and people are usually chosen for a team primarily because they possess required, and often scarce, specialist skills.

However, although people are chosen mainly because of their specialisms, **the Belbin roles can be very useful to identify the gaps and the actions required to address the gaps.** For example, if the team lacks a role, such as a CF, it would be very much strengthened by adding a person with these characteristics. Alternatively, the team may contain several people with similar preferences, and this may be the basis for conflict. For instance, if it is found that there are several shapers within the team, strong management will be required to keep them moving in the same direction.

Belbin team roles can also help the team members to recognise each others' strengths and weaknesses. If the team members share their Belbin profiles with each other they will develop understanding of why people behave in a particular way. This can also make it easier for the other team members to make allowances for some behavioural preferences.

Margerison–McCann Team Management Systems

Another view of role profiles has been established by Margerison and McCann (1995). Their work with managers led them to identify four key questions looking at how people prefer to:

- relate with others;
- gather and use information;
- make decisions;
- organise themselves and others.

Researching these questions led them to identify four scales based on the managers' work preferences. These scales were:

- **Relationships** – extrovert/introvert;
- **Information** – practical/creative;
- **Decision-making** – analytical/beliefs-based;
- **Organisation** – structured/flexible.

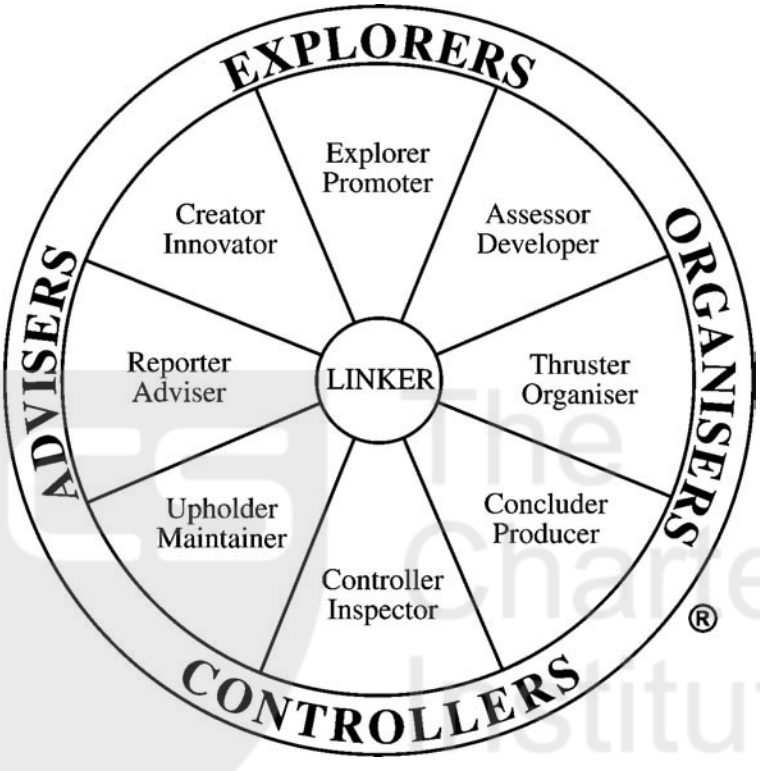
Margerison and McCann developed their Team Management Wheel as shown in Figure 3.2. This Wheel identifies four major areas of preference (Advisers, Explorers, Organisers and Controllers) plus eight team roles. These roles are shown in the sectors of the Wheel with Linker at the centre. The team roles in the Wheel are described below.

- **Reporter–Adviser** – Enjoys giving and gathering information.
- **Creator–Innovator** – Likes to come up with ideas and different ways of approaching tasks.
- **Explorer–Promoter** – Enjoys exploring possibilities and looking for new opportunities.
- **Assessor–Developer** – Prefers working where alternatives can be analysed and ideas developed to meet the practical constraints of the organisation.
- **Thruster–Organiser** – Likes to push forward and get results.
- **Concluder–Producer** – Prefers working in a systematic way to produce work outputs.
- **Controller–Inspector** – Enjoys focusing on the detailed and controlling aspects of work.
- **Upholder–Maintainer** – Likes to uphold standards and values, and maintain team excellence.

Interestingly, Margerison and McCann stated that the Linker role was not a preference but 'a set of skills that all people can develop' (Margerison and McCann, 1995). They identified three types of Linking:

- **Internal Linking (coordinating)** – This involves ensuring the team members work together in a coordinated way towards a common goal.
- **External Linking (representing)** – This involves representing the team and being an advocate for the work of the team.

Figure 3.2 Margerison–McCann Team Management Wheel[5]



- **Informal Linking** – Supporting the establishment of links within the team and networking.

It can be useful to think about the Linking role from these three angles, and ask questions such as: 'Who is the advocate for our team?'; 'Is the team manager enabling the team to work together with coordination?'; 'Are there people within the team who are helping to establish links between team members?'

The relevance of team roles

In essence, Belbin, Margerison and McCann (and many other writers in this area) have explored the components that make up the holy grail of teams: a performing team. The theme of 'balance' is evident in the research in this area, highlighting the importance of building teams that contain a balance of the required behavioural preferences. In other words, the people within the team cover all of the necessary areas. **Understanding the roles and ensuring sufficient balance are good bases for building a high performing team.**

[5] The Margerison–McCann Team Management Wheel is a registered trademark reproduced by kind permission of TMS Development International (www.tmsdi.com, 2012).

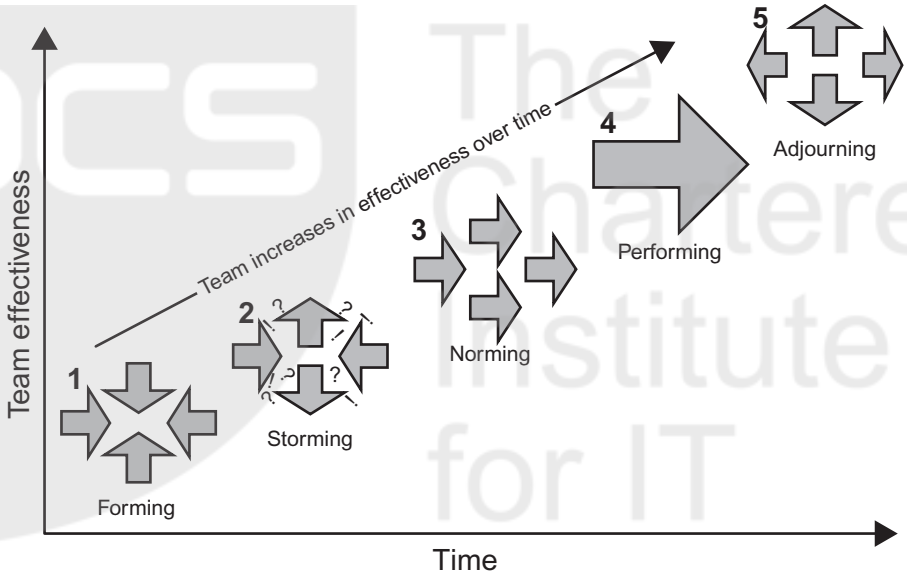
TEAM DEVELOPMENT

As discussed earlier, a group's effectiveness is dependent upon the extent to which it is performing as a team. We need to recognise that all work groups have to **develop** into teams. They are not teams from day one. The Tuckman model described below shows how groups develop into performing teams.

Tuckman model

One of the most popular models for team development was defined by Bruce Tuckman (1965). The 'Tuckman model' sets out the four stages of group formation as shown in Figure 3.3.

Figure 3.3 Tuckman's stages of group development



The characteristics of these stages of group development are as follows:

- **Forming** – This stage is characterised by politeness. The group has just been formed and everyone is feeling their way. There may be some confusion about individuals and their roles. Everyone feels tentative and uncertain about how they can work with the other group members. During this stage, the group members become acquainted with each other and establish some basic 'ground rules' for their interactions.
- **Storming** – This stage is characterised by people testing the limits of what they can do and how they can behave. There may be disagreement about the priorities for the group and a struggle for leadership. There is likely to be tension and sometimes argument. Some people may find this stage very uncomfortable and may avoid speaking out or interacting with other group members. Subgroups or cliques may form. Some groups never progress beyond storming because they find this stage so uncomfortable that they retreat back to the forming stage.

- **Norming** – Once at this stage, the group has found ways of working together. The leadership issues have been settled and norms of behaviour agreed. The group begins to set standards and the members work cooperatively. The group has a degree of consensus about their goals and working practices.
- **Performing** – This is the stage where a group is an effective, high performing team, which can only happen if the group has worked through the previous three stages. Group members know and trust each other and are able to work cooperatively. There is flexibility within the team such that if someone misses something, another team member will deal with it.

While the four stages were defined many years ago and are well-established, sometimes groups feel they can skip stages. A word of warning, if a group feels that this is the case then a surprise awaits. The statement, 'We got on so well from the outset that we didn't need to go through the storming phase' will just lead to disappointment because the group will stay stuck at the forming stage. **To become a norming, or even better, a performing, group, it is vital to go through the 'storming' phase;** without this, the group members will not be comfortable working together, petty disputes will remain unaired and agendas will stay hidden.

Similarly, if a team is joined by a new member, the stages will need to be revisited. The introduction of an individual with the potential for new ideas and opinions may cause the group to re-enter the storming, or even the forming, stage. While transition through the stages might be quicker than the original formation of the group, it will still be necessary for this to happen.

In later work, Tuckman and Mary Ann Jensen (1977) identified a fifth stage that affects groups: adjourning.

- **Adjourning** – The reasons for the group formation no longer prevail so it starts to break up. This stage is characterised by disengagement, anxiety about what happens next, positive feelings of past achievement and sadness at parting. If a team has moved through the development stages to become a performing team, the adjourning stage can be painful for the participants. All the ease of interaction and the familiar working relationships are about to ebb away and the future can feel very uncertain.

Using Tuckman's model

So how can this model help us? One of the key points is the need to accept that when people come together to form a work group, they will need some time, and some opportunities to disagree, before they can develop into a performing team. The point at which the conflicts emerge can cause feelings of discomfort that can disorientate and worry some team members, but traversing this stage is essential if the team is to perform within a mood of openness and transparency.

The speed with which teams move through the development stages will vary depending on the business context and the personalities of the team members and, if the team composition changes, stages will need to be revisited. Managers can take action to help the group move through the earlier stages into the more productive later ones. For example, team meetings and workshops can be invaluable in

helping the individual group members become familiar with each others' views and preferences. They can also provide forums for disagreements to surface, thus helping with the storming phase.

Finally, we all need to appreciate the difficulties inherent in the adjourning stage because our colleagues may need assistance and support during the breakup of the group.

MANAGEMENT AND TEAM BUILDING

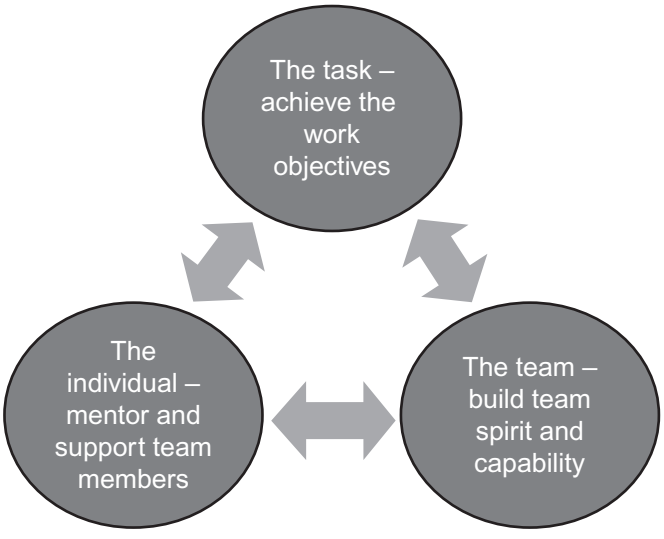
The manager of the team has overall responsibility for building the team and motivating the team members. This does not mean that the team members can abdicate responsibility for generating the team spirit. However, the manager has overall responsibility for this and usually has the greatest resources to enable its development.

Adair's model of group needs

John Adair developed a model showing the three elements to be addressed when leading and developing a successful team (Adair, 2011). The leadership aspect of the model is discussed in Chapter 5 'Leadership', but in this chapter we consider this model from the management of the team perspective. Figure 3.4 is based upon Adair's model and shows how the three aspects need to be coordinated and work in tandem with each other in order for a team to succeed.

Firstly, achieving the work objectives set for the team. This requires a clear definition of the task in hand. Adair commented, 'Without a clear goal there is no such thing as concerted teamwork.' The task definition provides a focus for the team and ensures there is direction. Decisions can be made within the context of the

Figure 3.4 Aspects of team leadership (based on Adair's three circles model)



task definition. The individual members of the team need to know what they are aiming to achieve and what should be delivered.

Secondly, mentoring, development and support of the individual team members. While there has to be a focus on achieving the task set for the team, this can only be achieved if the individual team members are encouraged to develop the required knowledge and skills, and are encouraged to do so. To enable this, the team members need to be clear on their roles and responsibilities. They need to know where the priorities lie. The motivation and reward of the individuals needs to be clear and supported.

Thirdly, building the capability of the team. Adair produced a checklist of items that should be considered when building the team. These can be divided into the tangible and intangible aspects. The tangible aspects include structure, lines of communication and standards. For example, is the team the right size and does it constitute the right skills? Are the communication lines established and clear? Do they know what is expected and the standards to apply? The intangible aspects involve dealing with the people. Is there team spirit amongst the group? Are there opportunities to develop this? Is there fairness in dealing with the team members (particularly on the part of the team manager)?

While this model represents the manager's responsibilities, **it is important for anyone working within a team to understand the three elements of the model.** The responsibility for any of these areas may be shared amongst the team or delegated to individual team members. The entire team needs to accept responsibility for the team's success, and understanding how effective teams are built is an important first step in achieving this.

Tannebaum and Schmidt continuum of management styles

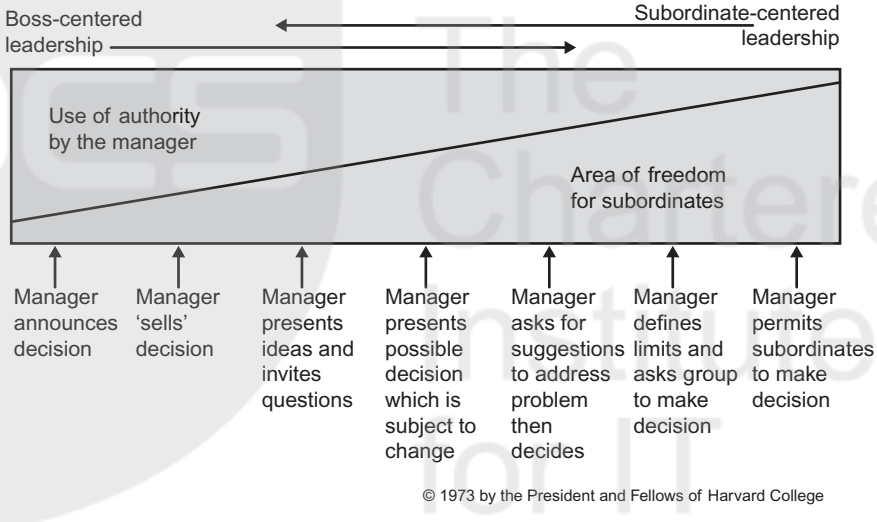
The management style is also an important factor in team development. Tannenbaum and Schmidt (1973) proposed that the style adopted by the manager is dictated by four factors:

- **The needs of the subordinate** – The people working in the team have needs. Some like a highly directive management style while, at the other end of the scale, others prefer to be given considerable freedom.
- **The needs of the manager** – Similarly, the manager has needs and a preferred management style. This may be more directive, involving regular progress monitoring and decision making. Alternatively, the manager may prefer to delegate the work, leaving time to concentrate on policy issues.
- **The demands of the situation** – Whatever the needs of the subordinates and the manager, the situational context will also influence the style adopted. Even if delegated responsibility is a feature of the team, there are some situations where strong direction is required (e.g. if an urgent issue arose with a key customer). Similarly, even if the management style is more directive, there will be situations where it is sensible to canvass as many views as possible before deciding what to do.

- **The culture of the organisation** – The management style must suit the culture of the organisation. Some organisations do not empower their staff and insist that managers control the work very closely. Others value the input from all staff members and require them to take on the responsibility for decisions. Management styles can also vary considerably from country to country; German managers, for instance, are often expected to be more directive than their British counterparts. Chapter 9 'Commercial awareness' discusses frameworks that explore national and organisational culture.

The model shown in Figure 3.5 is based on the Tannenbaum and Schmidt continuum, and the manager's actions are expanded upon below.

Figure 3.5 Tannenbaum and Schmidt continuum



Announces decision

The left-hand side of the model represents the most directive management style. The 'tell' style involves the manager making a decision and advising the team. While this approach may be appropriate in certain situations (e.g. if there is a need for urgent action or this is an immature team), it may not be acceptable in other circumstances. There are some situations where discussion and acknowledgement of other views are required. The imposition of decisions in these situations can reduce the sense of the cohesive team, cause alienation and dissent amongst the team members, and result in a lack of support for the course of action decided upon.

'Sells' decision

Moving to the 'sell' style, the model shows that the manager is still largely in control of the decision. However, in this position, the manager makes some effort to explain why the decision has been made and offers the opportunity for team members to express their views or make comments. Again, if this is appropriate to a particular situation or the manager is sufficiently persuasive concerning the need to make decisions, this style can be very effective. This is particularly the case

where difficult or unpleasant decisions have to be made. There is a danger with this approach though; **if people are given the impression that they are being consulted, when in reality they are not, they can become aggrieved when their suggestions are subsequently ignored.** Sometimes, the attempt to 'sell' the decision can be less acceptable and have worse consequences for the team than adopting the 'tell' style.

Both of these styles are highly directive and work best if the manager has made wise decisions. Where this is not the case, the alienation of the team can leave the team leader exposed with little support to limit any damage or resolve subsequent problems.

Invites questions

Here, the manager presents the ideas regarding the decision and invites questions from the team. The aim is to ensure that the team is able to understand better the decision that has been made and has the opportunity to explore the implications of the decision.

Presents provisional decision

The manager has made a decision, but it is not finalised until the team members have given their reactions. The decision is presented to the team on this basis, but the manager reserves the right to make the final decision.

Gets suggestions

The manager invites suggestions from the team prior to deciding, but reserves the right to make the final decision. This can be a positive move for two reasons: the additional views can be helpful if the decision is not straightforward or there are a range of factors to consider; the team will feel their opinions are of value and they are involved in team decisions. However, this style can cause problems if the views of team members are dismissed or not given due consideration because this can foster a sense of 'going through the motions' rather than demonstrating genuine team involvement.

Gives out problems

At the next level, the manager defines the problem and the parameters to be applied when deciding on the solution, and delegates responsibility for the decision to the team. This can be a highly motivating approach for some people and can foster a real sense of engagement within the team. On the other hand, it does require the team to be sufficiently mature to respond to the required level of responsibility. The manager is able to constrain the decisions using the defined parameters and so still retains some control, but there may be problems if the task or the parameters are not clear.

Permits decisions

Ultimately, the model shows the situation where complete freedom and responsibility is delegated to the team. In effect, the team is making the decisions as the manager did when using the 'tell' style. The team is responsible for analysing the situation, evaluating options, assessing the implications of those options, and deciding on the best way forward. General operating limits will be set for the team by the manager's boss (so they will be at an overview level). This approach empowers the team members, enabling a manager, particularly those at a senior level, to lead a

large group of people. There are some dangers here though: some team members may find the level of responsibility too onerous and fail to make the required decisions. Alternatively, some teams or individuals may be **too** prepared to decide and end up making errors and failing to contribute to the overall objectives of the organisation.

The strength of the Tannenbaum and Schmidt model is that it highlights the choices facing team managers when making decisions and organising the work. Each style has positive and negative outcomes for the team. In deciding which style to adopt, the leader must consider the needs of the team members, the needs of the manager, the demands of the situation and the cultural context within which they are operating. Problems can arise when managers allow their own preferences to dictate their style, irrespective of the situation, fail to balance the needs of the task with that of the individual team members, or do not take into account the culture within which they are working.

Both the Tannenbaum and Schmidt model and the Adair model reflect the importance of balancing different needs related to the team. Bearing this in mind when choosing the management style can contribute significantly to increased team motivation and effective team working.

CONCLUSION

An effective team can bring huge benefits to an organisation, but it is rare that this happens naturally; there is usually a need for good team management and design. In this chapter we have explored the three aspects to building a performing team:

- The individual team roles and behaviours: the range of skills required to cover all aspects of the work.
- The development of the team: the process by which a group of individuals evolves into an effective team.
- The management of the team: the direction and goals, and coordination of the team members to complete the tasks.

The models and frameworks discussed in this chapter are useful for anyone working within a team, whether permanent or temporary, collocated or remote. They can provide insights into why a team is not achieving high performance and how this may be improved. If we want to improve our teamworking ability, and support the development of a high performance team, an understanding of the three areas – team roles, team development and team management styles – is invaluable.

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4 NEGOTIATION AND CONFLICT

INTRODUCTION

If change is a constant in business, then negotiation is a constant in life. For most of us a situation requiring negotiation arises every day. Whether it is a small negotiation, such as working out which way to pass someone on the street, with failure resulting in an embarrassing pavement dance, or whether it is something significant, such as a business transaction or house purchase, the ability to negotiate is vital. Possessing negotiation skills will help with so many situations that often they will not feel like negotiations. Some people have a natural instinct for successful negotiation and this helps them in so many situations. Others try too hard to 'win', believing that every negotiation has to be a battle, and end up wondering why no one wants to work or socialise with them.

We may define negotiation as the:

> Mutual discussion and arrangement of the terms of a transaction or agreement.[6]

Many people find negotiation very stressful so they avoid it by walking away from the 'mutual discussion', often to the detriment of the situation and themselves. Perhaps even worse is the attitude that welcomes negotiation as an opportunity for confrontation and argument.

Most of us recognise that negotiation is everywhere and is really important, and as a result, it is beneficial to learn and develop negotiation skills. This chapter discusses negotiation approaches, the effects of poor negotiation and conflict management.

CONTENTS OF THIS CHAPTER

This chapter covers the following topics:

- types of negotiation situation;
- negotiation outcomes;

[6]www.dictionary.com

- the 'getting to yes' approach;
- process for successful negotiation;
- managing conflict situations.

TYPES OF NEGOTIATION SITUATIONS

In any negotiation, the participants have a position, opinion or desired outcome, and these differ from each other. There may be significant differences between the positions or the differences may be minor. If the latter case, it is usually easier to negotiate an outcome that satisfies all parties but, as we shall see, once emotion is added to the situation, this is not always the case. If there are significant differences between the positions, then the negotiation is likely to be more difficult even if there is a will on both sides to achieve a satisfactory outcome. If there is less of a will to resolve the situation, then the difficulties are compounded even further. While there may be two participants and two positions in a negotiation, this is not necessarily the case and often there may be several of each. Typically the greater the number of positions/participants, the more the negotiation is problematic.

Negotiation occurs whenever we try to reach agreement over an issue or a decision. Situations regarding negotiation are so numerous that often we don't recognise a negotiation has taken place until later, or even at all. They range from the minor – who is going to make the coffee? – to the significant – what shall we pay to buy this company?

Some negotiations require interaction with someone you are unlikely to encounter again, such as during the private purchase of a car, so perhaps a tougher negotiation line will be profitable. But, and this is a big but, the underlying assumption that you will never see the person again may be incorrect. You never know when you might need their assistance or may come across them again. For example, inadvertently, you may have forgotten to take some of the car documents and so need to recover them. Unfortunately, the person is still smarting from your tough negotiating stance and now has the opportunity to make life difficult for you. It's human nature to make the most of that opportunity in such circumstances.

So, most of the time, we need to think about not just the negotiation itself but also the longer term impacts.

In our professional lives, some typical business situations that may require negotiation are:

- customer/supplier business deal;
- complaint resolution;
- performance review;
- pay rise;
- product or task delivery timescale;
- work distribution.

We need to understand that the context to the negotiation is key to determining the best approach. There may be some situations where it is quicker, cheaper or less stressful to accommodate other people's needs and forget about negotiating. On the other hand, some situations may require an entire team of dedicated negotiators. Most business negotiations fall somewhere in between.

However, sometimes people don't consider the context. They plough on regardless often because they have to ensure that they win the day no matter what the price of doing so. Others shrug their shoulders, do not state their case and move on – even if this leaves unresolved issues with serious implications. Poor negotiation skills will hinder personal and career development. Sadly, many people who do not understand negotiation fail to realise how much they are damaging their career prospects or closing the door on business opportunities.

NEGOTIATION OUTCOMES

If we were to think about what most participants desire from a negotiation the typical answer would be for everyone to achieve their objectives. Sometimes a way forward is found that will achieve this. For example, perhaps a team is selecting their next business move and are able to find a creative way to encompass all of the desired requirements. But this is not typical. In the majority of situations, there has to be some movement towards the objectives of one participant and away from the objectives of the other. Where this is the case, the desired outcome is one that is most acceptable to all. In any event, the desired outcomes should mean that:

- everyone feels content with the outcome;
- no one feels resentful or annoyed.

Common problems found during negotiation

The major problem during negotiation is when people believe that there are only two outcomes – I win or you win – and they take entrenched positions. Participants believe the negotiation has to be soft or hard; either I give in or I hold out for exactly what I want; I compete or I capitulate. However, if there is a 'winner', then this guarantees that there will be a 'loser', and while the problems that this can cause may be evident immediately, in some situations they may not materialise for a long time after the negotiation has concluded.

The 'giving in' soft position may be taken if a participant wishes to avoid a negotiation. However, where a participant has conceded, this does not mean they find the outcome acceptable. They may be tired of the negotiation and may concede out of a sense of desperation; they may feel the potential reward from negotiating further is not worth the time and effort required; they may sense that the negotiation is veering towards disagreement and may wish to avoid this. As a result, **even if someone adopts this approach, they can still harbour a grudge for a long while afterwards. And this sense of resentment may cause many problems at a later point.**

The 'winning at all costs' hard position may result from a deeply held belief in the cause espoused or may be because of a deeply held need to 'win', with 'winning'

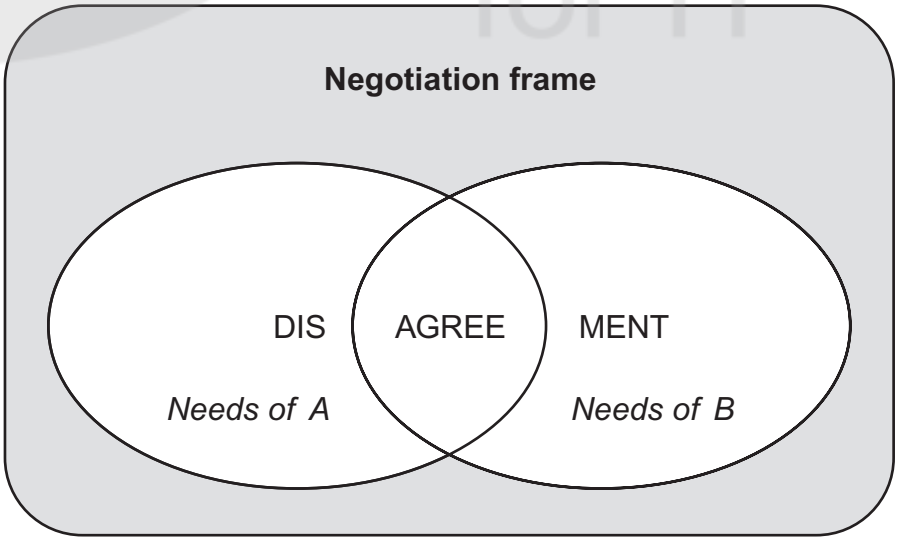
being the most important aspect. The problem with this method is that people can become entrenched in their positions; the more they justify to the other party why they cannot move or change, the more they believe it and the greater the difficulty of change being achieved. Such an approach can be very harmful to a working or personal relationship and, although beneficial in the short term, ultimately may result in more being lost than gained. The issue of 'saving face' enters the equation and the chance of reconciling the parties' interests becomes more remote. This can be a significant issue for some people, particularly those from national cultures where loss of face is to be avoided at all costs. These factors can mean that a great deal of time is wasted and any ongoing relationship between the parties can be endangered.

As mentioned earlier, where someone has negotiated hard it can be guaranteed that the other participant will not seek out opportunities to help or benefit them in the future. Try asking a favour of someone with whom you have negotiated hard and see the result.

Dovetailing

Typically, negotiation is a matter of balancing the values and desired outcomes of the participants. Success is achieved by fitting outcomes together so that everyone's needs are met to an acceptable level. Joseph O'Connor and John Seymour (2003) discuss this 'dovetailing' approach in their book on NLP. By seeking to dovetail outcomes the negotiators become allies, not opponents, and seek to work together to find acceptable outcomes. If the participants to a negotiation are framed as allies solving a common problem, the problem is already partially solved. Dovetailing involves finding that area of where there is overlap and a common problem as depicted through the negotiation frame shown in Figure 4.1.

Figure 4.1 The negotiation frame



Alternative approaches to dovetailing may involve imposing a decision or solution on the other participants or manipulation of the situation. In both of these cases, the needs of some people are disregarded. O'Connor and Seymour highlight four major drawbacks for those that impose solutions or manipulate situations: remorse, resentment, recrimination and revenge.

THE 'GETTING TO YES' APPROACH

The Harvard Negotiation Project proposed a completely different approach to the traditional soft ball/hard ball negotiations. The Harvard approach was published in *Getting to Yes* (2003), written by Fisher and Ury (and, in the latest edition, edited by Patton). In this approach, 'principled negotiation', focusing on fairness and the absence of aggression or fakery, is recommended.

Principled negotiation consists of four stages as shown in Figure 4.2.

(1) **People** – Separate the people issues from the problem under negotiation.

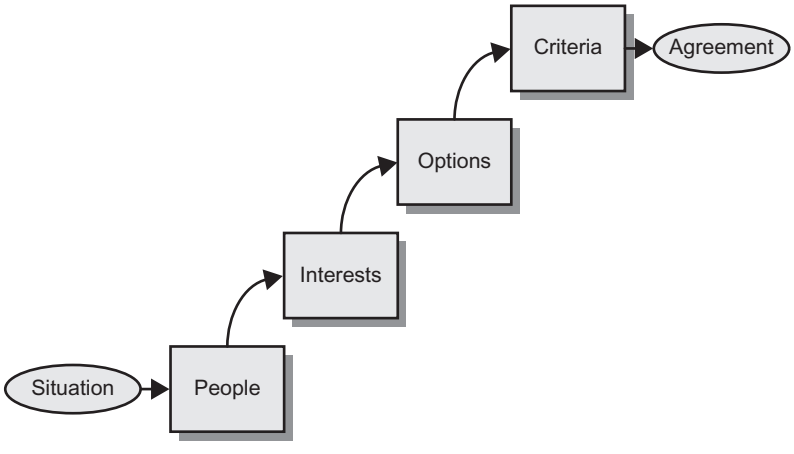
(2) **Interests** – Focus on the interests of the negotiating parties rather than the positions they have adopted.

(3) **Options** – Look at the possible options to resolve the negotiation before making any decisions.

(4) **Criteria** – Set criteria that will provide a basis for the decision and ensure objectivity.

These stages set the scene for a negotiation based on understanding the issues that face all of the participants while removing the emotion from the process. Let's look at them in greater detail.

Figure 4.2 Four stages of principled negotiation



People

Whether negotiating in business or in our personal lives, it is always important to understand that individuals hold opinions, beliefs and values, and have needs that must be satisfied. Sometimes negotiators fail to recognise this, which can result in serious problems arising and, ultimately, a failure to reach a negotiated agreement. The people in a negotiation do not want to feel they have been bullied into accepting an unfair deal, or have been weak or treated unfairly. Everyone wants to walk away with a sense of fairness and acceptance. Where someone does feel ill-treated they can store up a grudge that can cause problems at a later stage. People who feel a sense of grievance can behave unpredictably in future situations.

Failing to appreciate the emotions and beliefs at play in a negotiation is likely to be disastrous, both at the time of the negotiation and in the future, and this happens all too often. We entangle the people with the problem and the emotions rise. Aggression can result and eventually anger. Then the issue becomes personal and we direct our energies at the other parties rather than sorting out the problem. Our focus is on ensuring they feel as bad as we do and the situation escalates to one that is irresolvable. Unfortunately, this is a very destructive cycle that can harm working or personal relationships over the long term.

To avoid these issues we need to ensure that we focus on the person as well as the position. One easy way of doing this is to consider how you would feel from their position. We call this 'standing in their shoes' and involves taking on their beliefs and values, and considering the situation from their perspective. Fisher and Ury have identified three aspects to consider when thinking about the people:

- **Perception** – How they perceive the situation.
- **Emotion** – How they feel about the situation.
- **Communication** – How they will be communicated with.

Interests

Considering the interests means that we focus on the interests of the negotiating parties rather than their positions; a vital shift in emphasis. It is only by considering the interests that positive solutions that address everyone's needs can be found.

We can uncover interests by asking questions such as 'Why?' or 'What benefit would this achieve?' or 'What would be the implications of doing (or not doing) this?'

Let's look at an example. A party sets out a position: 'I must have a report by tomorrow.' The interests are uncovered by asking: 'Why?' or 'What benefit would you derive?' If the other party states 'We can't get all of the information that quickly', their interests may be uncovered by asking 'Why not?'

For every situation each party may have multiple interests. Sometimes, if there is more than one person in the party, they may each have additional, different interests. In the above example, the requester of the report may need to brief or advise other, possibly more senior, managers and may need to use the information to plan further activity; the compiler of the report may have competing requests and this may not be the highest priority.

It is usually the case that some interests between parties are in common as well as some being in conflict. It is useful to list all of the interests of the other party, understand their relative importance and identify the common interests. In the example given above, both parties wish to deliver the report, the conflict is over timing and competing priorities.

It is also important that you help the other party to understand your interests by stating them clearly. Sometimes, assumptions about understanding are made that are completely unrealistic. What may seem obvious to one participant may be completely opaque to another. In our example, it would be hopeless for the requester to continue reiterating that the report must be produced by the following day; similarly, repeating an entrenched statement that this is not possible will not help resolve the situation. If the requester explains **why** this is so important it is possible to consider what might be done to help – it may be possible to focus on a subset of the information in order to deliver enough for the urgent briefing. Also, it may be possible to find a way to address the competing priorities by providing further assistance from other members of staff with the other tasks.

It is always important to state the interests prior to describing any possible solutions. This sequence provides a basis for everyone to understand the interests and then participate in finding a way forward. Reversing this process, looking at the options before the interests, means that the options are based on incomplete information and allows the other party to consider their objections to them; they may even state their objections while you are explaining your interests.

Options

Once we understand how people feel about the situation and have explored their interests, we can move onto considering the potential solutions. Creative-thinking or problem-solving approaches (see Chapter 13 'Creative problem solving') can be very useful here because they help to identify possibilities that might not have been thought of otherwise.

Criteria

Once we have some options that form a basis of a solution we need to assess them and decide the way forward. Deciding on the basis of who is the stronger party at this point can only lead to resentment, so we need to find some more objective measures if we want to avoid a conflict.

The sorts of objective criteria that you might consider are:

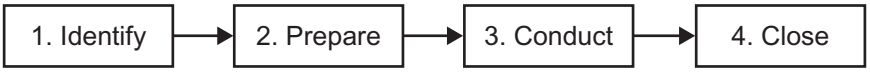
- market value;
- costs of repair/updating;
- time available/constraints;
- quantifiable data;
- the legal implications.

Any previous experiences of similar situations can be invaluable in setting the criteria. Assessing the options objectively and with fairness helps to focus on the problem and lead to wise agreements.

PROCESS FOR SUCCESSFUL NEGOTIATION

The principled negotiation approach provides some useful insights into conducting a negotiation. This is particularly the case if used within a broader negotiation process as shown in Figure 4.3.

Figure 4.3 Negotiation process



Identify situation

One of the key steps in ensuring a successful negotiation involves identifying in advance that a negotiation is required. This sounds straightforward but sometimes people are caught out when they have not anticipated a negotiation. Negotiating in an ad hoc way, having failed to identify situations in advance, is always a poor idea. **Early identification of negotiation situations enables participants to ensure that they are prepared (step two).** A lack of early identification leaves participants vulnerable to assertive tactics from the other participants and may damage their ability to promote their cause.

Prepare to negotiate

The preparation step is extremely important. Here, the participants should examine the situation, research or collect any required information, consider the other participants and assess their position. In essence this is a planning step, critically important during negotiation, because negotiation, like any other activity, is more likely to be successful if it is planned. Just 'having a think' is not planning; planning should be structured and formal.

Research information

Sometimes, for example when negotiating financial situations, information is vital; a lack of such information can liken the negotiation to driving blindfold. If you were about to negotiate a house purchase price you would need to know the costs associated with increasing your offer (such as increased mortgage payment and the impact on stamp duty charges); if you were going to negotiate the sale of a car, you would need to know the costs of a replacement, the amount of loan instalments and so on. But, even if there is no financial element (which is unusual), it is still vital that you collect relevant information because this will help you to assess any offer put forward by the other party. This information may concern areas such as:

- financial;
- timescales;
- legal requirements;
- business policies;
- geographical locations;
- people.

The latter point is particularly relevant because there is a lot of information about people available on websites such as LinkedIn. Many negotiators, particularly those working in disciplines such as sales or procurement, use these websites to research the people with whom they are in discussion. They provide valuable insights that can help with building rapport and negotiation.

Define the problem

Sometimes negotiations take place because people believe there is an issue to be negotiated, but this may not be the case. Sometimes they believe they understand the problem, when they don't. Sometimes they feel that a particular aspect is the root of the problem, when it isn't. Having researched the information, it is then important to ensure that you understand the issue over which there is to be negotiation; in other words, you have defined the problem. For example, you may be prepared to negotiate on a salary offer but find it is, in fact, higher than you thought. However, the amount of holiday offered may be far lower than you had anticipated. Or, two people may be negotiating over the price of a house and find that they are closer than originally thought. However, there may still be a dispute over assumptions made regarding other items such as carpets or fitted cupboards.

Failing to understand where the issues lie can seriously undermine a negotiation. You may find that you have accepted a settlement that includes elements that are completely unacceptable, or, even worse, you may find yourself in a negotiation where you are taken by surprise and are unable to recover the situation.

Consider participants

In many negotiations it is too easy to view the other participants as 'the other side' or even 'opponents'. This is a fatal error because it causes negotiators to ignore the motivations, priorities and values of those concerned. Thinking about their interests and objectives can yield many insights and to fail to do this can increase the temperature of any disagreement. Many approaches, including that of Fisher and Ury (as we saw earlier), recommend taking some time to consider the people perspective: to consider 'the voice of the customer', to 'stand in their shoes'. This can help in several different ways by enabling you to understand: why they have a particular perspective on the situation and what they need to achieve; and how they feel about the situation.

- **Perspectives** – It is always easiest to understand your own point of view. However, in any negotiation situation, it is also useful to consider how the other party perceives the situation by looking at it from their point of view. **This means identifying not only that there is another point of view, but also actively trying to understand this view. It is also important to understand and accept that, in the person's opinion, this is a valid view.** We may disagree, but just dismissing the other party's view is unhelpful in any negotiation situation. We don't have to agree with their perspective, but just accepting that there is an alternative view can at least prompt you to review, and possibly revise, your views. It can also help to diminish the tendency to point fingers and blame.

  While we can consider the situation from our point of view and then move to looking at the other party's perspective, another possibility is to consider the situation as if we were not actively involved; in other words, take an objective

third-party view. You can do this by asking, 'How might this situation look to an uninterested observer?' and this can be a very powerful approach. Sometimes, it exposes that the issue is relatively trivial; other times, it can open up questions that had previously been ignored or overlooked.

Once the alternative views have been identified, the perceptions can be discussed in an open and frank manner, which is not possible if participants feel their views are going to be dismissed or ignored. In doing this, the concerns, values and implications for the different participants will be explored, which will help when considering how the situation may be resolved. It is also possible that this will help establish some areas of agreement or common understanding and this can often provide a good basis for a positive negotiation. If we can show some shared understanding or a degree of appreciation for the other party's concerns, we will also have a basis for developing mutually acceptable solutions. This can be a vital development. Margaret Thatcher commented following her first meeting with Mikhail Gorbachev, 'We can do business together' (BBC, 1984). The results of this ability to work together positively persists decades later.

- **Feelings** – The way that people feel during negotiations can often be as important as the words that are spoken. If we are really going to 'stand in their shoes', we need to be prepared to understand how people are feeling, including ourselves, and acknowledge those feelings so that they are out in the open. In some negotiation situations, there may have been factors that have caused resentment to develop and this can be extremely destructive. It may be due to a previous negotiation or it may have arisen during the build-up to the discussion. Or the resentment may be caused by fears for the future that have grown, and been worried about, while the situation has not been addressed. In such situations, **it is often helpful to allow people the opportunity to express their worries, grievances or anger**. It is vital not to react to the outpouring of emotion, but to allow people time to express their fears or frustrations. Listening with courtesy can help ease emotional tension.

A small gesture, such as an apology, can often help defuse an emotional situation and may provide a more positive basis from which to begin negotiating. Care should be taken when apologising though. There has been a growing tendency for apologies to be couched in language that removes fault. For example, 'It is a shame you gained this impression' or 'I am sorry this was how it was interpreted.' In both cases, the objective appears to be to **fail** to apologise rather than genuinely say sorry, and there is a suggestion that the fault lies with the person gaining the impression or interpreting the situation. This may not be helpful if the objective is to defuse an emotional situation or remove resentment.

Similarly, if feelings are running high, it is important not to respond accordingly. Sometimes, accusations are levied or statements are made that are unjust or use highly emotive language. Blame may be placed and fingers pointed. Some people seem to have a gift for using language that causes offence. However, reacting is not helpful if we are trying to negotiate an acceptable outcome. It is important to recognise that often people need to voice their emotions and once they have done this they will be much more amenable to reasonable discussion.

Evaluate position

Part of preparation involves understanding the level beyond which the negotiated outcome would not be worth accepting. This is your 'bottom line'. It is a vital part of the negotiation process and anyone who enters a negotiation without understanding this is likely to be out-manoeuvred by the other party.

- **BATNA** – Fisher and Ury use an approach called the 'best alternative to a negotiated agreement' or BATNA. BATNA helps you to look at alternative courses of action by considering the question, 'What would we do if we do not get what we want?'

  For example, if we are trying to sell a house with an asking price of £450,000, we might consider the alternative courses of action available to us if we do not get an offer at this price.

  The alternatives might include:

  - deciding not to move house;
  - renting out the property;
  - extending the house;
  - developing the property into separate units;
  - dropping the price.

  Looking at the list of alternatives allows us to decide our preferred alternative, which we can then use to compare with the offered price. We would consider the context (our reasons for moving house) and which of the alternatives would satisfy our needs. This would cause us to set a minimum asking price for our house (let's say of £400,000) and we would then decide that we do not want to negotiate below this level. If we need more accommodation, we may decide that our preferred alternative is to extend the property rather than sell at a price below £400,000. So, if we are offered £380,000 we would consider that extending the property is preferable to accepting this offer. This approach helps you to produce a true standard against which any proposed offer can be measured and helps you to guard against being pressurised into accepting the unacceptable.

  One way of identifying the lowest acceptable level is to analyse a range of scenarios and possible offers, and assess whether they are worth accepting. For example, a job offer located 100 miles from home would require a salary that would enable you to pay any travelling or accommodation expenses; for an offer price for your house to be acceptable, it must enable you to purchase your desired new home. **If the negotiation is not going to satisfy your interests, then the outcome is not worth achieving. Understanding the point at which that occurs is extremely important preparation for the negotiation.**

  Sometimes the alternative to a negotiated settlement involves walking away from a negotiation. An example of this may occur where you are negotiating prices with a customer or supplier. Perhaps the customer has required a very low price whereas you have a standard price that is much higher. If there is some flexibility and you have sufficient authority, we would recommend trying to offer some discount or price reduction or additional service; this demonstrates good faith and an attempt to recognise the other party's perspective. If the customer wishes to purchase some goods in bulk, you may be able to offer

a bulk discount. Or you may be able to offer a post-sale service for which the customer would normally be charged. However, while you may have some room to accommodate the customer, there will still be a price below which you cannot go. This is an example of what Fisher and Ury call a **warning indicator**. This is a level at which it is important to stop and evaluate the situation. If the outcome means that the price does not cover the costs of producing the goods, then this may be a contract that is not worth winning and it may be sensible to walk away from the deal. This may seem straightforward, particularly if you have researched the important information such as your costs, but, in practice, there may be other factors and such situations may be far less clear-cut. While this particular deal is problematic there may be the possibility of a large volume of further business; or the nature of the customer is such that this business relationship will enhance your reputation. So a predefined level or amount will cause you to stop and evaluate. You can then make a reasoned decision, which will ensure that you do not make a hasty offer that you will come to regret. If you have researched the situation well and thought through the implications, then you will be able to set a level at which some pause is required.

Fisher and Ury, who developed this method at Harvard, state, 'If you have not thought about what you would do without a negotiated agreement, then you are negotiating with your eyes closed.' This is an important point to remember.

- **Relative power** – You should also assess the relative power between you and your counterpart. Researching the situation helps you understand the level of leverage that you have: your bargaining position. For example, you may supply a scarce service that is in demand but, unless you know what organisations are paying, you do not know the amount to expect for your services or the point at which an offer is too low. Alternatively, it may be that you are in a commodity market saturated with numerous suppliers and hence will need to accept the standard price, which may be very low. If you are searching for employment and there are many others in competition with you who possess similar skills, then your bargaining position will be weak. Many summer interns find that they are competing with other students who are prepared to work without pay in order to gain relevant experience, and, as a result, many intern positions are unpaid. But if you have skills that are in scarce supply you will have more leverage over organisations where these skills are needed. Similarly, if you are selling products or services you need to consider how available they are at the price and quality that you offer. Where there is scarcity of supply, or high desirability, then you will have greater leverage and will be able to use that during the negotiation, but only if you understand your bargaining position.

  Where the other party is more powerful or has a stronger bargaining position, all of the leverage is on their side, and no negotiation approach will guarantee you success. In this situation, it is even more important to prepare for the negotiation. There are two things that should be considered:

  - Firstly, how to protect yourself against making agreements (under pressure) that you should reject. Understanding your preferred alternative and warning level will assist with this.
  - Secondly, how to make the most of your assets so that any agreement will satisfy your interests as much as possible. Research and understanding the context will help here.

Conduct the negotiation

Remove emotion

During the negotiation one factor is critical: remove emotion from the situation. This is so important because it enables the participants to be objective and keep their focus on the outcome not on how they are feeling at a point in time. Also, where a party is very focused on how they feel (whether this is anger, despair or just a need to feed their ego), this can completely obscure the point of the negotiation; the focus is on feelings rather than outcomes; an almost guaranteed route to failure. Participants can become aggressive, sulky or start to 'score points', and at this point the negotiation can change into a conflict situation.

Communicate effectively

One of the techniques that helps to understand people involves analysing their **world view**. This can provide a great deal of insight into priorities and values. It is often the case that there are some common values between the different participants and their positions. Identifying these can help to establish some rapport and common ground, both of which may be very useful in agreeing an outcome to the negotiation. When exploring the participants' world views, we can think about the following questions:

- What do the participants think is the point of the negotiation?
- Why do they want their stated outcome?
- Where are their priorities?
- What part of the stated need do they value most?

Considering these questions helps you to uncover the underlying needs, many of which may be tacit or unspoken. It is also important to consider whether the words being spoken and the body language on display are congruent; a disconnect between the words and body language can signpost that someone is keeping to a party line or not being completely open.

To uncover the real needs successfully, it is important to communicate well and active listening, in particular, becomes vital. Communication skills are discussed in Chapter 6 'Influencing', but some listening behaviours that often cause problems during negotiations are highlighted here.

- **Judging** – This involves a failure to listen because you are intent on prejudging what the other party is saying (and dismissing it).
- **Filtering** – This occurs where you only listening to the elements of the communication that support your position.
- **Being right** – Where someone needs to be right they place greater emphasis on winning the argument than achieving a satisfactory outcome, and so they do not listen to the points made.
- **Rehearsing** – Here, you are mentally preparing points to make in support of your position (and, as a result, not listening).

These listening behaviours can prevent a negotiation from proceeding towards a satisfactory outcome and can entrench positions rather than opening up options.

If we are aware of the listening behaviours we are more likely to avoid them, although this can take practice.

Other key communication approaches that help when negotiating are:

- **Acknowledging** – Recognising what has been said and asking for clarification if necessary. A communication that resembles a ping-pong match can easily escalate into a disagreement. Listening to what is being said, acknowledging this and then asking for further information reinforces the impression of actively considering the other participant's point of view. And this is not a false impression because adopting this approach will enhance your ability to consider what is being said and gain understanding.
- **Rephrasing or reframing** – Phrasing explanations from your point of view rather than blaming. For example: 'I felt let down' rather than 'you let me down'. Or phrasing statements in a neutral manner: 'some people felt let down'. Blaming and finger-pointing is counterproductive in a negotiation. They cause the emotions to rise and allow a focus on feelings rather than outcomes. This approach is sometimes known as 'reframing'. The negotiation should be framed as a meeting of equal participants with the objective of resolving a problem. Any statements made by the participants that contradict this view should be reframed. For example:

John: *'I need another four days to complete the plan.'*

Mary: *'No. I will not shift the dates again. You never hit the targets and my department always pays the price.'*

Reframe: *'Since the planning effort was underestimated, perhaps we could…'*

Also, it is helpful to reframe any complaints as simple statements of requirement or need.

Complaint: *'You never advise us in time to pick the stock for first shift delivery.'*

Reframe: *'That means you need the advice notes before 7 a.m. We will make a note of that.'*

- **Keeping language neutral** – Some people use language in a provocative and emotional way and exaggerate points or issues; this is usually counterproductive unless you want to shock the other party into acquiescence. For example, 'I felt attacked by your aggressive response' is guaranteed to raise the emotional temperature whereas, 'I was concerned that you felt so strongly about the issue' helps to keep a neutral emotion.
- **Speaking for a purpose** – Do not say anything significant without knowing exactly what you want to communicate and the purpose the information will serve. Humour can often help defuse tension, but not if it serves to trivialise or, even worse, denigrate. Too much humour or flippancy gives the impression of not taking the concerns seriously.

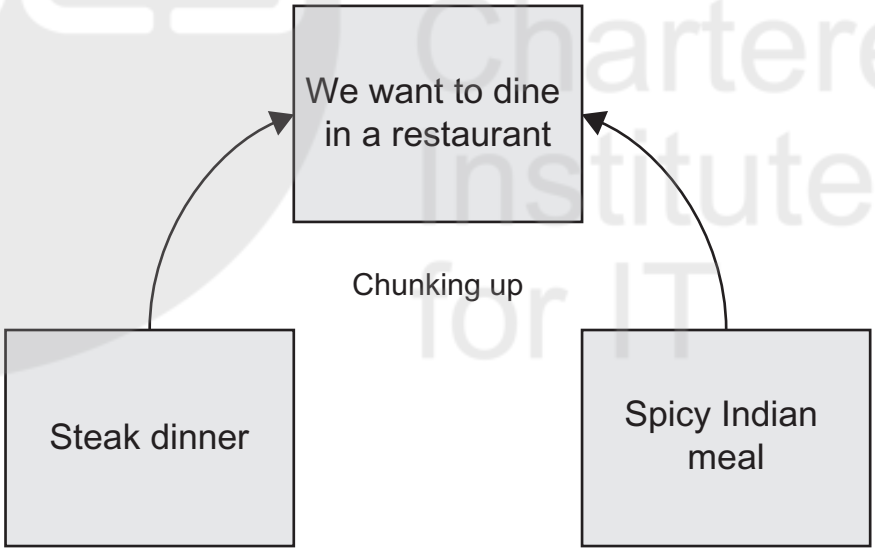
- **Focus on the problem** – Keep the focus on the problem to be negotiated and the possible options. This will help to ensure that issues do not become personal and working relationships are not endangered or damaged.

Look for options

People often enter a negotiation with a view in mind of the outcome they want. Our process attempts to find underlying issues, uncover tacit information and take an objective approach to finding outcomes. Adopting this process can help to identify potential outcomes that have not been identified earlier, but may meet both parties' objectives or at least find opportunities to satisfy most needs.

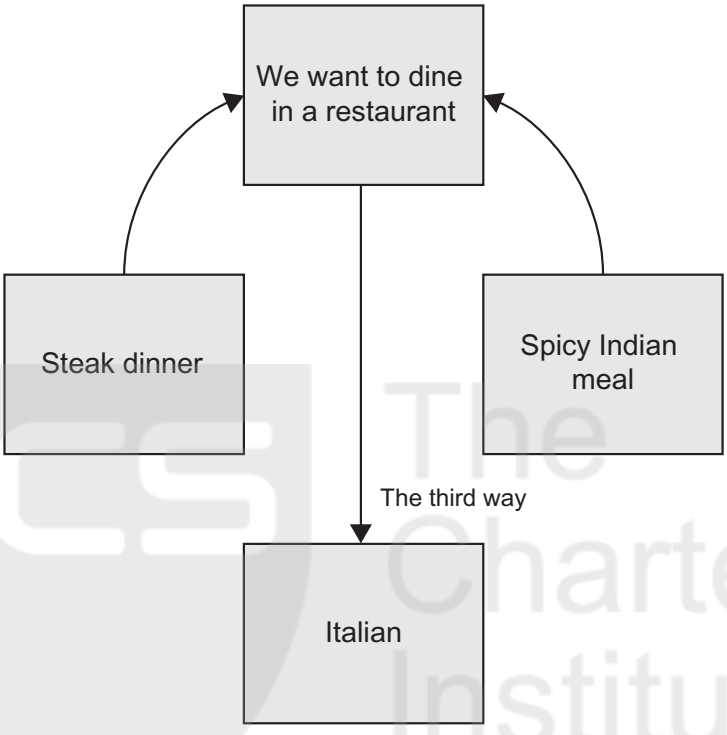
NLP advocates a technique known as 'chunking' during negotiation because this helps to increase objectivity and open up creative options. For example, let's say we have a negotiation between two people who are going out for dinner. One party would like steak and chips, the other is keen on spicy food. Chunking would involve taking this up to a higher level as shown in Figure 4.4.

Figure 4.4 Chunking up



At the higher level, both parties want to go out for dinner, so here we have agreement. The exact nature of the restaurant is where the disagreement occurs. By chunking up, we can see where there is agreement and consider whether there are other lower level options, 'chunking down', that will enable consensus. It may be that neither party is particularly wedded to their stated preference: they just don't want what has been suggested by the other. An alternative suggestion, perhaps an Italian meal, may suit both of them and peace will reign (Figure 4.5).

Figure 4.5 Using chunking to identify another option



Once the situation and its inherent issues are better understood, some thought should be given to identifying alternative options. Creative-thinking techniques can be valuable here because these options may not be obvious. While standard techniques, such as brainstorming or Post-it® note exercises can be helpful, additional techniques can help the flow of ideas. Two useful approaches are:

- **Alternative models** – Considering examples of other people ('What would Bill Gates do?') or other companies ('How would they approach this at Apple?').
- **Assumption reversal** – Taking any assumptions or conventional wisdom and turning it around. Rather than 'I want a pay rise', how about 'I want a pay cut'? This may result in someone reducing their hours worked, which might be a preferable outcome for them.

Sometimes in a negotiation there are traps that can block the development of creative options and it is important not to fall into them. These blocks are:

- **Premature judgement** – Sometimes we rush to prejudge what the other party might think or say. For example, we don't suggest options that we fear may be rejected. If a suggestion is not put forward, then we will not know

how it would be received; we may be surprised at the reaction to some suggestions. The other party may have additional interests that have not been disclosed and these may help them to accept options that we thought unacceptable.

- **Single answer** – There is a danger in believing that there is one best answer and dismissing options that only meet part of the interests. Again, this approach assumes that participants are not open to considering other options when this may not be the case. We will not find out if we do not put them forward. Also, by thinking more widely about options, we can sometimes uncover ideas that are acceptable, but would not have been identified otherwise.
- **Fixed-sum game** – Here we focus on one party winning and the other losing, rather than trying to be creative in identifying options that address interests on both sides.
- **Each party solves their problem** – In this situation, everyone considers just their own interests and believes that the other party will suggest options that address only their concerns. While people are adept at understanding their interests, giving consideration to the other participant's interests can cause people to think from a different perspective and may help spark alternative, creative ideas.

Once the options are identified they can be investigated to get some broad ideas about where they might be extended to meet the parties' interests. It is helpful to identify shared interests and then look for mutual gains provided by the options. Examples of shared interests could be preserving the working relationship, minimising costs or ensuring that we both move house. **Chances of a positive outcome to the negotiation are enhanced if we can identify options that reconcile different interests.**

Evaluate options

It is important that the process separates out the identification of options from the evaluation and decision making. It is also important that the criteria that may be used to evaluate the options are based upon the declared interests. The criteria should be objective (we mustn't allow feelings to creep back in at this point) and should be agreed by all participants as offering a reasonable means by which to judge suggested options. If possible, define quantifiable criteria because these can increase the objectivity. Care should be taken to avoid blind spots where participants cannot see past a particular issue; they should be encouraged to take a broader more objective view.

Close the negotiation

Closing the negotiation is not as simple as shaking hands and moving on. There will always be follow-up actions and it is important to ensure that any decisions are recorded and the momentum is continued. At the close of the discussions, the participants should reaffirm the decisions and their agreement. Responsibility for recording and gaining formal agreement should be allocated; this may be to one of the participants or possibly to an objective third party. It is vital that the decisions made are recorded and formally agreed as soon as possible. If this does not happen, there are risks of participants changing their minds or requesting variances to

the agreement. Further, if the decisions are not clearly recorded and distributed, any queries that arise later will be subject to individual memories. It is unfortunately the case that at this point, memories can be less than reliable and even the most honest person will have a tendency to remember the points that benefit them most. If you don't want to reopen negotiations, then recording and distributing the decisions is essential.

Following on from the negotiation, it is important to recognise that the people involved may harbour feelings of resentment if they think they were not treated fairly. However, behaviour during and following the negotiation can help to minimise this. If during the negotiation process you have taken some time to build a relationship and rapport with the other party then this will reap benefits not only during the negotiation, but also afterwards. If the other party believe you have acted to try to support as many interests as possible and have dealt with them with integrity and fairness, there is a much better chance of a continuing relationship that is not damaged by ill-feeling. It is important to recognise that people can re-emerge, sometimes years later, and if you have negotiated hard, dealt with them unfairly or pursued your own goals at their expense, then they will not be inclined to work with you fairly in the future. To quote Jimmy Durante, 'Be nice to people on your way up because you meet them on your way down.'

MANAGING CONFLICT SITUATIONS

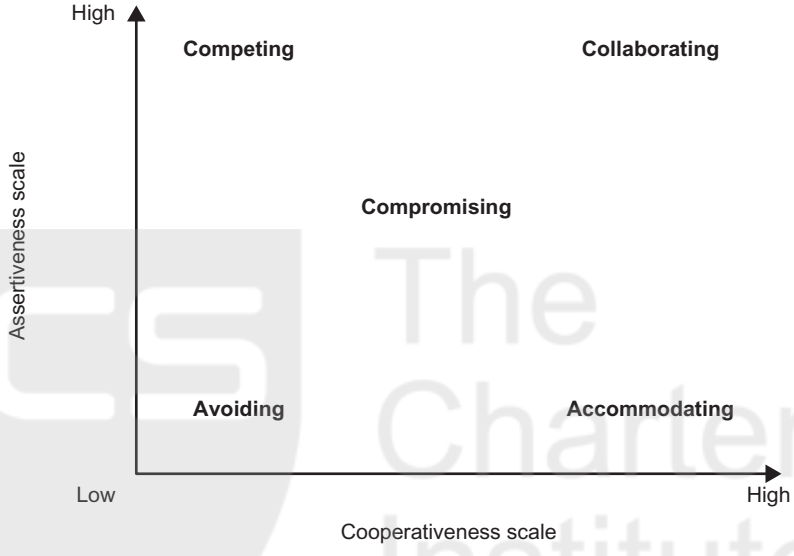
Conflicts arise when two (or more) parties disagree about something and this has not, or cannot, be resolved by negotiation. Typically, this may result from one or more of the following issues:

- Conflicts arising from differing goals or objectives. For example: 'I want an extension to my house because I need more room' versus 'this will obscure my view and diminish the light in my kitchen'. In other words, what I want to happen is incompatible with what you want to happen.
- Conflicts arising from judgements and evaluations of situations. For example: 'the monarchy is an expensive, outdated institution' versus 'the monarchy represents order and stability'. Similarly, there may be differences arising from our interpretation of situations.
- Conflicts arising from different values. Value conflicts are concerned with our sense of justice or fairness and our different perception of what is right. For example: 'smoking is an enjoyable personal choice' or 'an unpleasant habit that affects others in the vicinity'.

Most business conflicts arise from differences in the goals of the parties, but they can be exacerbated by the other types of conflict too. For example, I wish to have a requirement included in a software product, but we have defined a contract where the scope is not specific and a conflict has arisen about the inclusion of this feature. While we have conflicting goals (I wish the feature to be included within the current contract, the supplier wishes to negotiate a further fee to include the feature), as a customer, I also feel that this is unfair and I have been cheated by the supplier when setting up the contract.

One of the most popular approaches to considering and managing conflict is the Thomas–Kilmann conflict mode instrument (TKI), which presents a model showing five conflict strategies. These strategies are shown in Figure 4.6.[7]

Figure 4.6 Thomas–Kilmann conflict mode instrument



Essentially, this model shows conflict positions mapped against two scales: the levels of assertiveness (how much a party tries to satisfy their own concerns) and cooperativeness (how much a party tries to satisfy the other party's concerns). **This results in five possible positions, each of which can be relevant when resolving conflicts; it depends upon the circumstances:**

- **Avoiding** – This position is both unassertive and uncooperative. In some situations, avoiding conflict may be the most appropriate approach. For example, if there is no possibility of a satisfactory outcome or the issue is too trivial to warrant attention. However, avoiding may not be acceptable to some participants because they may feel strongly about the issues and may believe that it is important to address the conflict. In such cases, avoiding can build frustration, resentment and anger.
- **Accommodating** – High cooperation and low assertiveness. The accommodating position seeks only to satisfy the needs of the other party. It involves offering complete cooperation and subjugation and may be useful where it serves to promote some greater purpose. However, this approach may lead the cooperating party to feel powerlessness and ultimately can also cause the development of frustration and resentment.

[7] http://kilmanndiagnostics.com/

- **Competing** – High assertiveness and low cooperation. This position is concerned with meeting one's own needs and the needs of the other party are not considered. The competing position may be appropriate in situations where an instant decision or action is required. However, the other party may feel that they have not been given any opportunity to air their views or have them considered properly. The problem with the competing approach is that the other party must adopt the accommodating or avoiding positions, with their emotional repercussions, if the conflict is to have an outcome. Further, the competing party may become fixed on this position such that they approach any conflict in this way and fail to comprehend that others may have alternative views or needs.
- **Compromising** – Moderately assertive and cooperative. Essentially, compromising means giving up some needs to gain some benefits. While it is often felt that compromise is a good way of resolving a conflict, in fact the parties involved may all feel that their issues are unresolved. A well-known trade union leader once commented that he never compromised because it involved giving up something. However, compromising is often a useful approach. Haggling is a compromising method where a satisfactory common ground is found. Compromising can also be a useful position where a conflict must be resolved within some limited time frame.
- **Collaborating** – High assertiveness and high cooperation. The collaborating position seeks to identify and satisfy the concerns of all parties. This may be done by considering creative 'third-way' outcomes. Collaborating is of particular use where the needs of individuals are too important to be compromised or where the relationships are too valuable to put at risk.

CONCLUSION

Negotiation and conflict management are two of the key skills for today's professional. An ability to negotiate can open doors and remove tension, and can promote success and opportunity. To do this successfully, here are a few thoughts:

- Try to identify when a negotiation or conflict situation is on the horizon; early identification helps you to prepare.
- Think about the process for negotiation and adopt a staged, considered approach.
- Try to control your emotions during a negotiation or conflict situation, as emotion poses a major risk to achieving a successful outcome. Take time to think before you react.
- Focus on achieving mutual benefit. Think about the different perspectives of the parties to the negotiation. This is really invaluable in uncovering latent needs and tacit knowledge.
- Try to find creative solutions. Think of the 'third way'.
- Gain awareness of different negotiation strategies, such as those in the Thomas–Kilmann model; these can really help us to deal with a range of situations and ensure that we focus on those where a formal negotiation will yield the most benefit.

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5 LEADERSHIP

INTRODUCTION

Google the word 'leadership' and you get about half a billion results; search Amazon Books using the same term and it offers you a choice of over 50,000 tomes. By the time you read this chapter, those numbers will have increased. We can therefore safely conclude that leadership is one of the most hotly debated topics in business today. Why? Because effective leadership is considered to be a necessary condition for an organisation's success: a theory backed up by innumerable professional studies.

In this chapter, we provide a clear definition of leadership, exploring what leadership is and what it isn't (debunking some popular myths along the way). We review and compare well-known models of leadership and, most importantly, consider how we can show leadership when we don't have authority and why such lateral leadership skills are so important to a professional's career.

CONTENTS OF THIS CHAPTER

This chapter covers the following topics:

- what leadership is;
- how leadership differs from management;
- three keys to effective leadership – purpose, will, clarity;
- theories of leadership;
- leadership styles;
- the models:
  - Blake–Mouton managerial grid;
  - situational leadership;
  - Adair's leadership model;
  - emotionally intelligent leadership;
  - transactional versus transformational leadership;
- lateral leadership.

WHAT IS LEADERSHIP?

In the popular imagination, a leader is the charismatic, courageous individual who creates a destiny and takes others along, setting a compelling vision and articulating the strategy for achieving it. For example, when you think about someone who you consider demonstrates leadership, who springs into your mind? In the context of the world stage, it might be Winston Churchill, Mahatma Gandhi, Nelson Mandela or Martin Luther King; from business, it might be Richard Branson, Steve Jobs or Anita Roddick. Indeed a leader, the dictionary tells us, is 'the person who leads, commands or precedes a group, organisation or country' (OED, 1999).

However, the meaning of the verb 'to lead' is subtly different. To lead is to 'show (someone) the way to a destination by preceding or accompanying them' (OED, 1999). The purpose of the act of leading is therefore not to command, but rather to act as a guide for others to follow on a journey towards a shared destination; not solely as the head of the group, but alternatively as their peer. The conclusion is clear, **you don't have to be chief executive to lead or, by extension, to be a leader. This is an important distinction to make for our understanding of leadership: it can coexist with a position of authority, but it is not dependent on it.** In our careers we will have encountered people in senior roles who were truly inspirational leaders in all senses of the word, but we will also have come across a few who most definitely weren't. Being an organisational leader is therefore not necessarily an indicator of leadership qualities.

This is a good point to start to debunk two of the myths about leadership.

MYTH 1 – LEADERS ARE BORN NOT MADE

Although truly great leaders appear to be wholly superior from birth, the truth is that the major competencies of leadership can be learned. It is difficult, but there is no learning without mistakes and it is a skill that can always be improved.

MYTH 2 – LEADERSHIP EXISTS ONLY AT THE TOP OF AN ORGANISATION

This is a difficult one to shake off, partly because much of the popular literature on leadership is written by captains of industry. But any group of people wanting to achieve **anything** has need of a leader and, because most modern organisations are creating small entrepreneurial units and high performing teams, the opportunities for leadership at all levels are growing.

So what, then, **is** leadership? Unhelpfully, a unified definition does not appear to exist, but well-known business thinkers have come up with the following statements that shed light on the different aspects of leadership:

> 'The only definition of a **leader** is someone who has **followers**.' Hesselbein *et al*. (1997).
>
> 'Leadership is influence – nothing more, nothing less.' John C. Maxwell (2007).
>
> 'Leadership is the capacity to translate vision into reality.' Warren G. Bennis (1988).

Considering these three views, we can surmise that leadership is the ability to set goals and deliver strategy by persuading and influencing others to follow your direction. But there is one critical component missing. Dwight D. Eisenhower is popularly quoted as saying that 'leadership is the art of getting someone else to do something you want done because he wants to do it'.[8] In other words, leadership is:

> Getting things done by getting others to do things **willingly**.

Exactly how you go about achieving this in practice, what skills, attributes, values and behaviours you need to possess to be an effective leader of people, is the subject of much debate. From Jack Welch to Field Marshal Montgomery, there are as many approaches to leadership as there are leaders. Much work has been done both in the field of psychology and management sciences to group and simplify the common themes in these approaches. Understanding the main leadership 'styles' can help those of us who are looking to develop our skills as leaders, by identifying the approach that will work best or feel most comfortable for us as individuals, whether we're managing a small virtual team in a project or running a large, information technology (IT) function.

HOW LEADERSHIP DIFFERS FROM MANAGEMENT

Before we take a look at leadership styles and the theories which underpin them, it's worth considering if and how leadership differs from management. The UK Institute of Leadership & Management (ILM) is quite clear in distinguishing between the two. Whilst it acknowledges that one skill complements the other (and aiming to develop both as a professional is quite a good idea), the focus of each is different:

> 'Leaders imagine the future; managers make it happen.' (ILM, 2012)

Put simply, **the manager's job is to plan, organise and coordinate; the leader's job is to inspire and motivate. Management is largely about process; leadership is mainly about behaviour.** The most comprehensive compilation of the differences between management and leadership we've been able to find is by Warren G. Bennis in his book *On Becoming A Leader* (Bennis, 2009).

- The manager administers; the leader innovates.
- The manager is a copy; the leader is an original.

[8] Unverified.

- The manager maintains; the leader develops.
- The manager focuses on systems and structure; the leader focuses on people.
- The manager relies on control; the leader inspires trust.
- The manager has a short-range view; the leader has a long-range perspective.
- The manager asks how and when; the leader asks what and why.
- The manager has his or her eye always on the bottom line; the leader's eye is on the horizon.
- The manager imitates; the leader originates.
- The manager accepts the status quo; the leader challenges it.
- The manager is the classic good soldier; the leader is his or her own person.
- The manager does things right; the leader does the right thing.

Whether you agree with this list or not – and some believe that Bennis tends to denigrate the function of management – what is clear is that in 21st-century organisations, these distinctions are becoming increasingly blurred as traditional management hierarchies evolve and change. Today, most managers are expected to demonstrate leadership; and most leaders need to be expert at management. As *The Wall Street Journal Essential Guide to Management* points out:

> 'In the new economy, where value comes increasingly from the knowledge of people, and where workers are no longer undifferentiated cogs in an industrial machine... people look to their managers, not just to assign them a task, but to define for them a purpose. And managers must organize workers, not just to maximize efficiency, but to nurture skills, develop talent and inspire results.' (Murray, 2010).

In summary, there are distinctions between the practices of leadership and management, but to be a great manager you need to be able to lead, and to be a great leader you need to be good at managing.

THREE KEYS TO EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP

As discussed earlier, the central concept of leadership is about setting the direction for a group of people, then guiding them on the journey towards achievement of a shared goal. But before we embark on that journey, it's important that we are clear about both our purpose and our will to make it happen. **Without an alignment of *purpose, clarity* and *will*, we won't be able to inspire others to follow our lead:** we will appear to lack motivation and others will be unconvinced by the direction we set because we will exude ambiguity and doubt.

Possessing clarity of purpose and the will to pursue it is not just critical for effective leadership, it's also critical for professional success. Successful people are clear about their purpose and direction in life and work; they are unequivocal about what

success means to them and everything they do is consistent with their clarity of purpose. They look to the future, decide where they want to be and then take steps each day that help move them closer to their vision of success. When you clarify your purpose and take steps to live it, you will hardly ever find yourself going off on tangents or putting things off until tomorrow. You'll be completely focused on what's important to you.

Some fortunate people pursue a vocation; they are unlikely to have ever had to consider the difficult question, 'What's my purpose in life/work?' Most of us are not so lucky. As an individual, it's highly valuable spending some quality 'me' time, perhaps with a professional coach, to answer that question properly. Clarity of purpose has to be deeply ingrained in your psyche as a leader and not something you pay lip service to. It has to be part of who you are and in tune with your internal system of beliefs and values if you are to have the will to commit to it. When you've achieved clarity for yourself, you can set out to do the same for your team or your organisation – as a leader.

THEORIES OF LEADERSHIP

Leadership has been a research topic for hundreds, if not thousands, of years. Early theories tend to focus upon the characteristics and behaviours of successful leaders; later theories begin to consider the role of followers and the situational nature of leadership.

We have briefly summarised the most well known of these theories below (after Bolden *et al*., 2003).

- **Great man** – This theory (considered somewhat old-fashioned now) is based on the belief that leaders are exceptional people, who are born not made. The use of the term 'man' was intentional. Until the latter part of the 20th century, leadership was thought of as a concept that is primarily male, military and Western – and is not one the authors agree with!
- **Trait** – Trait theories propose that leaders share a number of personality traits and characteristics, and that leadership emerges from these traits. The lists of these traits associated with leadership exist in abundance, creating a vision of a 'superhuman' not too dissimilar from the vision of the 'great man', that is someone who possesses: creativity, ambition, drive, empathy etc. Check out your own organisation's leadership competency framework.
- **Behaviourist** – As the name suggest, these theories focus on how leaders behave, because how they behave impacts on their effectiveness. This theory has had the greatest influence on the development of 'leadership styles'. However, research has shown that these behaviours are not a constant because different behaviours are appropriate at different times. The best leaders simply adapt their behaviour to the situation.
- **Situational** – Situational theory considers leadership to be specific to a particular circumstance and attempts to predict which leadership style is best in which context, for example when a tough decision has to be made or when people need to be brought on board with a major change project.

- **Transactional** – This theory focuses on the 'contract' between a leader and their followers, assuming that work is done only because it is rewarded and for no other reason. While it is not the most morally appealing leadership approach, in terms of building sustainable relationships and developing a motivational work environment, there is no doubt that it does work in the short term, and as such is used to a greater or lesser extent in most organisations.
- **Transformational** – As the name implies, transformational theory is a leadership approach whose purpose is acting as a catalyst for significant change in people and organisations. Through their personality, skills and attributes leaders deliver change by example, articulating an energising vision and setting aspirational goals. Such leaders are a role model for highly ethical behaviour, working primarily for the benefit of the team or organisation. Unlike the other theories, transformational leadership ultimately strives to create future leaders from followers.

Of all the above theories, the ones most widely embraced in organisations for skills development purposes are behaviourist, situational and transformational. However, we suspect that you will also see evidence of transactional theory in the workplace, particularly where short-term results are the primary goal.

LEADERSHIP STYLES

We've taken a look at the main theoretical frameworks that have guided our understanding of leadership over the years. The next step is to consider the types of leader that exist and their individual style of leadership.

One of the most influential studies in this area was conducted in 1939 by a group of psychologists led by Kurt Lewin. Through their work, which observed the ways in which decisions can be made, three leadership styles were identified (Lewin *et al*., 1939):

- **Autocratic (Authoritarian)** – Autocratic leaders make decisions independently with little or no input from their team. Their followers are clearly told what needs to be done, when it should be done and how it should be done. There is little room for creativity in this approach. Understandably, most people genuinely resent being treated in this way. Where this style is abused, it can lead to an unhappy working environment characterised by grievances, absenteeism, dismissals and employment tribunals. However, there are situations when it can work well, for example: in a financial crisis where tough decisions have to be made and executed quickly; where jobs are routine and the advantages of tight control are preferred.
- **Democratic (Participative)** – Democratic leaders allow the team to participate to varying degrees in the decision-making process. Lewin's studies found this to be generally the most effective style because people feel engaged, have an opportunity to be creative and thus tend to be more motivated. It also helps build consensus in the team (underlining the importance of a shared purpose). The approach can be most suitable when quality is more important than speed of results. Despite the advantages of this style, it can be quite difficult to manage with some groups, for example particularly where ideas and views

conflict, the leader needs to be an expert facilitator. Levels of democratic team management are represented in the Tannebaum and Schmidt continuum discussed in Chapter 3 'Team working'.

- **Laissez-faire (Delegative)** – Laissez-faire leaders abdicate their responsibility to lead and leave decision making completely to the group. This style might imply sheer laziness but it can be very effective if, and only if, the team is highly knowledgeable, capable and motivated. However, Lewin's study found that people working for a leader adopting this style were less productive, unable to cooperate and, ironically, made more demands on their leader.

Since Lewin's study, research has continued with other 'styles' being indentified. Most are simply new perspectives on, or extensions of, the three presented above, but worthy of brief mention are:

- **Servant leader** – A term created by Robert K. Greenleaf in the 1970s (but a truly ancient concept), the servant leader style is a form of democratic leadership (Greenleaf, 1982). When someone, at any level within an organisation, leads simply by meeting the needs of the team, he or she is described as a 'servant leader'. Servant leaders gain their power and influence on the basis of their values and ideals. The most obvious example of a servant leader today is Queen Elizabeth II.
- **Transformational leader** – Drawn from a 1978 study on leadership in the world of politics (Burns, 2010), the extent to which a leader exhibits the transformational style is evidenced by the positive influence of their personal qualities on their followers; and the trust, respect, admiration and loyalty they earn as a result.

What we can conclude from this review of leadership styles is that no one style works in all situations; and each style suits many circumstances in business. As professionals looking to develop our skills, we need to remember that there may be situations where our natural preferred leadership style is not the most appropriate. This is why it's worth understanding a little about the other styles so that you have a greater chance of finding the right 'mix' for the situation you're about to address as a leader.

However, the ability to switch styles takes patience and practice; trial and error. For example, if your natural style is to be democratic, you will find it hard to become autocratic overnight – and your team may not at first appreciate the new 'you'.

THE MODELS

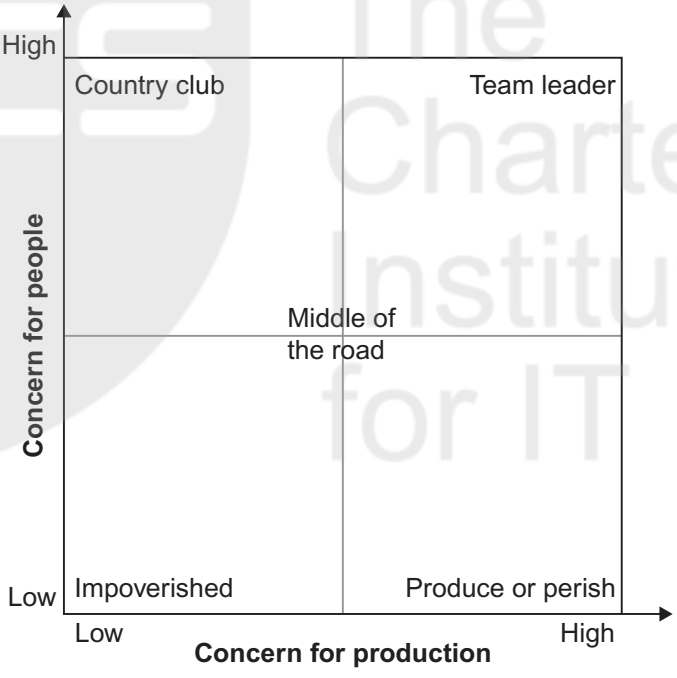
The realisation that there isn't one correct type of leader for all situations has led psychologists and business practitioners to develop models and frameworks that we can use to guide us in understanding which approach to use in which circumstance, for example: when a decision is needed fast to get out of a crisis or when people are needed to get behind a major change project. Likewise, should a leader be more focused on the people or the task in a given situation?

The Blake–Mouton managerial grid

Some leaders are very task-oriented; they simply want to get the job done. Others are very people-oriented; they want people to be happy. Most of us are a combination of the two. The Blake–Mouton managerial grid (Figure 5.1) developed by Robert Blake and Jane Mouton in the 1960s aims to help you decide how best to lead, using two behavioural dimensions (Blake and Mouton, 1972). The axes reflect your concerns:

- Your concern for people (y-axis) – the extent to which you consider the needs of the people in the team.
- Your concern for production (x-axis) – the extent to which you focus on objectives, efficiency and productivity.

Figure 5.1 The Blake–Mouton grid



The model describes five different leadership styles in terms of their position on the grid, relative to the respective concerns for people and production:

- **Impoverished** – Low people/low production. Lack of both organisation and content staff. Erm… why are they leading?
- **Country club** – High people/low production. Content workforce, but low productivity.
- **Team leader** – High people/high production. The level we all aspire to!

- **Produce or perish** – High production/low people. Autocratic leader with little focus on the team members' concerns. May work in certain circumstances.
- **Middle of the road** – Medium people/medium production. Comfortable, but ineffective.

Whilst this model is useful in helping us identify our default styles, it doesn't provide great insights into the use of these five styles in different business contexts.

Hersey–Blanchard Situational Leadership®

As we've developed our understanding of leadership in this chapter, we've reached the firm conclusion that there is no single overarching best practice approach to leading. Which style works best depends on the situation you're facing. Paul Hersey and Ken Blanchard in their book *Management of Organizational Behavior*, first published in 1969 (Hersey *et al*., 2007), took this concept to a new level and proposed that the most effective leaders not only adapt their styles to the situation, but also to the maturity of the person or group they're leading and the task in hand.

Hersey and Blanchard identified four main leadership styles, which are variations or interpretations of Lewin's three styles. These are:

- **Telling (S1)** – Leader gives followers precise instructions for carrying out various tasks.
- **Selling (S2)** – Leader still gives some direction, but invites contribution from followers.
- **Participating (S3)** – Leader delegates many decisions to the follower. Requires high levels of mutual trust.
- **Delegating (S4)** – Leader gives followers responsibility for directing most of their own work.

The first two styles are focused on getting the task done; the last two are more concerned with developing team members' abilities to work independently. Knowing when to use each style is largely dependent on the 'maturity' of the person or group you're leading, which is also broken down into four different levels:

- **M1** – People lack the knowledge, skills or confidence to work on their own, but are willing to give it a go.
- **M2** – People have some skills and knowledge, but still need support from the leader to build their self-confidence.
- **M3** – People are experienced, willing and able to do the task, but still need some support and encouragement.
- **M4** – People are completely competent and confident with the task and able to make most decisions for themselves. The leader just has to set broad objectives and boundaries.

It's appropriate to note at this point that the maturity level of a person must be assessed in relation to the task they're about to undertake. It does

not relate to their overall skills and aptitude for their job. For example, a member of your team might be skilled, confident and motivated in their job, but would still have a maturity level M2 when asked to perform a new piece of work requiring skills they don't yet possess.

Helpfully, the Hersey–Blanchard model maps each leadership style to each maturity level (Table 5.1), so we know which style to use when:

Table 5.1 The Hersey–Blanchard model

Maturity level	Most appropriate leadership style
M1: Low maturity	S1: Telling/directing
M2: Medium maturity, limited skills	S2: Selling/coaching
M3: Medium maturity, higher skills but lacking confidence	S3: Participating/supporting
M4: High maturity	S4: Delegating

The model is appealing for organisations to implement because of its simplicity and common sense. As such, it is one that underpins many formal leadership development programmes in the 21st century, particularly in service industries.

To illustrate the value of the model to real-life situations at work, imagine that you have just received a new graduate into your team. Their organisational induction and team orientation has been completed and they're now ready to start their first piece of work. You provide general instructions to them in the same way that you would to more experienced members of the team, then get on with your other duties. When you check on them, you find that the work hasn't been completed. They hit a hurdle, didn't know what to do and weren't sure where they could get help – everyone else looked too busy to be interrupted. As a result the deadline is looming, so you end up completing the work yourself. The result is frustration (possibly resentment) on your part and an even greater loss in the graduate's self-confidence. Sound familiar? The Hersey–Blanchard model would have predicted this sequence of events: when style and maturity are not matched for the task, failure results. In this situation, it would have guided you to adopt an S1 leadership style with the graduate, as opposed to an S2 or S3.

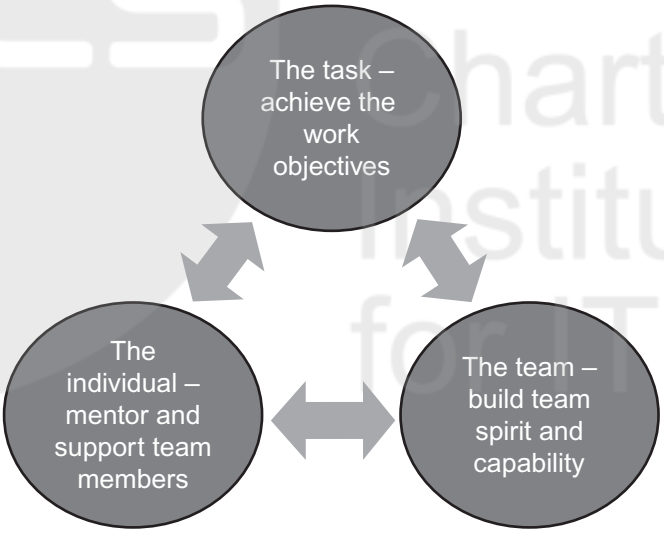
Adair's leadership theory

John Adair stands out amongst leadership gurus, not just for the successful model of leadership he developed, but for his colourful early career history. Unlike many others in the field, he is not a career psychologist. Born in 1934, according to his website he served as a platoon commander in the Scots Guards in Egypt; became the only national serviceman to join the Arab Legion; worked on an Arctic trawler in

Iceland and also trained as a hospital orderly.[9] Securing a role lecturing in military history at the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst, he became an advisor in leadership training, which eventually led to an appointment as the world's first Professor of Leadership studies at the University of Surrey in 1979. Over more than 30 years, Adair has built a reputation as one of the most important thinkers on leadership, authoring more than 40 books and gaining formal recognition for his contribution from both industry and academia. Central to his thinking is that leadership is a trainable skill rather than something you're born with.

However, Adair is perhaps best known for his 'three circles model' (you may have heard it referred to as 'action centred leadership', which was an earlier version). The enduring popularity of this model can perhaps be explained by its simplicity; the fact it is framed in the language of business (rather than psychology) is easily understood. As a concept, it's both accessible and pragmatic. Figure 5.2 shows the three areas identified by Adair.

Figure 5.2 Aspects of team leadership (based on Adair's three circles model)



Adair reduced the responsibilities of management to three core activities (see also Chapter 3 'Team working'):

- achieving the work objectives – the 'task';
- building the 'team' or group;
- developing the 'individual'.

[9] www.johnadair.co.uk

However, no activity can exist in isolation. While each is of individual relevance to the leadership, there is also interdependency between the activities. What the successful leader looks to achieve is balance between the three dimensions. But no one claims it's easy. The three elements can conflict with each other, for example, pressure on time and resources often increases pressure on a team to concentrate on completing the task to the possible detriment of the individuals involved. On the flipside, showing good leadership by investing time in creating a good team spirit without applying enough effort to the task may mean the team loses focus and fails to achieve its objective.

Integrating the three circles

Considering this in a little more detail, we will first examine how an effective leader goes about integrating the three circles in practice:

- **Achieving the objectives** – The need to accomplish the tasks for which the team, unit, department (and, indeed, organisation) exists is perhaps the most obvious responsibility for an organisational leader. If you consistently fail to achieve your performance targets you're unlikely to remain a leader for very long. It is therefore vital to be clear about what your objectives are, how they are going to be achieved, by whom, with what and to what quality standards.
- **Building the team** – Although we are employed by our organisations on the basis of individual contracts, it is in teams that the majority of our work is conducted. Teams exist simply because the task cannot be achieved by one person alone or by a loose collective of people (despite what the anarchists claim). Teams differ from groups because they work to a common goal (some refer to it as 'group synergy') and each individual understands and values the contribution of the other members. In your role as leader, it's your responsibility to build effective teamwork by directing each individual's efforts towards the achievement of the team's (ergo, the organisation's) objectives. To achieve this requires that you consciously set about gaining the loyalty of members to the team, develop a sense of pride in belonging to that team, and foster a desire to work whilst ensuring that performance standards are achieved. Teamworking is explored further in Chapter 3.
- **Developing the individual** – Ideally, every job should draw out the best from us; using our abilities to best effect, matching our responsibilities to our capabilities, but still stretching us enough so that we continue to develop. A leader must therefore ensure that each individual in their team knows what is expected of them, believes that they are making a worthwhile contribution to the work, receives regular feedback (including reward and recognition) for their efforts and support for their personal development. If you do not pay sufficient attention to individuals, then, in the worst case, they may start to withdraw from the team. You will only notice it when the work begins to be affected, which may be too late.

You as leader

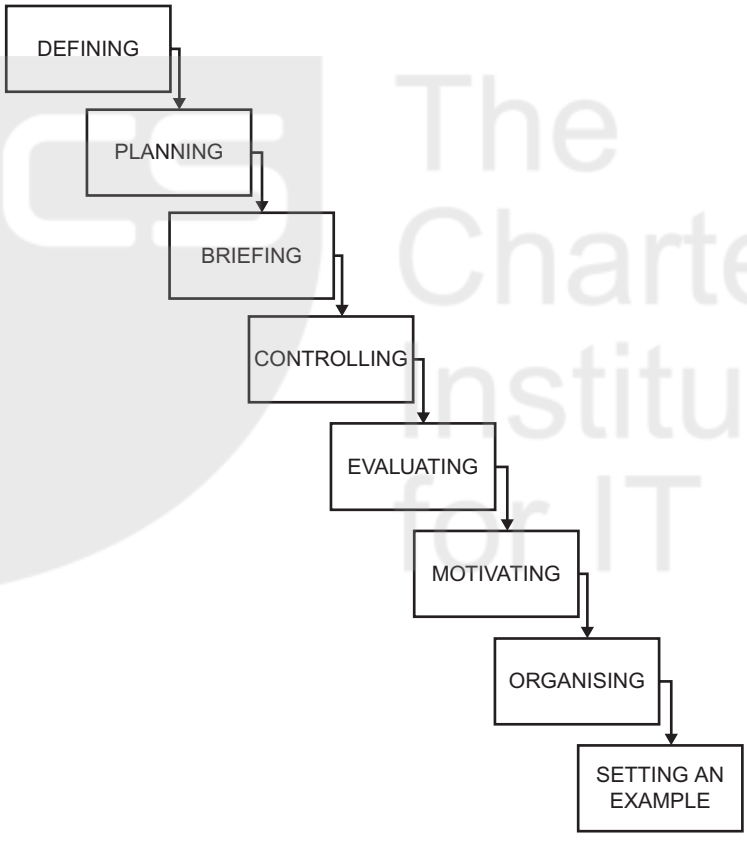
Importantly, in Adair's model, you 'as the leader' are not only an intrinsic part of this team, but also a member of your own peer group and, as such, you will be engaged in tasks as a team member at a higher level of management. Invariably,

this higher level will have longer time horizons, larger financial responsibilities and more significant decisions. From this position, you should be able to stand back and monitor the progress of your team towards desired results. You can then act accordingly.

Leadership functions

Whilst keeping these core areas of leadership clearly in mind, we can see that in order to lead a group of people towards the completion of a task, the leader must perform a series of what Adair called 'functions'. These are shown in Figure 5.3.

Figure 5.3 Adair's leader functions



These functions can be explained as follows:

- **Defining the task** – To set a clear objective.
- **Planning** – How the task will be achieved.
- **Briefing** – To create the right atmosphere, foster teamwork and motivate each individual.

- **Controlling** – To ensure performance standards are met, by the individuals, the team and the leader.
- **Evaluating** – Assess achievements, appraise and train individuals.
- **Motivating** – Provide encouragement, reconcile disagreements.
- **Organising** – Optimal allocation of time, people and resources; realistic action plans.
- **Setting an example** – Leaders must set a good example of behaviour and actions at all times.

The effective leader/manager carries out the functions and exhibits the behaviours depicted by the three circles. Different situations will call for different responses by the leader: imagine the circles swelling or contracting as the situation varies. For example, in establishing a new team, you may spend more time initially on motivating the individuals and getting them to work together effectively.

A useful checklist for applying the model in your own working environment is presented below (Bolden *et al*., 2003). What you should aim for is to consider what performance means in your own situation, then incorporate relevant local factors to create your own interpretation.

- TASK
  - define the task;
  - make the plan;
  - allocate work and resources;
  - control quality and rate of work;
  - check performance against plan;
  - adjust the plan.
- TEAM
  - build team spirit;
  - encourage, motivate, give a sense of purpose;
  - appoint subleaders;
  - ensure communication within group;
  - maintain discipline;
  - develop the group.
- INDIVIDUAL
  - attend to personal problems;
  - praise individuals;

- give status;
- recognise and use individual abilities;
- develop the individual.

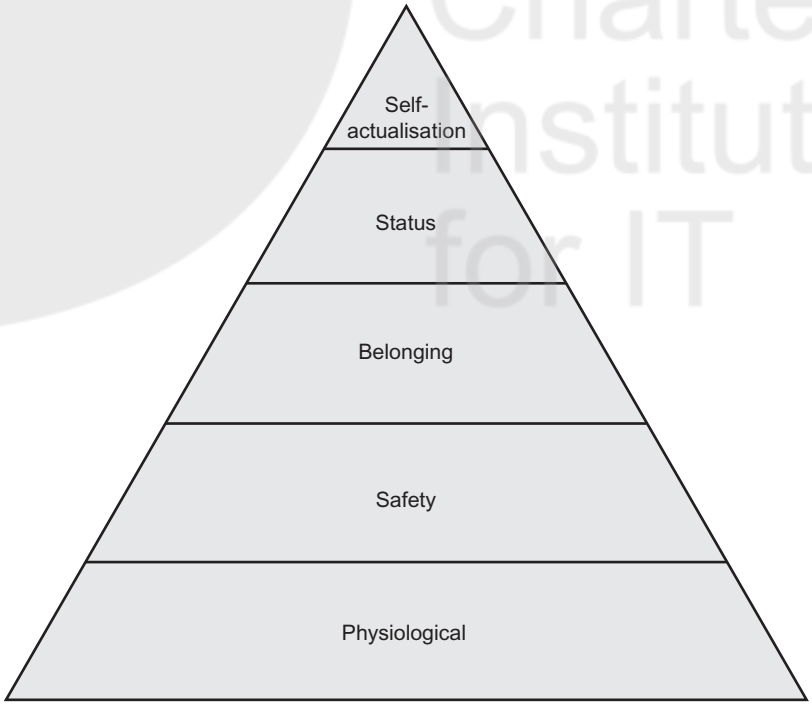
Motivation

You will have noticed that in Adair's model, 'motivation' of the team and individual is a significant responsibility of the leader. It is after all, one of the golden keys to performance improvement. There are two 20th-century writers who have strongly influenced our understanding of motivation in the workplace: Abraham Maslow and Frederick Herzberg.

Maslow

Abraham Maslow concluded from his research that human needs exist in a hierarchy. Until a need is satisfied it acts as a motivator but, when it has been satisfied, motivation from that source ceases. Instead, a motivator of a higher order takes over until that, in turn, is satisfied. Maslow's framework is illustrated in Figure 5.4.

Figure 5.4 Maslow's 'hierarchy of needs'



The levels in Maslow's hierarchy, from bottom to top, are:

- **Physiological needs** – These relate to the basic needs of food, clothing and shelter. If one has nothing to eat, no clothes to wear and nowhere to live, then probably little else matters to you. It's survival.
- **Safety needs** – Once the basic physiological needs are satisfied, humans seem then to be concerned about their safety.
- **Social needs** – With physiological and safety needs satisfied, what now motivates a human? Maslow concluded that social needs now start to play their part. Originally, Maslow termed these 'love needs' and they included the need to belong to a stable social grouping (refer to Cialdini's goal of 'affiliation' in Chapter 6 'Influencing').
- **Esteem needs** – These refer to the need, not just to belong to a recognised social grouping, but to be well regarded within that group.
- **Self-actualisation needs** – At this point, we have reasonable material comfort and security and we are a respected member of a respected tribe. What motivator can now be left for us? Maslow's answer is that, at this point, we will seek self-fulfilment from doing things that we consider to be valuable or challenging and that enable us to reach and stretch our personal potential. Maslow's contention, then, is that at some point, the sheer challenge of the task becomes a motivator in itself; if not, the individual will look elsewhere.

The important point to grasp about Maslow's hierarchy is that it represents very deep-seated needs, which are not easily visible to others, unless they are unmet. Once a need is satisfied, it ceases to become a motivator in itself. However, the lower level needs must be satisfied before the higher level needs are brought into play. For example, people who are at risk of redundancy tend not to worry too much about their need for self-actualisation at that point in time, even if they'd been operating at that level before.

Herzberg

Frederick Herzberg, often called the 'pioneer of job enrichment', took Maslow's thinking a stage further in his book *The Motivation to Work*, first published in 1959 and not subject to any serious challenge since (Herzberg, 1993).

The key to his theory is that the factors that motivate people at work are not simply the opposite of those that cause them dissatisfaction. The most obvious example is awarding a pay rise to someone complaining about money. It may satisfy a 'hygiene' need, but it won't motivate them per se.

Herzberg considered things such as working conditions, salary, leadership/management style and employee relations as hygiene needs; these align to Maslow's levels 1 to 3. However, motivators were status, esteem, responsibility, promotion prospects and work challenge, which align to Maslow's levels 4 and 5.

We can use Maslow and Herzberg's principles as tools to help us lead our teams and improve motivation by ensuring that we can move beyond satisfying hygiene needs (which are critical) by consciously focusing on giving people more direct

responsibility for the work that they do, ensuring it is at an appropriate level of difficulty and offering them the opportunity to develop status as 'experts'.

Emotionally intelligent leadership

Bring up the subject of emotional intelligence (EI) with many business people, particularly those in traditional professions such as accountancy, law or banking, and you can see the light die in their eyes as they dismiss you as a 'tree hugger': someone they couldn't possibly take seriously. However, the idea that to be great a leader is to have a high emotional quotient (EQ) in addition to intelligence quotient (IQ) has not been developed by the New Age communities. Rather, it has emerged from scientific study dating back many years: the Israeli academic Reuven Bar-On was writing about emotional quotients back in the 1970s; Howard Gardner of Harvard Business School (Gardner, 2011) and John Mayer and Peter Salovey of Yale were researching and analysing EI in the 1980s; and it is now 17 years since Daniel Goleman helped to popularise the concept of EI in his 1995 best-selling book *Emotional Intelligence* (Goleman, 1996).

Historically, when the 'command and control' style of leadership prevailed, technical skills and a high IQ were often all that was necessary for leading an organisation. In the modern knowledge economy, however, evidence suggests that whilst these competencies are certainly necessary they are no longer sufficient as the 'era of expertise' has been replaced by the 'era of behaviour' in which people skills are the true assets of an organisation (though they don't as yet appear on the balance sheet... but that's the subject of another book). Put simply, we've all met people who are academically brilliant and yet are socially inept; and we also know that professional success does not automatically follow a high IQ score.

It is easy for leaders to think of business 'value' in terms of traditional financial assets such as physical capital (e.g. bricks and mortar) or intellectual capital (e.g. intellectual property). **Emotional value, however, such as the energy, enthusiasm and commitment in the hearts of everyone connected with the business can also be highly, if intangibly, valuable too:**

- Firstly, emotions can help to create strong interpersonal relationships between people, whether they are colleagues or customers/suppliers, which if nurtured, can create a real competitive advantage for any business.
- Secondly, these emotions and the behaviours associated with them can be consciously developed by organisations and used to drive innovation and problem solving, with dramatic results for performance.

Many organisations around the world have focused on including EI in their leadership development programmes, believing that it can not only help to deliver superior performance in the workplace, but it can also create and sustain competitive advantage. Every day people bring their heads and hearts to work, and if they don't, the negative consequences can be significant. Leaders today, therefore, need to stop seeing themselves as 'the boss' and start seeing themselves as 'emotional capitalists' (Newman, 2008).

So what is EI? EI may be described simply as knowing how you and others feel and what to do about it. As such it is entirely complementary to the other

leadership models described in this chapter. Psychologists John Mayer and Peter Salovey described EI as being made up of five 'competencies' or skills:

- **Self-awareness** – Knowing how you feel in the present moment, now.
- **Emotional literacy** – Being able to talk about feelings with others.
- **Empathy and compassion** – The ability to feel and understand the emotions of others.
- **Balance** – Being able to make decisions using a healthy balance of emotion and reason.
- **Responsibility** – Taking primary responsibility for your own emotions and happiness.

Some people are naturally better at this than others. Your culture, both national and organisational also has an effect. The good news is that Goleman is clear from his research that **anyone** can learn to improve their skills in EI. The bad news is that developing these skills is not something you can learn by simply reading a book or an article. It takes training, practice and reinforcement. You can take the first steps in cultivating your own EI by reflecting on your experiences, with perhaps a little assistance from coaching, 360 degree feedback or one of the EI profiling tools, such as ESCI or EQ-i®.[10, 11] Over time the insights you gain will transform the way you do your job. If you can listen to and empathise with others you will become less self-involved and more objective in your understanding of situations. You will not shy away from addressing 'high emotion' situations and can become more courageous as a leader.

LATERAL LEADERSHIP

The leadership models we've reviewed so far in this chapter make an assumption that, as a leader, you are in a position of authority over other people. But can you lead effectively from other positions in the organisation hierarchy?

According to Stever Robbins, an entrepreneurial advisor and former career coach at Harvard Business School, 'You don't need a leadership title to do what it takes to help a team or organization build momentum. You can lead from anywhere... by adapting principles of responsibility, stewardship, and values' (Robbins, 2008).

This concept of lateral leadership (or put more simply, getting things done when you're not the boss (Fisher and Sharp, 2004)) has been gaining recognition in recent years as more and more people find themselves working in flatter, more fluid, matrix or virtual organisation structures. For example, you may be the leader of a strategic cross-functional project, but have no official 'command and control' powers. However, if that project is to be successful, you need much more than traditional management methods and skills. You'll need abilities to influence others positively,

[10] Emotional and Social Competency Inventory, Daniel Goleman (2007).
[11] Emotional Quotient Inventory®, Reuven Bar-On (1997).

to persuade, negotiate, network, collaborate and build coalitions with peers; what J.A. Conger calls 'a constellation of abilities'.[12]

Critically, you also need to develop a mindset that says, 'I might not have the authority, but I'm going to take personal responsibility for our, not just my, success.' This might mean having the courage to challenge the status quo constructively; present your ideas for doing things better/faster/cheaper or just differently; being generous in supporting others in the team; seeking out new people and new ideas. And so on.

These are all skills that can be learned and developed. So where do you start? Conger, it seems, recommends focusing on four closely interconnected and mutually reinforcing capabilities (2008):

- **Networking** – Cultivate a broad network of relationships, both internal and external to your organisation (particularly if they are 'portals' to bigger networks). You may need their support for your initiatives.
- **Constructive persuasion and negotiation** – This does not refer to manipulating others. Conducted with an appreciation of 'what's in it for me?' (WIIFM – see Chapter 6 'Influencing'), you can be comfortable that you're behaving ethically.
- **Consultation** – People like to be invited to offer their opinions and views about a problem. So consulting your stakeholders is time well spent. You never know what great ideas may be volunteered.
- **Coalition building** – Affiliation is a universal human goal (see Chapter 6 'Influencing'), so several people who together are advocating an idea exert more influence than a lone voice. By building coalitions, Conger explains, you gather influential people together to form 'a single body of authority', which is why the ability to build coalitions is an important skill in lateral leadership.

What lateral leadership therefore ultimately depends on is your ability to connect with the right people in your organisation, in the right ways, so that your initiatives are a success. They are unlikely to exist solely in your own function and the organisation chart won't tell you who these right people are, so you have to take the initiative: get out from behind your desk and talk to people, up, down and across the organisation. Maybe even outside the organisation, if, for example, your support functions are outsourced.

CONCLUSION

In our increasingly networked world, with its ever accelerating pace of change, lateral leadership seems to be an almost Darwinian evolution of the older models. Not yet widely embraced in corporate management development programmes, it is perhaps the only leadership approach that will prove successful in this new business environment. Time will tell.

[12] J.A. Conger is Professor of Organisational Behaviour, London Business School.

That said, there is much we can learn from the vast body of leadership studies that are available to professionals wishing to improve the ways in which we engage others with a goal, a task or a wider business purpose. The starting point, however, is to take a step back and look at ourselves and our preferred leadership style in the mirror. Is it truly consistent with any of the leadership models we have described in this chapter? And if it is, does it fit comfortably with the culture and people in our workplace? If not, we must be prepared to adapt and experiment with new or unfamiliar approaches, always keeping in mind that although our level in the organisation hierarchy offers us a certain status, the title of 'leader' is only ever awarded by the followers you've earned.

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6 INFLUENCING

INTRODUCTION

Think about the word 'influencing' for a moment. What image springs into your mind? You might think of a famous stage hypnotist character, making people do things they wouldn't normally dream of doing (barking like a dog perhaps), just for the amusement of others. However, whilst the ability to mesmerise colleagues or senior managers into doing whatever you ask them might sound tempting, particularly around the time of your annual pay review, this is not influencing, it's manipulation; in others words using tricks and techniques to make people agree to things that are fundamentally not in their best interests.

When we say that influencing is a key skill for a professional, we are indeed referring to the ability to get others to agree with your proposals or requests, but to do so willingly. For example, a salesperson needs customers to buy products, and buy them more than once. A strong code of ethics should therefore guide the use of influencing techniques in the workplace, especially if your objective in acquiring this skill is to build mutually beneficial, long-term relationships.

The benefits to professionals of mastering influencing skills are that they open doors for your career by improving not just the ways in which you interact with important groups of people, but also by increasing your self-confidence in your ability to communicate persuasively. The more confident you become the greater success you will enjoy. However, to be truly influential requires you not only to master the tools and techniques, but to be able to appreciate the benefits of what you're recommending to those you're trying to influence:

> 'People who have mastered the art of influence are very good at putting themselves in other people's shoes and understanding what's in it for them.' Penny de Valk (extract from Tims (2011)).[13]

There is a huge, often confusing library of literature on the subject of influencing, some of which, unless you have a PhD in Psychology, bears more than a passing resemblance to 'Pseud's Corner' in *Private Eye*. In this chapter, therefore, we've focused on what we believe to be the most practical and accessible parts of this body

[13] Penny de Valk is CEO, Institute of Leadership & Management.

of knowledge. We summarise the core psychological principles that guide successful influencing and offer you a selection of proven, popular models that can be easily applied to many of the situations you will encounter at work.

CONTENTS OF THIS CHAPTER

This chapter covers the following topics:

- influence versus power;
- defining our circle of influence;
- influencing and the three universal human goals;
- Cialdini's 'six principles of influence';
- the outcome frame;
- questions: the golden key to influence;
- influencing according to social preference;
- the influencing process.

INFLUENCE VERSUS POWER

Many people make the assumption that the need to exert influence declines in direct proportion to the seniority of your position in an organisation. Once you're chief 'something' officer (CXO), can't you just tell people what to do? Well, yes you can and mostly people will do what you ask them, albeit perhaps begrudgingly, just because you're the boss. As humans, we tend to obey figures of authority; it's programmed into our natures and makes us, in certain circumstances, open to exploitation.

But relying purely on the power vested in your position to get things done can only be successful in the short term. Over time, it weakens relationships because people generally don't like being made to feel weak by others and using power alone over them can cause them to feel frustrated, resentful or, worst case, vengeful. Those who use power and coercion at the expense of persuasion and influence tend to fall spectacularly. We can all readily think of examples of such people from the political domain; Hosni Mubarak and Muammar Gaddafi are two leaders whose abuses of power over their people caused popular revolts, which led to the loss of authority in the first case and death in the second.

However, there may be similar examples closer to home. In your professional career, you may have encountered bosses whose preferred management methods could at best be called 'command and control'. Were their methods successful? Did they last long in the organisation? One of the worst examples available in the public domain of abuses of power in the corporate sector was the case of Railtrack, which under former chief executive Gerald Corbett developed a culture in which it regarded itself as a dictator and the rest of the industry as 'supplicants' begging for favours, according to the Rail Regulator Tom Winsor. Some train operating companies even accused the organisation of using 'intimidation' in its dealings. This dismissive

and arrogant attitude was also extended to the Strategic Rail Authority and the Health and Safety Executive who were regarded as 'a bit of a nuisance'. The result? Gerald Corbett resigned in the wake of the Hatfield crash and Railtrack was finally put into administration by Stephen Byers, the then Minister of Transport, the following October.

Time and again, individuals who consistently use their position of power to serve their own self-interests inevitably sow the seeds of their future downfall. One of the benefits of using influence and persuasion to achieve your goals is that it requires you first to see the world through others' eyes. **Armed with a clear, positive answer to 'what's in it for me?', people will usually do the things you ask of them willingly, and you don't need to have authority *over* them. What you achieve instead is power *through* them**. That doesn't necessarily imply that what you're aiming to achieve is ultimately ethical or good of course, but you are likely to remain in a position of authority far longer.

In a modern organisation with fluid teams and hierarchies, the people you need to act in a certain way or to provide something you require rarely report directly to you, so just using your authority to get what you want is fast becoming a redundant concept. Influence and persuasion are the keys to success. Possessing an empathy with colleagues and clear personal objectives, supported by well-developed communication skills can really help you break through the corporate hierarchy. So instead of complaining about 'the powers that be' at the coffee machine, we should accept that true power is derived from influence, not vice versa, and take steps to acquire these skills for ourselves. The final word on the topic of influence versus power belongs to Richard Stiller (1997), an author and HR manager with Sun Microsystems, from whose 'Influence as power' essay for SunLabs' *Perspectives 97-3* series of papers the following quote is taken:

> 'Very few people have real power. In reality, the rest of us are followers. If we hold any power at all it is a sort of self-empowerment, which is a control of our reactions to the power exercised by others as they impress their will upon us either with a soft touch or a hard fist. Our reaction is to posture what little power we believe we have and exercise it over the hapless, or to become victims of the power exerted upon us. We all know the feeling and helplessness.
>
> It took me many years to understand that there is another power that we all have access to if we are willing to grasp it. In many ways it is more substantial than real power. Real power often acts as a lightning rod and the possessor often ends up being a target for others who desire it. The other power, the one we all can possess, if practised diligently, draws no attention, and so the practitioner remains safe. This is the power of influence.'

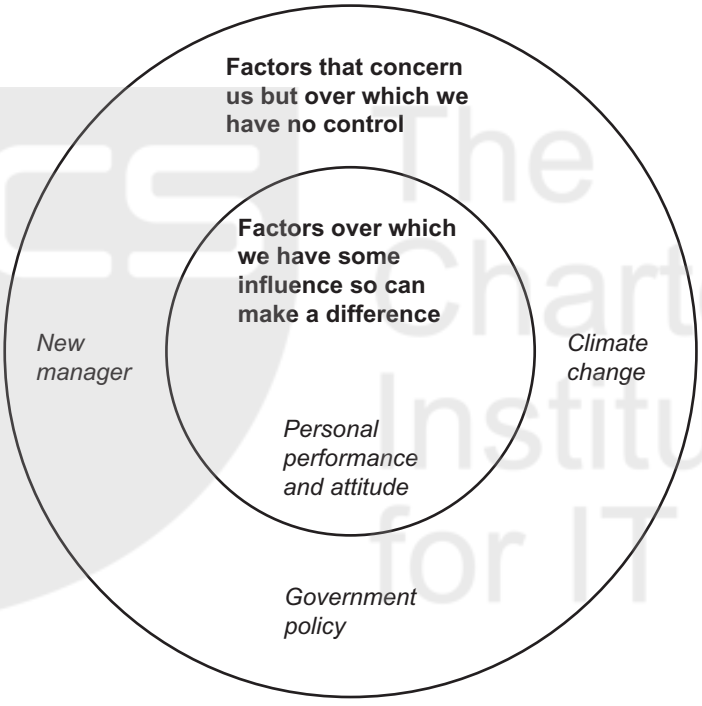
STARTING OUT: DEFINING OUR CIRCLE OF INFLUENCE

When you think about it, there are many things over which you'd like to have an influence: your work; your family; your health; your community. You may be considering what steps you can take to land that promotion or get that project sponsored.

The chances are you've had moments when you've felt pretty powerless to effect the change you'd like to see.

In his book *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, Steven Covey (2004) observed that the problems and opportunities we all face as people fall into two areas: the circle of concern and the circle of influence. These two circles are where we choose to expend most of our time and energy. Figure 6.1 is based upon Covey's observation and suggests some areas of 'concern' and 'influence'.

Figure 6.1 Circle of influence, circle of concern (based on Covey)



Our **circle of concern** encompasses those things over which we have no control, such as the melting of the polar ice caps, the new CEO and other things that we are simply unable to do something about. **Most of us spend too much of our time on the things that we cannot control; this is not only a waste of our time and effort, but also leads us to experience increased levels of frustration and failure.** Covey noted, on the other hand, that we can choose instead to focus our time and energy on things where we can make a difference; these reside in our **circle of influence**. This is where he believes 'highly effective people' choose to spend the majority of their time.

In working with this model, Covey recommends that to improve your proactivity, you first notice your concerns, then among the concerns, determine where you can realistically take action. In working on these things by being proactive,

your personal energy will become 'positive, enlarging and magnifying', attracting others to you, which eventually results in an expansion of your circle of influence. Conversely, choosing to focus on your concerns creates a negative energy that causes your circle of influence to shrink.

So, how can we ensure that we are focusing effectively? A useful way of determining which circle your concerns are in is by listening to the language you use, distinguishing between the use of the words 'have' and 'be'. Circles of concern are full of 'have's' while circles of influence are full of 'be's'. For example, saying, 'If only I had a boss who wasn't...' will be in your circle of concern, whereas, 'I will be more sympathetic of my boss's views' will be very much in your circle of influence.

Table 6.1 gives some examples that can help you rework your concerns to gain improved influence and control.

Table 6.1 Circle of concern, circle of influence

Circle of concern	Circle of influence
• My manager doesn't communicate with me.	• I will request a weekly one-to-one meeting.
• My career's going nowhere.	• I will learn a new skill.
• We don't have enough resources.	• We can realise some efficiencies.

Ultimately, whenever you're getting worked up over something at work and feel less than influential, ask yourself, 'What can I do to change this situation for the better?' Work out some acceptable alternatives and act on them without delay. If you really can't think of anything, accept that you're wasting valuable time and energy in worrying about an issue you can't control and just let it go. Then focus your resources on something else where you can make a difference. We won't pretend that achieving this is easy. It requires conscious, continuous effort and practice until it becomes a habit.

INFLUENCING AND THE THREE UNIVERSAL HUMAN GOALS

Now that we understand that we **all** have the potential for the power of influence and know where best to direct our time and energy to greatest effect, we can explore the basic psychological principles behind being a successful influencer. Here's the science bit. There are three goals fundamental to all human interactions, of which we are not usually consciously aware. To deliver the results we desire, our attempts at influencing must tap into these subconscious motivators, identified by Cialdini and Goldstein in their 2004 paper 'Social influence: Compliance and conformity'.

Goal 1: Affiliation
As humans we are programmed to be social: to live and work with and alongside others. In order to be social, we need to be liked. This desire to be liked, or conversely, the fear of rejection, is a basic driver for much of our behaviour. We may try to get people to like us simply by agreeing with their views or complimenting their appearance. We want the things we do, think and believe in to be broadly in line with what others do, think and believe in because it means social acceptance (i.e. affiliation). Great influencers leverage this basic need for affiliation and give us something we can imitate, so we can 'be like everyone else' (much as we might try to deny we are 'keeping up with the Joneses').

Goal 2: Accuracy
Accuracy might seem an odd term in this context, but it refers to our very human compulsion to 'do the right thing'. It could refer to social situations, such as not upsetting the mother-in-law at a family wedding, or financial situations, such as buying a new car at the best price. Alternatively it could be accuracy in more personal matters, such as choosing to follow the 'right' religion. As before, great influencers understand this need to be right and so they try to offer things that appeal to our need for accuracy. For example, recognised experts or authority figures can be successfully employed to influence people precisely because they offer us a 'correct' way of doing things: George Foreman persuading us to buy a grill pan; Jennifer Aniston persuading us to use a certain shampoo 'because you're worth it'; or even Iggy Pop persuading us to buy car insurance.

Goal 3: Maintaining positive self-concept
This is a deep one. It takes a lifetime to create a holistic identity for oneself: who you are, what you stand for, your place in the community, your self-esteem and self-respect. So it's no surprise that people will go to extraordinary lengths to protect this self-image and will, under most circumstances, behave in ways that are consistent with it. If someone believes that they are a thoughtful person, and is recognised as being so, they will go to even greater lengths to ensure that their reputation for thoughtfulness continues. Great influencers can leverage this goal by invoking our sense of consistency with our internal perception of ourselves. For example, if you've said 'yes' to a small request, you are more likely to agree to the next, bigger request. People feel subconsciously that it would be inconsistent to agree to one request and then refuse the next one, so they want to say 'yes' again. A classic door-to-door sales technique.

In summary, to become a truly powerful influencer you should seek to align your communications with a person's need to belong, their need to be seen to do the right thing and/or be consistent with their personal identity. This is more easily said than done perhaps, at least to start with, but give it a go next time you're trying to influence a colleague to agree to get you a coffee.

CIALDINI'S 'SIX PRINCIPLES OF INFLUENCE'

Dr Robert Cialdini is a social psychologist based at Arizona State University in the USA. His book *Influence: Science and Practice* (2008) was the result of years of study into the reasons why people comply with requests in business settings.

He has spent his entire career researching the science of influence, which has earned him an international reputation as the leading expert in the field, advising companies such as Google, Microsoft, Cisco Systems and IBM on their marketing and sales strategies.

Cialdini proposed that there are six key principles that underpin successful influencing and therefore our own propensity to be persuaded:

- **Liking** – As we learned in Chapter 2 'Building rapport and sustaining relationships', it's much easier to influence someone who likes you. Have you ever bought anything from someone you really didn't like? Successful influencers try to uncover similarities with the other person.
- **Social proof** – People like to follow one another (the goal of affiliation), so influencers imply everyone else is moving the same way. The more people there are that seem to be doing something, the more we begin to believe that it is an acceptable. For example, in IT you will get one or two early adopters of a new technology, but most CEOs choose not to commit significant sums of money to a new system until the vendor can provide case studies and testimonials of success elsewhere.
- **Consistency** – With some notable exceptions, most people prefer to keep their word. We don't like letting others down. If people make a commitment (particularly if it's made verbally in public or in writing) they are much more likely to keep to it. We have been raised (programmed) to accept that we need to be consistent in order to be honest, strong and respected and achieve the goal of maintaining a positive self-concept. This driver can be leveraged to influence in many business situations, not just a sales pitch.
- **Scarcity** – Advertisers use this principle a lot. Opportunities seem more valuable when their availability is limited. Even when companies have warehouses full of a product, they will still advertise using time-limited offers that emphasise scarcity. The assumption is that people want what they can't have (or at least what might be running short): remember the queues at UK petrol stations early in 2012 when the Government announced impending strike action by fuel delivery drivers.
- **Authority** – As stated earlier, people are strongly influenced by experts. Successful influencers leverage their knowledge to establish their expertise, appealing to the person's need for accuracy (i.e. 'doing the right thing').
- **Reciprocity** – Social conditioning has taught us that if someone does something for us then we feel we must do something for them. The simplest example in this country is buying a round of drinks. You buy someone a drink and they feel obliged to buy you one in return (or risk becoming a social outcast).

In his book, Cialdini cites many real-life examples of each of these principles at work in different business settings. You may want to reflect on whether you can identify any of these principles in your own experiences, particularly in popular consumer marketing campaigns; you will undoubtedly start to view the efforts of global brands to sell to us in a different light.

As professionals, we would all like to think that we're not quite so easily swayed, that we can 'see through' these techniques. But the truth is that by being human, we are all open to persuasion by others using these principles in the right place, at the right time. Which brings us on to a final point: plan your timing carefully – if someone is busy or has other things on their mind they will not take in what you are saying. **In many situations, particularly with senior people, you need to ensure your first conversation/presentation convinces them effectively because you may not get invited back for a second chance.**

THE OUTCOME FRAME

In Chapter 2 'Building rapport and sustaining relationships', we looked at the basic techniques for influencing: body language, tone of voice, mirror, match and pace. Armed with this knowledge, we can explore more advanced influencing techniques, one of which is the 'outcome frame'.

In NLP it's said that 'the person who sets the frame controls the communication'. In other words, whoever sets the context for the communication at the start, will influence everything that follows. Similar to objective setting methods, such as SMART,[14] the outcome frame is a planning tool that provides a focus for what we want to achieve, the ensuing effects and the resources required to achieve it, within a clear set of boundaries. **Outcome thinking also allows us to influence by communicating what we want to others and eliciting their desired outcomes (through questioning and active listening), thereby achieving a result that is best for both parties.**

It's important to note that an outcome frame is the **direct** opposite of a problem frame. The latter is focused on what is wrong or needs to be fixed, rather than what is sought after. In many business situations, it is problem solving that many of our professional methodologies often guide us towards, so using the outcome frame may take a little practice. Like many of the best psychological models, however, it is very straightforward: it is simply a series of questions that guide your brain to a new way of thinking. There are many variations of the outcome frame, but all broadly follow these steps:

(1) What is the outcome you want?

(2) Where, when and with whom do you want it?

(3) What will you see, hear and feel when you have achieved the outcome?

(4) What will having this outcome do for you (what are your motivators)?

(5) What stops you from having your desired outcome already?

(6) What resources do you need to achieve your outcome?

[14] SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, time-framed) is discussed fully in Chapter 10 'Coaching'.

(7) Are there any other ways to achieve the outcome?

(8) Now imagine stepping into the future. Look back at the steps you took to achieve the outcome.

It is important that you write down your answers to the above questions for any given situation, so that you can revisit and check that it really represents what you want to achieve. You may even want to share it with trusted 'others', who can offer you constructive feedback, encouragement and support. How much detail you need to go into will of course be dependent on the complexity of the desired outcome. However, it's important to develop your thoughts sufficiently and also be as specific as you can: certain words will create new connections and perspectives.

Using the outcome frame

Steps 1 and 2

One example of using the outcome frame in a common influencing business scenario is the formal pitch. In this case, let's assume it's for a £250,000 budget for a new system implementation. A well-formed outcome would be 'I want to deliver a confident pitch to gain full executive approval for the £250,000 investment in the proposed system implementation'.

First notice that the language used is positive throughout. This is important, as using negative language in the statement such as 'I don't want my pitch to be rejected' will subconsciously drive you towards a negative result. Secondly, notice that the outcome has been phrased to ensure it is fully under the control of the person: the statement refers primarily to their confidence in delivering the pitch, not 'I want the board to stump up £250k for the system implementation'. Thirdly, the outcome is in a manageable chunk size: 'I want to deliver a confident pitch etc.' rather than 'I want to deliver a confident pitch so that we can… and roll out the system globally in two months'. You may notice some similarity here with the ways in which you set a SMART goal.

Step 3

The next step in developing this outcome frame would be to gather sensory-specific evidence for the outcome. When you have delivered the pitch confidently and gained approval, what will you see, hear and feel? You might reply something like, 'I will see the five executives sitting in front of me, smiling. I hear an animated conversation moving positively towards the next steps. I'm invited to sit down and offered a coffee and biscuits. I feel relaxed, happy, calm and satisfied.'

Step 4

You would then move to what is called the 'meta-outcome', that is what having this outcome will do for you both in an immediate and a wider sense. For example, 'When I am able to deliver the £250k system implementation project with full board backing, I can confidently ask for a promotion. The resulting salary increase will allow my partner and me to start a family.'

Steps 5, 6 and 7

The next three questions are what are called in NLP 'ecology checks'. Here we consider whether there would be any undesirable by-products from a given outcome and what we would need to give up to achieve it. The aim is to elicit all risks to

your outcome so that you can remove them before proceeding. For example, there's no point pitching for a new system investment if you won't have the resources to deliver the project or if the company is about to embark on an acquisition or merger.

Step 8
Finally, putting yourself in the future having accomplished your outcome can help you feel more positive and motivated about it. It also helps you clarify whether you might have missed any important steps in your planning.

QUESTIONS: THE GOLDEN KEY TO INFLUENCE

Questions are the single most powerful tool you have to influence a person. It is said that the person asking the questions controls the conversation, but more of this later. Dale Carnegie in his book *How To Win Friends and Influence People* (first published in 1936 , new edition 2006), pointed out that by asking questions, then listening and encouraging the other person to speak, he could, within a very short period of time, gain their trust and respect. When you ask a thoughtful, genuine question, others will appreciate you for your insight and your understanding, even when they are doing most of the talking.

Another reason to ask good questions in a professional, business context is to help the person you are conversing with think more profoundly than before on an issue, to facilitate the creation of new ideas, new answers and new possibilities. In fact, **the key skill that top-notch consultants possess is not the ability to provide answers, but the ability to ask the right questions.** In today's business environment where the pace of change keeps accelerating, the 'right' answer seems to have a very short shelf life, making questioning skills more critical than ever.

Questions can be categorised into two basic groups: 'open' and 'closed'. Open questions literally 'open up' the conversation and enable you to find out things; about the person (so you can build rapport) or the situation (so you can develop a solution to a problem). Open questions require more than a 'yes' or 'no' to answer adequately. They begin with the words 'what', 'who', 'how', 'where' and 'when'. Although an open question can begin with a 'why', you need to be sure the context is right or your questioning will feel more like an interrogation to the other person. Closed questions on the other hand can be answered with a 'yes' or 'no'. They usually begin with 'can', 'do' or 'are' and should be used when you want to draw a conversation to a close, perhaps gaining the other person's commitment to a next step. In a salesperson's methodology, it's no coincidence that the 'closing' stage is where they use closed questions to try to secure an agreement to an order.

However, questions can do more than elicit information. They can also be used to influence or suggest answers. Referencing a short paper published by a communications consultant to the legal profession in the USA (Kellerman, 2007), we see that questions can help you obtain the answers you're seeking in one of four core ways:

- **Wording** – Even minor adaptations to question wording have a major impact on responses: they can literally put words in the responders' mouths.

For example: 'What glitches did you encounter with the new system?' will elicit a list of issues; 'What improvements did you encounter with the new system?' will prompt a list of benefits. If you want to encourage a positive view of a system amongst the users, you will almost certainly want to use the latter.

- **Framing** – As we learned from NLP earlier, questions can suggest some answers and actively exclude others. For example, 'What factors frustrated you during the project?' suggests the person was dissatisfied and you will be less likely to receive a positive response.
- **Using assumptions** – Asking an assumptive question prompts someone to think about providing a considered reply. For example, 'What is it that you like about my proposal?' assumes that the person likes the proposal and guides them into providing you with a reasoned answer, which a more common alternative question such as 'Did you like my proposal?' would be less likely to achieve.
- **Inviting agreement** – We already know by considering Cialdini's work that, for social reasons, most people prefer to agree more than disagree with others. So a question such as 'Do you agree with our user feedback that shows the upgrade is much easier to use than version 2.4?' is more likely to gain agreement than asking 'Do you think the new upgrade is much easier to use..?'

So, in choosing to use questions in an influencing situation, we need to be conscious that the exact words we choose matter a great deal. Subtle, and seemingly minor, changes in wording can have major and profound effects on answers. Choosing different nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, conjunctions and the tone of your voice will affect whether people answer 'yes' or 'no' or offer their support to you.

Response framing

To take our consideration of the use of questions to influence answers one stage further, we will now take a look at the NLP technique of 'response framing'.

Questions that include larger values or broader scope prompt answers that are larger, for example 'What would you think if we set a budget of £1,000,000?' will deliver a different number of responses to 'What would you think if we set a budget of £500,000?' The larger figure will elicit more answers. Similarly, these principles can be applied to other dimensions, such as time spans.

Offering a middle position or 'don't know' option in a question increases the chance that people will respond with a middle position. Inclusion of a middle position leaves the relative importance of other answers intact. For example, 'What would you think if we set a budget of between £1,000,000 and £1,250,000?' is more likely to obtain a response of 'I would say £1,125,000 sounds about right'.

Finally, when asked to choose among a series of alternatives, it seems that people are more likely to choose the last alternative in oral questions and the first alternative in written questions.

Understanding this principle helps us to construct our questions better in order to receive the responses we require.

How to listen

However, it's no use asking great, well-structured influential questions if you don't know how to listen to the answers. And by listening, we don't mean the natural process of sound waves hitting your ear drums. To use questions truly influentially, you must learn to listen properly.

Most people prefer the sound of their own voice and will appreciate you for providing an audience. A sympathetic ear helps build trust. But as we know from our exploration of rapport, interest has to be genuine, not faked. Dale Carnegie indicated that the key to listening is derived from one's genuine show of interest in the lives of other people. If you come across as being insincere during conversation, than the other person will pick this up and not be inclined to trust you (a key condition for influence).

Our tips for practising being a good listener are as follows:

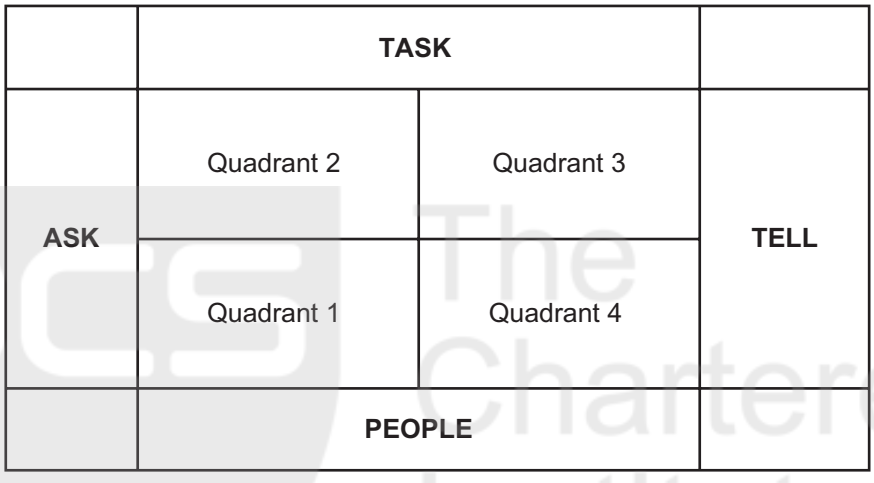
- **Avoid talking when you're trying to listen** – You simply can't do both. Relax and allow the other person to speak without interruption, allowing the speaker to deliver their message completely. Remember to be patient and give the speaker time (this can be trying with some individuals).
- **Listen out for the key points** – You want to pick up on the main ideas and quickly be able to separate the important from the irrelevant.
- **Beware of distractions** – Where possible remove all potential distractions such as other people, phones etc. Beware of trigger words, phrases or situations that may cause your mind to wander off on another track.
- **Take notes** – By taking brief notes you can allow the speaker as much time as they require, secure in the knowledge you have your notes to refer back to. Instead of worrying about remembering it all, you can concentrate on really listening and understanding. It also demonstrates to the speaker your interest in what they have to say.
- **Suspend your own judgement** – To really listen, you need to be open to different points of view. You need to be able to respond to the message and its value, so you must put your own opinions, judgements and perceptions aside.
- **Listen for more than words** – This is about beginning to understand the true meaning, by being aware of their feelings and the deeper implications behind the words (we expand on this point in Chapter 10 'Coaching').

INFLUENCING ACCORDING TO SOCIAL PREFERENCE

As a professional, you may have undergone a profiling of your personality and communication preferences as part of a graduate training scheme or a management development programme. The aim of such exercises is to increase your self-awareness not only of your own preferences but also those of others, so that you can make subtle adaptations to your natural style of communication and make it more successful, in a management or other influencing context. If you can improve your ability to adapt your approach to different situations, you can save a lot of grief both for yourself and everyone else.

In very simplistic terms, these tools help you understand whether you are more task-oriented or more people-oriented; and whether you are inclined to tell others what to do or are more collaborative in your approach. This is typically represented in a graphical quadrant such as that shown in Figure 6.2.

Figure 6.2 Social preference type quadrant



The terms that popular profiling models use for each quadrant 'type' can be roughly compared as shown in Table 6.2.

Table 6.2 Social preference model comparison

Model	Quadrant 1	Quadrant 2	Quadrant 3	Quadrant 4
SocialStyles®	Amiable	Analytical	Driver	Expressive
Jung	Feeler	Thinker	Director	Intuitor
MBTI®	Introvert/ Feeler	Introvert/ Thinker	Extrovert/ Thinker	Extrovert/ Feeler
DISC®	Steadiness	Compliance	Dominance	Influencing

The main difference between the Social Styles®, and DISC®, MBTI® and Jung models is that the first focuses on observable patterns in behaviour whereas the last three focus on personality.

The Social Styles® model, developed by psychologists David W. Merrill and Roger H. Reid (1981), is typically used as a reference in many communication skills development programmes in organisations. The Social Style® profiling tool is copyrighted and distributed by the TRACOM Group.[15]

MBTI® was developed to make the psychological theories of C.G. Jung more understandable and applicable in an organisational context.[16] It attempts to measure a person's preferences on the four scales identified by Jung and expanded upon by Katharine Cook Briggs and Isabel Briggs Myers. The profiling tool is copyrighted by Consulting Psychologist Press.

The DISC® model is attributed to Dr William Moulton Marston, whose book *Emotions of Normal People* (first published in 1928) explained the model using the DISC terminology. The DISC® profiling tool is copyrighted and distributed by Inscape Publishing Inc.

AUTHORS' NOTE

You must seek appropriate training and accreditation if you would like to use psychometric tools such as the ones described above. Administering formal personality tests is a highly sensitive and skilled area, which requires the ability to interpret the results correctly and then provide the feedback to the person being assessed in a structured, meaningful way. Failure to use these tools professionally and ethically creates a potential minefield for misinterpretation and worry.

So how can we use our knowledge of our own and others' preferences in an influencing situation, leveraging Cialdini's 'six principles'? US sales trainer and coach Brian Ahearn provides us with some practical thoughts in his blog of how we might achieve this,[17] based on his experience in business and working directly under Cialdini (he is at pains to point out that these ideas are not yet backed-up formal scientific research). We have summarised and expanded upon his points below.

Quadrant 1

The people in Quadrant 1 like to be everyone's friend. They appreciate stability, are slow to change and highly people-oriented. They set great store on their feelings. The principles you should be aware of when planning your communication with these types are:

- **Consensus** – Because they genuinely want everyone to live in harmony, the principle of consensus can be used effectively to influence them. Be sure to let

[15] www.tracomcorp.com
[16] MBTI® (Myers–Briggs Type Indicator®) is also discussed in Chapter 2 'Building rapport and sustaining relationships'.
[17] www.blogger.com/profile/16601815654346578807

them know that what you're proposing has had great feedback from others and you'll be well on the way to securing their agreement.

- **Liking** – These people naturally like others and thus want to be liked themselves. Find ways of showing that you like them and you'll increase your chance to influence.
- **Reciprocity** – As they are so people-oriented, they are naturally programmed to reciprocate. Devoting time to helping them sort out an issue is likely to be returned in a venture important to you.

Quadrant 2

Quadrant 2 types can come across as rather cold, particularly so if you are a Quadrant 1 type yourself. They are highly task-oriented and systematic in their approaches, tending to respond less to the more obviously human principles of liking and reciprocity. Many finance professionals naturally fit this profile. When dealing with this type of person you can appeal to their nature by focusing on their need for:

- **Authority** – As they think long and hard about things themselves, they respond well to expert advice. Make sure your communication references leading experts or provides them with research data and you'll have their attention.
- **Consistency** – Again, because they devote a lot of thinking time before they take action, they take their words and actions extremely seriously. Make sure therefore that you reference what they've said or done in the past to make your point and of course help them be consistent.
- **Consensus** – Thinkers feel more comfortable when part of a group of like-minded people. Show them what other people they respect are doing when building your case.

Quadrant 3

Quadrant 3 people are the ones you are most likely to encounter at very senior levels in an organisation. They are ambitious fast movers, oriented towards getting the task completed with little patience for lengthy and expansive discussions, particularly involving feelings. They demand quick results from their teams and use a directive and controlling style of management, which can be intimidating. They are the ones who hold power in an organisation, so the ability to influence them effectively is critical to your professional credibility. You should aim to employ the principles of authority, consistency and scarcity when planning your communication:

- **Authority** – Drivers aren't concerned about following the crowds, but if you can make your point referencing someone they respect or admire (an industry expert perhaps) they'll be more likely to listen.
- **Consistency** – Drivers have an almost evangelical belief that they are always right, which can make their views particularly difficult to shift. If you can link your message to what they've said or done in the past you are more likely to succeed because you are appealing to their need for consistency.

- **Scarcity** – Drivers are highly competitive and like to win. Show them what they might lose if they don't accept your recommendation.

Quadrant 4

Quadrant 4 people are more in tune with people rather than tasks. Highly creative, they tend to be natural persuaders who like innovation. You should aim to employ the principles of liking, reciprocity and scarcity when planning your communication:

- **Liking** – These people are expressive and usually quite like to talk about themselves. Link your message into something you know they're passionate about and they will be more inclined to listen to you.
- **Reciprocity** – Being people-oriented and natural networkers, they will use this tactic in their own communications. Do them a favour and they'll naturally try to return it, which can work to your advantage, particularly when engaging them to influence a driver.
- **Scarcity** – Creating opportunities is a particular motivator for these people. Talk about how they might lose an opportunity if they don't act and you'll have a good chance of agreement to your proposal.

Table 6.3 summarises the above influencing principles according to social preference.

Table 6.3 Summary of influencing principles according to social preference

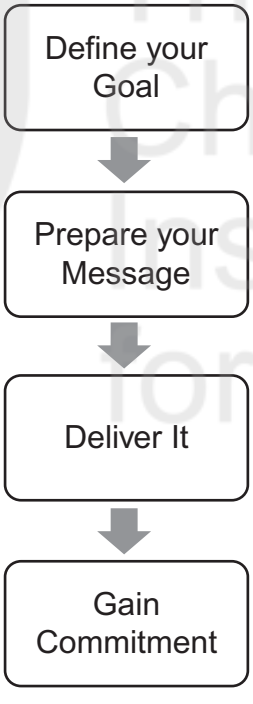
	PEOPLE	TASK
ASK PREFERENCE	**Quadrant 1 – Amiable** Use: ● consensus; ● liking; ● reciprocity.	**Quadrant 2 – Analytical** Use: ● authority; ● consistency; ● consensus.
TELL PREFERENCE	**Quadrant 4 – Expressive** Use: ● liking; ● reciprocity; ● scarcity.	**Quadrant 3 – Driver** Use: ● authority; ● consistency; ● scarcity.

THE INFLUENCING PROCESS

Now we know about the context for influencing at work and the key psychological principles at play when we try to convince someone of our views, we can introduce a practical framework for your use in influencing situations. As we've stated before, the process can be applied to a formal presentation or it can be applied to an informal, but nonetheless important, conversation. The fact that you have spent even just a few minutes mentally thinking through the process will increase the likelihood of your success, particularly as the other person is unlikely to have taken similar time and trouble.

There are many processes available to those seeking to improve the way they influence. The following model (Figure 6.3) is our simple, easy to remember and apply, four step framework.

Figure 6.3 The influencing process



(1) **Define your goal** – Apply the 'outcome frame' to be clear on what it is you want to achieve and how the conversation might play out.

(2) **Prepare your message** – You can use Cialdini's 'six principles' to appeal to the person(s) you are trying to influence. Make sure your proposal is clear on the WIIFMs so that you are emphasising the benefits for the other person. Most influencing situations are 'sales' situations by another name.

(3) **Deliver it** – Ensure you use language that builds rapport with the other person (remember VAKOG from Chapter 2 'Building rapport and sustaining relationships'). Don't forget to employ questions to help you subtly 'lead' the other person to the right conclusion.

(4) **Gain commitment** – You have not influenced unless you have gained both a 'yes' and a commitment to an action plan. Make sure that this follows as soon as possible after the delivery of your message by using appropriate closed questioning techniques.

To reiterate, if you are planning a formal communication or presentation you will have a lot more time to spend thinking through the details of this four-step process. However, even for brief communications, such as a short conference call, mentally thinking through these steps for just a few seconds can help guide your conversation and increase your degree of influence with your audience. Obviously, the time you spend at each stage will be dependent on the complexity of the outcome you're aiming for.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, we have learned that the ability to influence others is a source of personal power, far more important than your position in an organisation's hierarchy. It is a learned skill, rather than something you're born with, and is increasingly important to professional success in our 21st-century, highly networked environment. The ability to influence is derived from an understanding of how and why others behave as they do; 'tune' into them as people to build their inclination to go along with you.

We have considered a range of practical, proven psychological tools and methods to take this understanding into the way we interact with people in our workplaces. Psychometric profiling can be a fantastic way of getting to know yourself and others at a deeper level, but should not be used informally or casually. But let's not over complicate matters. All you really need to do to start improving your influencing skills is identify an upcoming situation that might benefit from one of the approaches we've looked at. Do some preparation and try it out. We're confident that once you've started seeing some results, you'll want to delve more deeply into the secrets of human communication.

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7 WRITTEN COMMUNICATION

INTRODUCTION

Once upon a time, the only way to communicate with people over long distances was by writing them a letter (or, possibly, sending them a verbal message via a courier). Nowadays, telephones (static and mobile), video conferencing and the internet are available and so communication is much more immediate. Nevertheless, there are still occasions when formal written communication is required. We still need to submit written reports, draft agreements or contracts and even write formal letters occasionally, and the standard of writing we demonstrate can have a major effect on the way we are perceived by others.

There are also available to us other written media, such as email and blogging, which bring particular challenges; they have the immediacy of verbal communication and may reach a wide audience, but they also have permanence and leave an audit trail.

We shall consider all of these in this chapter, with a special section on the 'perils and pitfalls' of email and social media.

CONTENTS OF THIS CHAPTER

This chapter covers the following topics:

- the pros and cons of written communication;
- the communication process and the barriers to communication;
- issues to address in written communication;
- a process for written communication;
- types of written communication;
- assessing readability (the 'fog index');
- email (perils and pitfalls).

THE PROS AND CONS OF WRITTEN COMMUNICATION

Before sitting down to write anything, it is worth reflecting for a few moments on the advantages and disadvantages of the written word compared with face-to-face communication. **We often encounter situations where it is worthwhile considering the most appropriate way to communicate. The question to ask is, 'Should I put this issue in writing or would it be better or more appropriate to speak to the recipient of the communication instead?'**

Advantages

- **Creates a permanent record** – Putting something in writing creates a permanent record (an audit trail), which can be used later as a reminder or even to resolve differences of view.
- **Gives time to consider accuracy and completeness** – Whereas with speech a thought is instantly communicated, writing gives the author time to consider, and reconsider, the exact phraseology required to convey the intended meaning. Written communication allows the writer to draft and revise as necessary and provides the opportunity to employ a reviewer to ensure there is no ambiguity or errors.
- **Writing can reach a lot of people simultaneously** – Sending an email to 50 people is obviously a lot quicker than telephoning each one individually.
- **People can deal with the communication in their own time** – People vary in the way they receive information. Some are very quick to respond immediately, others like to take their time and consider their response. Verbal communication tends to favour the former group, but written communication allows people to respond as and when they feel able to.

Disadvantages

- **Provides a permanent record** – Sometimes the permanent record provided by a written communication is not helpful. A common example is where a communication has been sent to a group of people, such as an over-hasty email or internet message. This is discussed in further detail below.
- **Good written communication takes time** – As we have seen, written communication offers the benefit of revision before publication, but this takes time. Even rattling off a short email can take longer than conveying the same information face to face.
- **Not everyone's writing skills are the same** – To be blunt, some people are better writers than others and some people struggle when they have to put together a written document, such as a report. Often, those who are reluctant to go into writing are very articulate face to face and so naturally prefer that medium.
- **Writing can include ambiguities** – It is notoriously difficult to write so that the material can only be read in one way; just consider the problems that

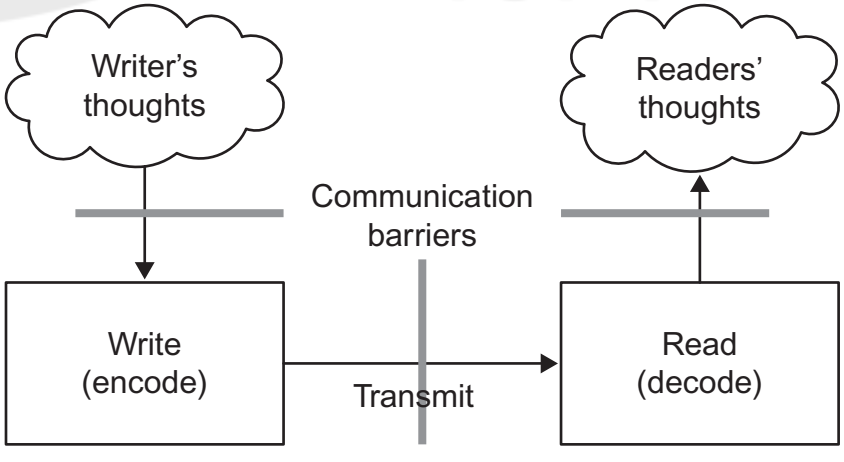
often arise with the wording of legislation that is drafted by professional legal authors. There is no sure-fire way around this although it is often useful to have the document reviewed by someone other than the author.

- **Lack of immediate feedback from recipient(s)** – When speaking 'face to face', the recipient's facial expressions and body language can help us to 'read' the response to the message and adjust the communication as necessary. Even on the telephone, it is possible to tune into the other person's response, such as the level of their agreement or acceptance, and adjust as necessary. With the written word, there is no such feedback and no opportunity to adjust the material until later. As a result, and as we have seen already, there is a possibility that the recipient will not receive the communication in the way the author intended.
- **No certainty that the document has been received or read** – The vagaries of the postal service, problems with company post-rooms, full in-trays and untidy desks, mean there are dozens of ways in which a communication can get lost in transit or overlooked when it gets to the recipient. Even with something like registered delivery, all one can be certain of is that the document has been received (by someone, not necessarily the intended recipient), not that it has been read. At least with verbal communication, you know the message has been heard, even if not fully understood.

THE COMMUNICATION PROCESS AND THE BARRIERS TO COMMUNICATION

Before we consider the different forms of written communication, it is useful to consider the communication process itself and the difficulties that are inherent in it. A simple model of the communication process is shown in Figure 7.1.

Figure 7.1 The communication process



As the figure shows, in writing we are effectively trying to encode our thoughts and the reader is trying to decode the writing into their thoughts. However, during the encoding, transmission and decoding of our thoughts, we encounter barriers to communication and these can be classified broadly into three types: semantic, physical and psychological.

Semantic barriers
These include:

- **Language** – This can be a problem if a message is sent or received by a person with insufficient knowledge of the language in use. Even if we believe we have the right word, there may be nuances of which we are not aware and which can cause confusion or even offence. A US President once visited Poland and, in his speech on arrival, announced that 'I love Poland'. Unfortunately, in Polish there are several words for 'love',[18] and the interpreter chose the one meaning 'carnal love'. Obviously, the President's remarks didn't quite have the effect he intended.
- **Jargon** – Every trade or profession develops its own language and, for those within the group, it provides an effective shorthand method of communication. However, so common is the use of jargon that we often forget that outsiders may not understand it. For example, a common term used within retail organisations is 'SKU' meaning 'Stock Keeping Unit'. But expressed to someone outside that area, it may be meaningless. Although the use of jargon is understandable, what is less acceptable is its deliberate use to confuse or intimidate outsiders.
- **Clarity of writing** – Incorrect grammar or use of vocabulary may alter the meaning or sense of a message. Over-elaborate sentences, with lots of subordinate clauses, are difficult to follow and comprehend. Sometimes, problems like this come about because of ignorance and sometimes it is because the author is trying to demonstrate their expertise. Although some good writers do construct very complex sentences, what is remarkable about the most effective authors is often the simplicity and clarity of their writing. Much academic writing is very detailed and can be hard to follow because it is often peppered with references to other books or documents. While this style is required for academic work (where the author must acknowledge their sources and justify their conclusions), it is not useful in most business communication.

Physical barriers
These include:

- **Distractions** – A problem with written communication is that we cannot control the environment in which our readers are trying to read and understand our words. The sound of telephones, people talking, printers working, building works inside, roadworks outside and the sirens of emergency vehicles all get in the way of understanding correctly. Often, too, people save reading for the train journey home and they are then trying to understand the document

[18] There are reputed to be 30 or more words for 'love' in Greek.

when crammed into an uncomfortable seat, trying not to let others read over their shoulders.

- **Lack of a feedback mechanism** – When we are speaking face to face, our physical actions, stance and facial expression convey much of our meaning (see Chapter 8 'Presentation skills' for a discussion of this). With written communication, this is absent and we are not able to make the required clarifications or adjustments. This means that even more work must go into planning and creating the communication, all the time considering how this may be interpreted (or misinterpreted) by the recipient.
- **Available time** – There are two aspects to this with regard to written communication. First, as we explained earlier, good writing takes time and often in the modern world that is very scarce. Unless the writer is really talented, hurried writing is often poor writing and fails to convey the desired meaning. On the other end of the communication, the recipient may also not have time to review a document properly and so miss or misunderstand vital points. So, lack of time on either side can be a major problem. We might observe here that brevity helps the recipient, but takes more time and effort from the author, so, if shortage of time is not to be a real problem, the onus should be on the author to take sufficient time to communicate well.

Psychological barriers

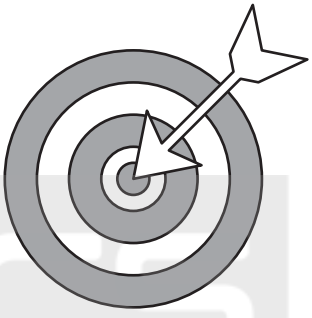
These include:

- **Temperament** – Some people are impatient, or short of time, and want to get things done quickly; this is not a good temperament for writing. A similar temperament in the reader can lead to 'page skipping' or, a very common problem, failing to read to the end of an email or other written communication and missing important points. It is useful for a writer to know something about the probable readers of their communication so that they can, if possible, adjust it to accommodate different temperaments. Listing key points at the beginning of a document or email rather than embedding them within the text can be very helpful.
- **Education and work experiences** – People have different education and work experiences; these will result in them having different levels of written communication skill. To take an obvious example, business school academics will have spent much of their careers reading and writing, and the skills will be natural to them. Someone who has worked in an environment where verbal communication is key, such as sales or training, may not have had as many opportunities to develop this skill.
- **Lack of concentration** – It is impossible to create an effective written communication with your mind elsewhere and, similarly, it is unlikely that a distracted person will comprehend the document properly. A major difficulty for writers in the modern world is the plethora of distractions with which they have to contend: phone calls, emails, text messages, people talking to you, to name but four. There really is no alternative, if a decent job is to be done, but to set aside dedicated time and find somewhere free from interruptions to develop and hone that important email, report or letter.

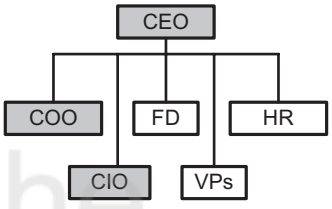
PLANNING THE WRITTEN COMMUNICATION

Before embarking on any written communication, it is important to consider the 'four As' illustrated in Figure 7.2. These help us to analyse the basis for the communication and plan the best approach.

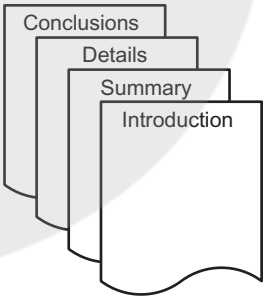
Figure 7.2 The 'four As' for planning a communication



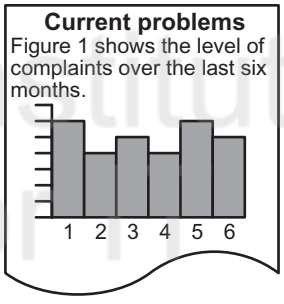
Aim – what is the objective?



Audience – who will read it?



Arrangement – what structure?



Appearance – presentation?

- **Aim** – What am I trying to achieve here? Is it to convey information? Get a decision? Enlist support? Get an apology?
- **Audience** – Who is going to receive this communication? What level are they at in the organisation? What interests them? What will engage and sustain their interest? How do I get a decision from this person?
- **Arrangement** – What would be a logical structure that will enable the audience to make their way through the document and persuade them towards the desired outcome?
- **Appearance** – What will make the document accessible to the audience? Sustain their interest? Provide them with the information they need to make a decision?

TYPES OF WRITTEN COMMUNICATION

The starting point for any written communication (or a verbal one, come to that) is to consider its context: what is the communication's aim or purpose? This simple question can help you decide what communication vehicle is best, for example an email, a phone call or a formal report.

It is also a good discipline to write a statement setting out the aim for the communication: 'As a result of this email/report/proposal/letter, I want the recipient to…' Keeping this sentence in mind, and even in view, when drafting the communication allows us to ask continually whether its form and content are likely to achieve the desired result.

We will now consider the best practice guidelines for three of the most common types of written communication: emails, reports and letters.

Email

Email is the most common and frequent form of written communication in business today. Unlike the traditional written memo, an email can be composed and transmitted quickly to a large number of people, and, therein, are some of its problems.

It is so easy to dash off an email reply that we don't always take the time to consider what to write. The immediacy of email encourages reactive communication, which can be hasty or ill-conceived. In particular, emails can reflect the mood of the writer (good or bad) at the time of composition. This leads to errors, or, even worse, inappropriate comments. In addition, it can be very difficult to strike the right note in business emails. Thinking about the expectations of the audience is critical in these situations.

It is important to treat an email as if it were a more formal communication. Compose it carefully, check it thoroughly, and maybe wait a little before firing it off to see if what you have written it is what you really wanted to say. **A useful tip is to reread emails with the aim of 'finding the error'; it is amazing how often an error can be found.**

Email is central to contemporary communications, so we discuss some of its problems and how to address them in more detail later in this chapter.

Reports

The starting point for creating an effective report is to consider what it is expected to achieve. Is it simply to present the findings of some research? Is it to present recommendations for management decision? Is it to influence the formation of organisational policy? Is it to present the business case for a proposed course of action?

The author needs to be very clear at the outset about the effect the report should have on its readers and should construct a document that gradually proceeds towards that outcome. This involves a consideration of who is the target audience of the report. For example, a document aimed at a board of directors may need to explore the 'big picture' and focus on major financial issues; one for managers more

involved in day-to-day operational issues may need a more detailed consideration of the facts and figures. A report intended for consumption by staff representatives should address the issues that impact upon the day-to-day work. And so on.

Also, the author needs to decide whether the report will take a particular stance and recommend a course of action or simply present alternatives neutrally for decision elsewhere. The former situation is more common but, if an unbiased view is what is required, then the writer must take steps to ensure that the document is, in fact, completely impartial.

As with other means of written communication, it is better to concentrate on the main findings and recommendations in the body of the report and to use appendices for the detailed facts and figures.

Many organisations have developed templates for the structure of a report and, even if they are not mandatory, using them is usually a good idea because the recipients will more easily be able to find their way around the document. If there is no predetermined format, the following structure has been found to be very effective.

(1) **Introduction** – This explains the background to the report, and the objectives and scope of the project or investigation that has given rise to it. The introduction to a report provides an opportunity to engage and persuade the audience. **One effective approach to doing this is to consider the following four-part structure: description of current situation; identification of major issues and problems; evaluation of implications for the future; definition of business needs.** This structure has proven to be extremely useful in persuading an audience of the need to address a business situation, making them more favourably disposed to listening to the conclusions and recommendations.

(2) **Management or Executive Summary** – This part is very important because it is probably the first section that the senior people, the decision-makers, will turn to, and possibly the only part of the report they will read. The summary should be as short as possible, commensurate with conveying the key points. **The management summary should be written last and should distil the body of the report into, ideally, three paragraphs describing:**

- what was found during the investigation;
- the options considered to deal with the issues discovered;
- what action is recommended.

(3) **Body** – Here, the main results of the investigation or whatever are presented. All the relevant factual material should be included but in as concise a form as possible whilst getting down to the essence of the problem or issue. Four key points to consider are:

- all the information presented should be relevant to the argument;
- the points should be made in a logical order so as to build the argument most effectively;
- all the information needed to support the argument should be included and irrelevancies and distractions should be cut out;

- if graphs, tables or other illustrations are used, they should be positioned near the text to which they relate so that they can be examined in relation to that text.

(4) **Conclusions and recommendations** – Here, the conclusions drawn from the arguments presented in the body are set out including, if relevant, a discussion of the alternative courses of action that have been considered. Enough detail is needed here so that the reasons underpinning the recommendations can be understood.

In a short report, conclusions and recommendations can form one section but, where more complex issues are concerned, it may be better to split them into two sections.

(5) **Appendices** – The really detailed information, and especially tables and catalogues of facts, should be placed in appendices. This makes them easily available to those who need to scrutinise them but prevents them from getting in the way of the central arguments presented in the body of the report.

In terms of layout, a good system of headings and subheadings can make it much easier to navigate a report and to understand the relevant significance of the sections. In most cases, three levels prove sufficient.

- **Level one headings** – For the main sections of the report.
- **Level two headings** – To divide the main sections into topics.
- **Level three headings** – For more detailed points.

More levels than this usually make a report very hard to follow.

Letters

Some organisations use letters very rarely these days; others, such as legal organisations, are much more likely to use letters. They are usually directed outside the organisation so need to be developed with care because they can affect the image of the organisation. Business letters could be written for various purposes including:

- to respond to a letter from another party, for example a customer;
- to respond formally to a regulating body or other organisation, for example to HM Revenue and Customs over a tax query;
- to complain to an organisation, a bank or supplier perhaps, about their services;
- to place something formally on record, for example making information available to a solicitor dealing with a legal matter;
- to introduce your organisation to a new customer.

The format, style and tenor of the letter will depend to a large degree on its purpose; a letter to introduce yourself to a new customer, for example, might have a more discursive style than one to your lawyer.

As with all written communications a letter should have a beginning, a middle and an end.

- **Beginning (introduction)** – This should greet the reader, have a title to indicate what the letter is about, and set the scene for what follows. For example:

> ***Dear Mrs Jones,***
>
> *Thank your for your letter of 3rd July concerning your discovery that your cat Tiddles is able to operate your new Whizzo washing machine.*

- **Middle (body of the letter)** – Here, the main issues of the letter are presented and discussed. For example:

> *I have checked with our engineering department and they assure me that there were no feline members of the development team. They can only suppose that Tiddles is an extraordinarily gifted member of her species.*

- **End (conclusion)** – Here, the point of the letter is reached and it concludes with an appropriate sign-off:

> *Perhaps we could recruit Tiddles' services for our next marketing campaign. I shall pass this idea on to our marketing department.*
>
> *Once more, many thanks for your letter.*
>
> *Yours sincerely,*
>
> *Paul H. Stephanides*
>
> *Customer Relations Department*

Although business communications are often less formal than previously, it is worth considering just how informal a letter can or should be. If you know your correspondent well, and are on first name terms when speaking face to face, then beginning the letter 'Dear Alison' (for example) is probably a good idea since it puts you on a friendly basis at the outset. But if this is a first communication, or you don't know the person too well, it is safer to err on the side of caution and go for title and surname (family name) as in 'Dear Dr Cook' (for example).

In line with this, if you start the letter with the person's name, first or family, you should end with 'Yours sincerely'. Use 'Yours faithfully' when the letter starts 'Dear Sir/Madam'. In other words when you are writing to a 'role' rather than to an individual.

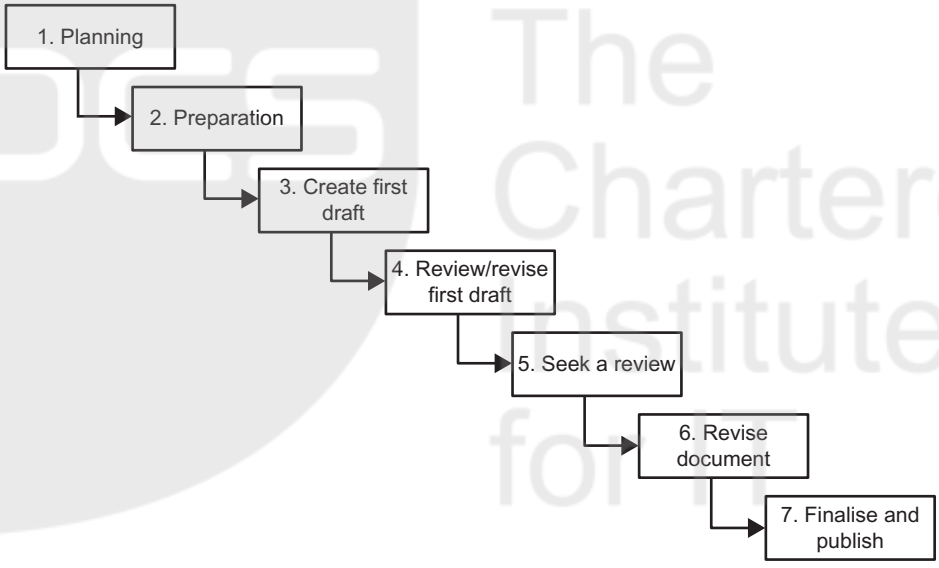
Conciseness and precision of expression should be the key when writing a letter. If a lot of detailed information, such as in-depth product specification, is also to be sent,

then this is probably best confined to appendices or supporting brochures, rather than used to clutter and lengthen the main text.

A PROCESS FOR WRITTEN COMMUNICATION

Figure 7.3 presents a seven-stage structure for developing any form of communication. Obviously, it must be adapted to the demands of specific types of communication. A formal report would probably involve all the stages whereas an email would usually use an abbreviated process. However, it does provide an effective framework for creating a written document.

Figure 7.3 Creating a written communication



In a little more detail, the stages shown in Figure 7.3 are:

(1) **Planning** – This is where the 'four As' allow us to think about who the communication is for, what we are trying to achieve and how best to structure and present the communication.

(2) **Preparation** – We collect our thoughts about the shape and content of the communication and we also do any needed research. This enables us to clarify the 'what' and 'how' of the communication. We map out an outline structure of the communication in terms of main headings and subheadings.

(3) **Create first draft** – We produce an initial draft of the communication. Different authors have differing approaches to this. Some people like to make their first drafts in pen, jotting down their ideas as they have them, crossing things out and so forth. The author has now got to the point where it is not possible to compose without sitting in front of a keyboard. (This is partly

because of a preference to revise while writing and partly a feature of truly terrible handwriting.)

(4) **Review/revise first draft** – With all forms of written communication, including (if not, particularly) email, it is important to review what you have written. You should read through the document to ensure the structure, phraseology and overall message is in line with what you want to communicate. Always read through emails or other forms of internet communication prior to sending. The immediacy of this form can cause people to send a hurried message, even in a business context, and this can often cause problems as discussed later.

(5) **Seek a review** – **If you have written a formal report, it is a good idea to seek a second opinion on its structure, content and effectiveness.** The reviewer should be briefed on the intended purpose of the document so that they can assess the degree to which they think this objective is likely to be achieved.

(6) **Revise document** – You should now revise the document in the light of the reviewer's comments. Of course, you will not necessarily take on board all of these, but the author needs to be clear in their own mind why they do, and do not, accept amendments. Another review may also be sought if major changes have been made.

(7) **Finalise and publish** – Finally, prepare the document for publication. This includes making sure that the formatting and spelling are correct and also giving due consideration to the appearance of the finished document. **Lots of white space, and the use of colour and diagrams, can make a document more accessible and more likely to be read.**

THE EMOTIONAL IMPACT OF WRITING

In Chapter 8 'Presentation skills', we discuss the fact that most of the impact of a face-to-face presentation is delivered by the tone of voice (music) and by the body language of the presenter (dance); the words themselves play only a minor role. Body language is, of course, wholly absent in written communication (although diagrams and pictures can provide part of the visual stimulus to the reader) and the actual words matter very much more. Also, although not to the same extent as with face-to-face communication, the written language can convey tone. With face-to-face communication, however, most people are able to pick up signals from the recipient about how their communication is being received and, if these signals indicate a problem with the tone, they may change their approach or clarify their words. This option is not available with written communication, which, as mentioned previously, provides a permanent record of what is being communicated.

When we receive a written communication that we don't like, we read it over and over again, probably growing angrier and angrier as we do so. Eventually, we may fire off an equally offensive letter in reply – and thus do wars and feuds start. We encountered a situation several years ago where a manager who, incensed about an issue, dictated a very angry memo to his secretary. Fortunately, she took a couple of days to type it up, by which time the manager had calmed down a bit and, on rereading it, decided that sending it would just provoke a huge row within the

organisation. So, instead, he went along to see the other manager to sort out the matter and they had a sensible conversation about the issue.

The message here is **to be aware that what you write does have a significant, and sometimes permanent, emotional impact.** While it may be very satisfying to give vent to your emotions, be aware that this probably isn't the best way to get people to cooperate with you in the future. It might, instead, result in the other party digging their heels in and becoming less accommodating, or responding in kind and triggering a major upset. This is explored further in the section on email communication.

WRITING STYLE

General principles

Business people are generally very busy and do not have time to decipher over-complex language and sentence structures, so **aim for a succinct and purposeful style of writing.** Consider the following:

> *In accordance with your instructions, I proceeded to the region and took command of the armies stationed there. I conducted a thorough reconnaissance of the area and made an assessment of our military strength and that of the local tribes. I also entered into strategic alliances with some of these tribes. Having thus made the most thorough preparations, I embarked on military operations and I am pleased to report that these have been successfully concluded such that the region is now under the complete control of the Republic.*

Interesting and informative, no doubt, but what Julius Caesar apparently wrote was:

> *I came, I saw, I conquered.*

The shorter version obviously has more impact and has been passed down to us as an exemplar of precision and compression. Here is a more modern example of 'business-speak':

> *It is not at all clear, taking into account the prerequisites defined by the Board, and allowing for a degree of interpretation commensurate with changes in the business situation since these prerequisites were defined, that the situation at present encountered by the review team meets the overriding demands of the business in terms of market positioning, competitive stance and customer perception.*

It is likely that most readers would get lost somewhere in here and many may never find their way out at all. Much better is:

The current situation does not meet the business's current needs in terms of market positioning, the competition or customer perception.

This says almost the same thing and in 20 instead of 61 words.

Of course, you must not treat your readers as if they cannot understand words with more than two syllables. On the other hand, consider each phrase and ask yourself if shorter, pithier words are available that might convey your meaning more quickly and directly. But avoid the temptation to use a simpler word if a more complex one has a very precise meaning that you are trying to impart.

Avoid jargon as far as possible. Each profession and discipline has, over time, developed its own vocabulary that, whilst aiding communication between colleagues, can act as a barrier to understanding with others. It is probably acceptable to use the client's jargon (provided that you really understand it). In other cases, where there is no commonly understood word that precisely conveys your meaning, use a jargon word, but provide an explanation of it at its first appearance. The same is true of abbreviations.

Some abbreviations are very common in the English language, like 'e.g.' for 'for example'. But remember that the same abbreviations do not necessarily work in other countries.[19] So, given the international nature of so much business today, why not forget the abbreviation and reproduce the phrase in full?

The active voice and the first person

Consider this phrase:

It is not understood what this process adds to the competitive situation of the company and it is recommended that it be discontinued as soon as is practicable.

By whom is it not understood? By the authors of the document? By the readers of the document? By the chief executive? And to whom is it directed? The phrase is both indirect in expression and rather pompous as well. Try instead:

We cannot see how this process aids competitiveness and we recommend you abandon it as soon as possible.

This says, quite plainly, that we (the authors of the document) recommend that you (the readers of the document) do something. The statement is much more direct; why try to hide the fact that it is your recommendation. After all, it is **your** document.

[19] The German abbreviation for 'for example' is 'z.B.' ('zum Beispiel').

Use the active voice as much as possible and also use the first person. This makes the whole document much more accessible and helps it to read less like an academic treatise and more like a call to action.

Incidentally, Microsoft® Word includes a tool that analyses the grammar of text and also highlights where sentences have been phrased in the passive voice. It can be a bit annoying to use, but it can be a useful tool to analyse your text if you don't have a reviewer handy.

Finally, use the present tense as much as possible. Instead of 'this will imply that', try 'this implies that'. The effect is to make the text more positive and more concise.

Styles to avoid

- **Superfluous descriptions** – Look out for words that add nothing (except bulk) to the text, for example: **true** facts; **free** gift; **component** part; **unfilled** vacancy.
- **Clichés** – Also try to eliminate phrases that, due to overuse, have been robbed of their meaning and impact, for example: **integral** part; **whole** range; **glorious** Technicolor; **innocent** victims.
- **The 'deadwould' stage** – 'Would' and 'will' are much overused in writing and often either add nothing to a sentence or reduce its impact. For example:
  - 'I suggest…' is better than 'I would suggest…';
  - It is apparent that…' makes a greater impression than 'It will be apparent that…'.

ASSESSING READABILITY: THE 'FOG INDEX'

The 'fog index' is a tool that can be used to assess the readability of a piece of text by comparing it with the style used in a range of different documents. It indicates how easily the text could be understood by people of a given reading level. The following shows how to calculate the fog index.

(1) Take a sample of writing of 95–105 words. Hyphenated words count as separate words.

(2) Calculate the average sentence length by dividing the number of words by the number of major punctuation marks (;:–.).

(3) Count the number of words of three or more syllables. Ignore past tenses or participles ('-ing' words) unless they are at least three syllables without the ending.

(4) Add the average sentence length to the number of long words. Multiply this value by 0.4. The result is the fog index.

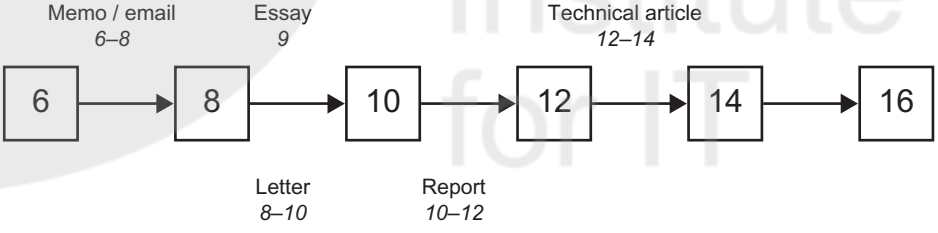
Table 7.1 shows how the fog index figures relate to various typical publications and to the possible readership.

Table 7.1 Readership and the fog index

Fog score	Proportion of people reached	Reading level	Literary style
5	91%	9 years old	Comics
7	80%	11+	'Mills & Boon' novel, *Sun*, *Mirror* newspapers
9	64%		*Readers' Digest*
12	14%	GCSE	*Times*, *Guardian*, *Independent* newspapers
17	2.3%	Graduate	Scientific/professional journals

Finally, Figure 7.4 provides an indication of the target fog index score to be aimed at in various types of communication.

Figure 7.4 Target fog index scores



If you don't relish all the work of calculating the fog index for your document, Microsoft® Word has a built-in feature to assess readability. It uses the Flesch-Kincaid readability test, which relates a piece of text with what should be comprehensible to the various 'grades' in US schools (similar to the 'year numbers' used in UK schools). Depending on which version of the product you use, this feature can be a bit hard to find, but you can search for 'readability' in the 'help' function.

EMAIL: PERILS AND PITFALLS

In the space of a decade or so, email has become a widespread and effective method of communication. It has considerable advantages over other methods:

- It is faster than conventional memos or letters because the message is transmitted electronically and instantaneously.

- It is asynchronous, in that the sender and recipient do not have to be available at the same time (unlike the telephone).
- It is relatively informal, avoiding much of the correctness that has traditionally been part of written communication.
- It is easy to reach a large number of people very quickly.

However, many people complain about email: about the sheer volume of it; about the irrelevance of much that gets into their in-box; about the imprecision of many emails.

Here we provide some suggestions for how to make email usage more effective. It is presented as a series of problems often associated with email, with ideas on how best to deal with each problem.

- **Problem** – Sheer volume.
  - **Guideline** – If you have the facility to generate an out-of-office reply, use it. After they get the first reply back, people may realise there is no point in copying anything else to you for a while. They usually find the receipt of out-of-office replies annoying so will desist unless you really need to receive the email.
  - **Guideline** – Only send/copy emails to people who really need them. Think how you feel about unwanted emails and consider that others are just like you. This is a major cause of the high volumes of emails and can also cause embarrassment if the person replying only meant their communication to be read by the originator.
  - **Guideline** – Do not send attached documents where the content could be easily placed in the body of the email. This will help to reduce data traffic on the internet and prevent the degradation of internet communications.
- **Problem** – Sending to the wrong recipient.
  - **Guideline** – Make it a habit to take a second to double-check the recipients (including those for courtesy copies) before hitting 'Send'. It will help you avoid circulating an email discussing the possible redundancy of a member of staff to the whole team, rather than just management (as personally witnessed a few years ago).
  - **Guideline** – When forwarding an email trail to a new recipient, make sure you read the full trail before pressing 'Send', removing anything that might be confidential. For example, there might have been a lot of internal discussion about a proposed solution, which is then sent on to the customer. At the least, this can be embarrassing and, depending on what is in the email trail, it could be a whole lot worse than that.
- **Problem** – Excessive prioritisation.
  - **Guideline** – If used excessively, 'high priority' emails will be treated in the same way as other emails (i.e. ignored until the reader has time to

clear their in-box). Only use high priority signals on messages that really warrant them. Otherwise, allow recipients to prioritise messages for themselves.

- **Problem** – Email titles bearing no relationship to the message.
  - **Guideline** – Readers appreciate having emails where the 'Subject' is accurately completed and the subject accurately reflects the content of the email. A relevant subject line makes the email easier to locate and retrieve, and helps the reader by providing a clear indication of its contents. So always provide titles for emails, make sure they are meaningful titles, and change them, as necessary, when forwarding or replying to make sure that message content and title agree.
- **Problem** – Not knowing whether/when a message has been received.
  - **Guideline** – Acknowledge received emails straight away unless a message is 'for information only' and does not require a reply. Even if you cannot make a substantive reply (perhaps because you need to do some research first), you can at least let the sender know that you're working on it.
  - **Guideline** – If you are sending an email, do not assume that your email has been received, understood or acted upon. Even if you have received an automated acknowledgement, you cannot assume that the recipient has digested what you wrote or, even less, acted upon it. If the matter is important, you must follow up, ideally in person or by telephone, to make sure that the desired action is in hand.
- **Problem** – Inappropriate tone and language.

  As mentioned earlier, one of the beauties of email is that it's a lot quicker than conventional written communication. In part this is because it has evolved a simpler style of salutation and complementary close (e.g. 'Dear Clive' and 'Yours sincerely' are more often rendered in email as 'Clive' and 'Cheers' or 'Best regards' respectively).
  - **Guideline** – Read all emails thoroughly before sending them and consider how they are likely to be received. A curt message that begins with just the person's name (or omits it altogether) and does not conclude with a 'Regards' may cause offence. In addition, emoticons, unless the person really is a good friend, are best left to texts or social media communications.
- **Problem** – Poor grammar, punctuation and spelling.
  - **Guideline** – The cardinal sin in **any** form of written communication. Reread each email carefully before sending and check for grammar, punctuation and spelling errors. If your email package has a spelling checker, use it; otherwise, if the email is a long one, you could always compose the text in a word-processing package first, spell check it and then paste it into your email.
- **Problem** – A private email enters the public domain.
  - **Guideline** – There are many examples in the media where a private email exchange has made it into the public domain, sometimes causing much

upset and embarrassment. Never say anything in an email that you would not like to be read by a wider community. ***Don't*** **be tempted to say something in an email that would upset or offend.**

WRITING FOR THE WEB

The evolution of Web 2.0 websites in the early years of this century has revolutionised written communications. Providing free and open platforms for users to share, collaborate and comment on topics of interest, the technology has been embraced enthusiastically by everyone with access to a computer. Hundreds of millions of people around the globe have Facebook and/or LinkedIn accounts, from senior citizens in LlanfairPG to the President of the USA.[20] Company intranets are increasingly being developed as social networks for people working in the organisation to share experiences and expertise with colleagues around the world. Indeed, by 2014, Gartner predicts that social media will overtake email as the primary vehicle for interpersonal communication for 20 per cent of business users.[21]

As a professional, if you're not already writing for the web through your intranet, LinkedIn profile, Twitter feed or blog, then chances are in the next five years you most definitely will be. But writing for the web needs to be approached with some care if you want to stand out from the crowd. It's sadly true that a significant proportion of the content contributed by 'professionals' to the web is rambling, poorly presented and littered with spelling/grammatical errors. By following a few simple rules you can make sure your web communications with employers, customers or colleagues, have the right impact and enhance your credibility.

First, it's worth briefly discussing the specific challenges that are presented when writing for the web. These are important because people simply don't read web pages in the same way as they read printed pages:

- People read up to 25 per cent slower from the screen than a printed page.
- Eighty per cent of the time people don't read web pages word for word. They scan.
- If they don't find what they're looking for within seconds, they will move on.

When contributing content to a website, internal or external, it is critical that you write in a way that grabs and holds the reader's attention immediately. **Here are our top tips for achieving this.**

- Think of your web page as an executive summary, where you have to get all your points across on one side of A4. Put your conclusion at the beginning, get to the point in the first paragraph, then expand upon it.
- Use warm and engaging language. Avoid excessive formality, such as writing in the third person.

[20] Llanfairpwllgwyngyllgogerychwyrndrobwllllantysiliogogogoch (LlanfairPG) is a remote village in north Wales, famous for having the longest name in Britain.
[21] Monica Basso, research vice president at Gartner. Speaking at the company's Gartner Symposium/ITxpo 2010.

- Write only one concept per paragraph. Your goal is short, punchy paragraphs rather than long rambling ones.
- Your sentences should be concise. 'Streams of consciousness' have no place on the web.
- Use short lists rather than paragraphs where appropriate. It breaks up the text and they are easier for the reader to scan and remember.
- Subheadings can enable the reader to find the precise information they're looking for quickly and easily. It also helps search engines locate your content.
- Ensure your page concludes with a call to action. What do you want your reader to do next? Contact you? Read another page? Comment?
- **Always** proofread your content before clicking 'Submit'. You don't want people to comment on your spelling or grammatical mistakes rather than the content.
- Finally, take time to think about whether the content **should** be online in the first place. Is it really relevant to the readers you're aiming at?

CONCLUSION

As this chapter has shown, written communication continues to be an important skill to master in the 21st century and takes many forms. The chapter has provided many guidelines and tips to improve your written communication, but there are two points that we wish to emphasise above all:

- Plan any communication and take into account the needs of the audience and the limitations of the communication medium chosen.
- Review the communication carefully before sending. Adopt the 'find the error' approach.

FURTHER READING

Austin, T. (ed.) (2003) *The Times Style and Usage Guide*. Times Books.

Bryson, B. (2009) *Troublesome Words*. Penguin.

Gowers, E., Greenbaum, S. and Whitcut, J. (2004) *The Complete Plain Words*. 3rd edition. Penguin.

Stanton, N. (2003) *Mastering Communication*. 4th edition. Palgrave MacMillan.

8 PRESENTATION SKILLS

INTRODUCTION

Whether we like it or not, and many of us do not like it, the ability to plan, develop and deliver an effective presentation is a key skill in today's business world. A few people seem to have natural gifts in this area, but most of us have to acquire the necessary skills through practice. The good news, though, is that the basic principles of a good presentation are well established and the psychological difficulties can be controlled, if not completely overcome. In this chapter, we shall consider first the technical aspects of a good presentation and then the more personal issues associated with presenting yourself effectively.

CONTENTS OF THIS CHAPTER

This chapter covers the following topics:

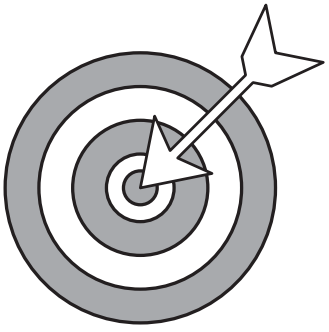
- planning the presentation;
- developing the presentation;
- speaker's notes;
- presentation aids;
- delivering the presentation;
- the team presentation.

PLANNING THE PRESENTATION

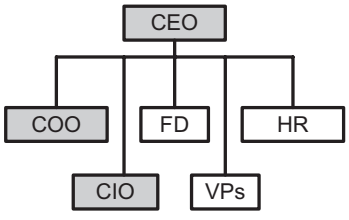
The 'four As' framework that we discussed in Chapter 7 for written communication is also a good technique for planning a presentation. The 'four As' are aim, audience, arrangement and appearance and are shown, slightly modified, in Figure 8.1.

Their relevance to planning presentations are described below.

Figure 8.1 The 'four As' for planning a presentation

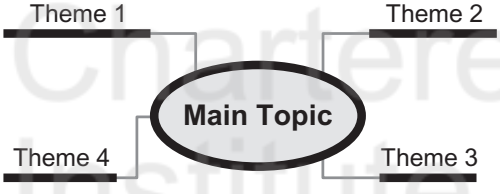


Aim – what is the objective??



Audience – who will attend?

Appearance – presentation?



Arrangement – what structure?

Aim

To state the obvious, the starting point for an effective presentation is to be clear what it is intended to achieve. For example, is it:

- to impart information to people?
- to explain complex technical issues?
- to address complaints or problems?
- to sell a product or service?
- to get someone to agree to a business case?

Clearly, the purpose of the presentation is different in each of these cases and its content and emphasis must be designed accordingly. **It is crucial that the**

presenter is sure what is to be achieved by the presentation before beginning to design it. When thinking about this, it is also vital to consider the view of the audience and what they want from the presentation. These last points bring us onto the second of the 'four As'.

Audience

Different audiences have different backgrounds and experiences, and also have different expectations and needs from a presentation. Do they want to find out some important information? Do they want to learn about a new approach or technique? Do they want to understand the implications of choosing a particular supplier or software package? Do they want to be entertained? It is possible that the answer could be 'all of the above'. As a presenter, you should always consider the audience's needs and ensure as far as possible that they are met.

To understand audience needs, write a list of what an audience member would want from the presentation you are about to give and then compare this with your aims (as discussed above). It is surprising how often there are differences and these will give you some key insights into what you need to achieve in your presentation.

When you have considered the audience's aims in general, it is then important to think about individuals. Even within a single organisation, people have differing personality types and approach presentations differently. Some people are the 'reflector/theorists' referred to in Chapter 12 'Facilitation', who like to understand the background context and underlying theory; others are 'activists' who want to do something. Some people like a vision, the 'big picture', others are interested in evidence and detail. Some people attend presentations where they are already well-informed about the subject; others attend to learn. It is always wise to think about who is attending the presentation and what is known about them as individuals. Sometimes, the attendees are an unknown quantity and you will have to try to think about meeting a range of needs. This may be done by providing a balance of theory and practice, overview and detail, and so on.

Where you are to give a formal presentation in a business context, some research into the backgrounds and personalities of the audience can pay dividends. Social networking sites, such as Linkedin, Facebook and Twitter, can be invaluable in helping with this.

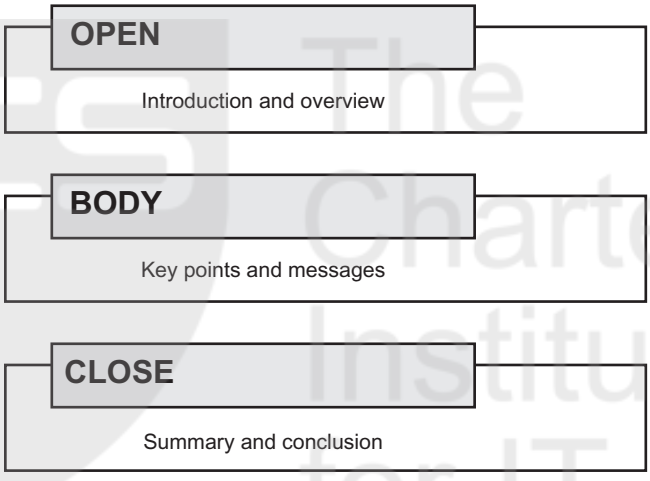
Having done some research, a pretty obvious difficulty is what to do when faced with a mixture of personalities. The chief executive, for instance, prefers to be given the 'big picture', but the influential finance director wants to know the details, and both are expected to have a say in the decision. In this situation, it is usually a good idea to adopt a top-down approach, beginning with the overview picture and moving gradually into more detail, and then provide printed documents containing additional information for those interested in the detail. There is an obvious danger that some audience members might spend the presentation looking through this documentation rather than concentrating on the presentation itself. The easiest way to avoid this is to provide the supporting documents when required or even at the end of the presentation and ensure some time is left to discuss the information.

Arrangement
There is an established formula for a presentation that is still used because it encapsulates a lot of common sense and practical experience:

- **Tell 'em what you're going to tell' em** ('*and now I am going to discuss...*')
- **Tell 'em** (the presentation itself).
- **Tell 'em what you've told' em** ('*...so we have covered...*').

Let us expand this into a more detailed formula as shown in Figure 8.2.

Figure 8.2 Structure of a presentation



The reasoning behind this three-part formula is simple: audiences need a framework on which to hang their understanding and like to know the overall coverage of the presentation. Further, reiterating the key messages helps to ensure that they are lodged in the audience members' minds.

Open: Setting the scene
Set the scene and explain what the presentation is going to cover. If possible, try to find an opening with impact that will get the attention of the audience. For example, if presenting to a group of senior managers, you might open with 'How to make sure business changes are successful' or 'Why your organisation is wasting £2 million per year'. (If neither of those interest senior managers, then the presentation isn't going anywhere useful.) During this curtain-raising stage, too, set out the general shape of the presentation to come.

Body of the presentation
The main part of the presentation should set out the detailed information, the findings of the study, the logic leading to the recommendations and so forth. Avoid the temptation to put in too much detail at this stage.

Closing and concluding

At the end of the presentation, draw the themes you have explored together and make the conclusion as clear as possible. As at the beginning, try to end with an impactful statement.

Defining the detail

Having worked out the general shape of the presentation, you can now give further thought to the detailed points to be made and the order of making them. It is important that the audience are given enough information to help them understand the ideas being presented and, if relevant, the nature of the decision they are being asked to make. But bear in mind that people can only absorb so much information at a time and try to adopt the maxim 'less is more' as far as the detailed arguments are concerned.

Appearance

There are several aspects to this, for example: how the presenter looks and comes over to their audience; what the presentation looks like (in terms of slides and other presentation aids). We discuss these points in more detail later in this chapter.

DEVELOPING THE PRESENTATION

In developing the presentation, it is vital to keep the overall aim in mind. This should provide a central, underlying theme for the presentation and the 'glue' that binds it all together.

Developing the structure

The aim needs to be expanded into the key messages to be delivered in the presentation. **There is an important issue to bear in mind here: do not try to make too many points.** The reason for this is straightforward: if too many points are covered, the overall message will be diluted and confused, and the impact of the presentation will be blunted.

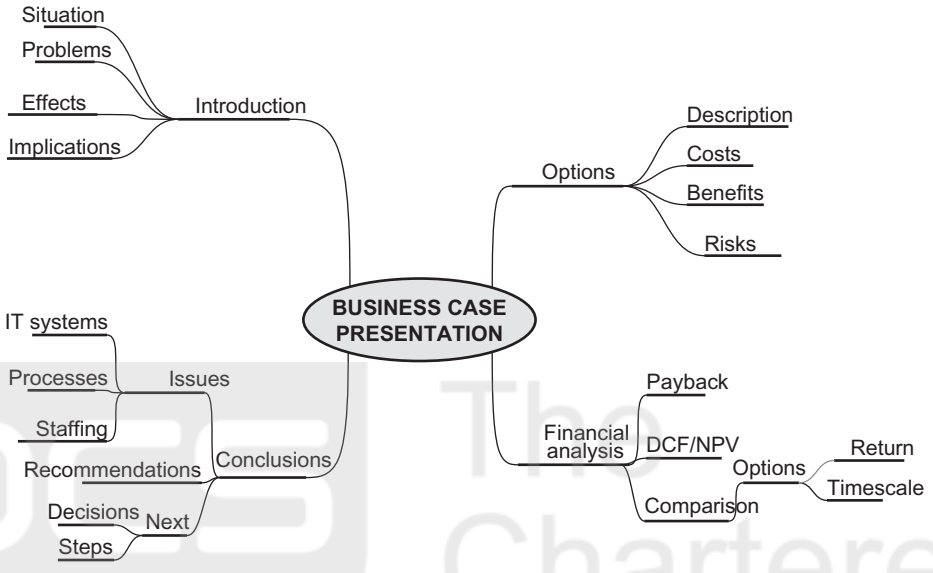
One way of developing the key themes is to use a mind map. The overall aim of the presentation is shown in the centre of the diagram, the key themes become the branches and then the 'twigs' can be populated with the detail to be presented. An example mind map is shown in Figure 8.3. Mind maps are discussed further in Chapter 12 'Facilitation'.

Developing the sequence

If a presentation is to be effective and polished, the sequence of the themes and detailed points need to flow. Do this by setting out the key themes in the order that makes most sense and then consider how you move from one theme to the next; they should build on each other and link together in a logical way. If the themes don't link, you may need to change them. One way of thinking about this is to see the presentation as a journey from A (the start) to B (the conclusion); you want to take the audience with you along a route that is logical and coherent.

If this is an important presentation, it is a good idea to write out the presentation in full once you have identified the key themes and the overall structure.

Figure 8.3 Example mind map for a presentation



This is a further check that the sequence works and enables you to check the 'flow' of the words and test whether they work properly. **It is important to say the words out loud to see how they sound and to practise delivering the messages.** Don't forget that the spoken word is different from writing, so saying the proposed words will help to test whether they will come over properly when delivered to the audience.

Any supporting slides or documents should be developed in parallel with the script to check that they fit together and are in alignment.

SPEAKER'S NOTES

Although there are gifted speakers who seem able to memorise a lot of information, nearly everyone will need supporting notes of some sort. Even if we think of two of possibly the best political speakers in recent decades (British Prime Minister Tony Blair and US President Barack Obama), it will be remembered that both make extensive use of autocues when these are available. At the Conservative Party Conference at which David Cameron established himself as an effective speaker, it was remarked that he delivered quite a long speech without notes at all; but it is most probable that he was able to do this because of many hours spent learning and rehearsing the speech.

Most of us will not have an autocue available and for many presentations it would not be helpful even if it were a possibility. This means that we have to think about how we remember what we intended to say. There are four major options:

- full script;
- cue cards;
- a slide overview;
- learn the presentation.

Each of these has advantages and disadvantages. The most appropriate form depends largely upon the nature of the presentation and the audience. We discuss each approach below.

Full script

One possibility is to use the presentation text that has been written out in full detail, with indicators stating when to use each slide, introduce an exercise, provoke a discussion, handout a document or use a display board. As mentioned earlier, this approach lets the presenter think through the themes and points in detail, and also provides a good basis for rehearsing the presentation. Many presenters develop a script for preparation purposes only because it is such a useful discipline for ensuring the presentation will work. If using the script to present, there is a danger that the presenter may retreat into just reading it, especially if they are nervous or encounter audience indifference. Reading the script **never** works; it removes any possibility of engagement between presenter and audience causing people to become distracted, disengaged and stop listening. For this reason, we would not recommend using a detailed script during the presentation; it is most useful in the earlier stages of preparation while the presenter is becoming familiar with the material.

Cue cards

Cue cards are used to list the key points and can be very useful. The cards should be written in sufficient detail to remind the presenter of the points to make and should reflect the order of the presentation. They are particularly useful if they are organised so that each card relates to a specific theme, slide or other presentation aid. As with a script, it is important to practise delivering a presentation using cue cards. They help to ensure a less rigid style of delivery than using a full script and are more flexible. The one potential downside is that you have to remember what to say about each point. It is also a good idea to number the cards so that, if you drop them or they get out of order, you can reorder them easily.

Slide overview

Another useful approach is to print out the slides in reduced size, perhaps six or even nine to a page. This allows you to see that slides are coming up next and helps to ensure that the presentation flows well. Also, a slide overview will have a space alongside each slide that may be used to note any key points to be made. The result is similar to cue cards, but uses the slides as visual cues. Again, you have to remember the detailed points you wish to make and, for an important presentation, it is a good idea to write out the presentation in full as part of your preparation.

Learn the presentation

As mentioned earlier, there has been a trend for some public speakers to learn the presentation rather than use a script or other reminders. This is because it is undoubtedly the best approach for engaging with the audience. It enables you to

focus your attention completely on them and pick up any body language or other feedback. Having said that, it can be risky because it is all too easy to forget a particular point or lose the sequence. A similar possibility is to learn the presentation and use the slides as a form of autocue as they are being displayed. If you do this, try not to keep looking behind at the displayed slides. Instead, place the laptop in front of you where you can see the current slide. This approach is not recommended for more formal, important presentations unless the presenter has an excellent memory and the confidence to deliver without the safety net of an autocue, slides or cue cards.

PRESENTATION AIDS

Slides and other visual aids can create all sorts of difficulties for presenters, usually because they haven't thought through how to use them effectively or practised handling them in advance. The two most commonly used methods of providing images to support the presentation, computer-projected slide shows using software such as Microsoft® PowerPoint® and flip-charts/whiteboards, are discussed here. These are the presentation tools likely to be available to most presenters.

Automated slide shows

'Death by PowerPoint®' has become a common phrase in business today and one can easily understand why. Practically everyone has a story of sitting through an hour or more of a presenter showing bullet-point slide after bullet-point slide and adding to the tedium by laboriously reading each one to the audience. Sometimes this approach is made even worse by incessant use of the 'build' function for each bullet point. This poor impression of PowerPoint® is rather unfortunate because, used properly, it can really help to enliven a presentation. It should also be pointed out that this syndrome has also been observed where lists on whiteboards or flip charts are read to the audience.

Assuming that we are using PowerPoint® or another presentational software package, here are some pointers to making the slide show more effective.[22]

Number of slides

Think about how many slides you really need and ration yourself according to the proposed length of the presentation. As a very rough guide, **allow yourself about two–three minutes per slide, which would amount to 10–15 slides (maximum) for a half-hour presentation.**

Bullet-point slides

Try to avoid bullet-point slides wherever possible (Figure 8.4). There are three key messages here:

- A slideshow entirely composed of lists of bullet points does not engage and is not attractive. Try to replace some with other forms and media. For example, a simple graph as shown in Figure 8.5 is a much better approach. There is a world of shapes, colours, pictures, film stills or even video clips; it is a good idea to use them.

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http://prezi.com offers presentational software.

Figure 8.4 The ubiquitous bullet-point slide

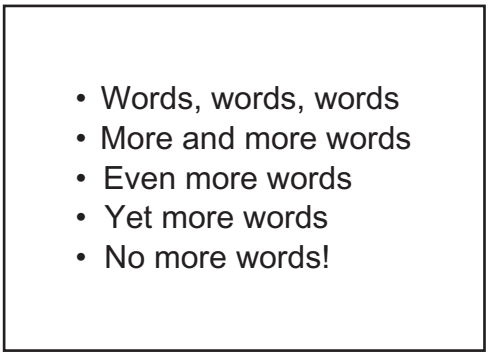
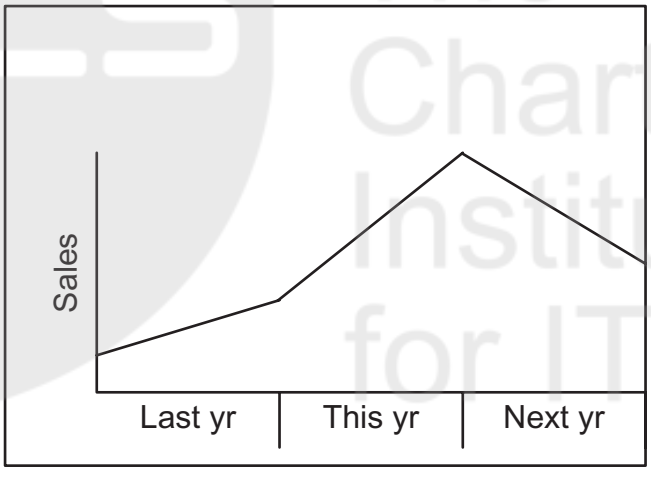


Figure 8.5 Graphical slide

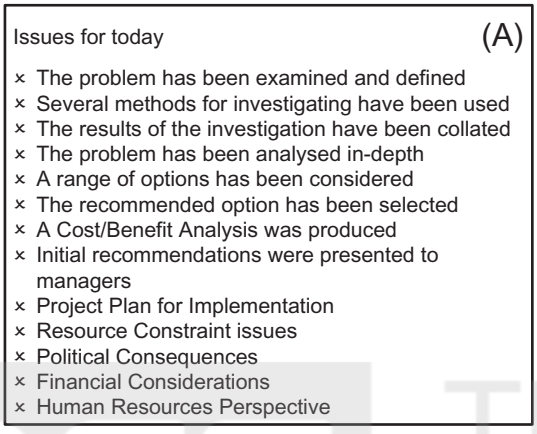


- **If you have to include bullet-point slides, don't read them to the audience. They are able to do this for themselves.** People can read quicker than you can speak, so, while you are reading, they will have assimilated the point made in the text and will be waiting for you to finish. Instead, keep the text succinct and find something interesting to say about the points listed, if possible using them as a basis for discussion.

- **Don't make the bullet points into complete sentences.** Firstly, because you will have to use a small font, which will be unreadable by the audience, and secondly, because it is a good idea to leave yourself something to say that will add to the slide.

Consider slides A and B in Figure 8.6. Slide A is far too busy; it looks like a partial script. Also, the main heading is far too small. Slide B has a more prominent heading and the number of bullet points has been reduced (and the text enlarged accordingly).

Figure 8.6 Example bullet-point slides



Tables

Tables of figures are usually difficult to read. If you can, turn them, into graphs or pie charts, or something more visual. Consider the slide in Figure 8.7, which shows a lot of detail that is difficult to assimilate. Figure 8.8 shows similar information in a more easily digested graphical format.

Figure 8.7 Example of data presentation

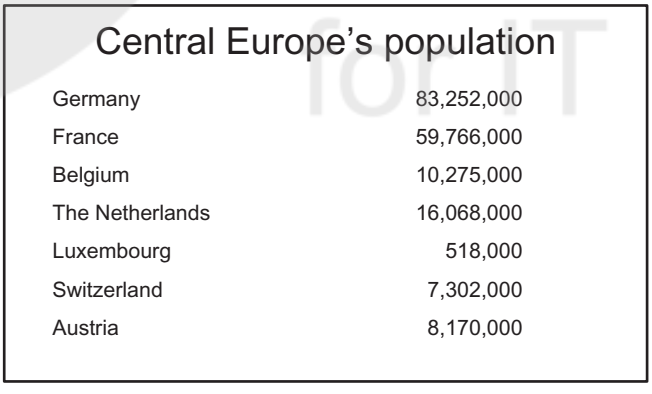
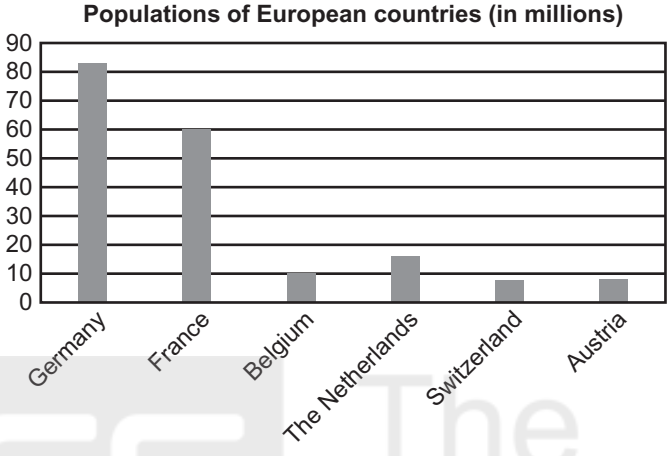


Figure 8.8 Graphical example of data presentation



Use of fonts

Be consistent in the use of fonts and presentation of text. A slide show in which the fonts and font sizes change from slide to slide, or the heading moves from left-justified to centred to right-justified, looks extremely messy and unprofessional.

Use large font: 40-point for the slide heading and a minimum of 24-point anywhere else.

Use of colour

Use colour to enliven the presentation, but use it carefully. Too much colour can be distracting in the way that too little can be boring. Avoid strong or dark colours for backgrounds if there is lettering on the slides because it makes the text difficult to read.

Every data projector, and every projection screen, seems to display colours differently. This is particularly the case if the projector is old; it can ruin your carefully produced slides by presenting strange, washed-out colours. Ideally, you should do a run-through using the exact equipment you will be using on the day of the presentation but, if you cannot, play safe and use only the main colour palette and black text.

Clip art

Avoid clip-art as far as possible. People have seen most of it before and very rarely does it present exactly what you want to convey. Pictures and photos can be much more imaginative and evocative.

Animations

Similarly, **beware the temptation to use the whole palette of animation tricks that the software provides because too much of this becomes very irritating indeed.** If you are using animation, select a standard approach and use it consistently.

Transitions

Select one transition to use between slides and stick to that; don't have a different transition between every slide. It is helpful to use a hand-held wireless remote to change the slides because this will allow you to get away from the laptop and present more naturally without needing to walk back to the keyboard each time. Make sure you are familiar with the controller and check the batteries before you start. Also, resist using the laser pointer on the remote (or for that matter any pointer) too much.

Flip charts and whiteboards

Possibly, the biggest advantage of flip harts and whiteboards is that they don't require electricity and don't shut down in the middle of a presentation. However, given their relative informality, they are not usually appropriate for important business presentations.

Flip charts are extremely simple to use and very flexible. They allow for spontaneity in a presentation, allowing the presenter to veer away from the defined script, jot down additional points or create a drawing or diagram to respond to the developing needs of the audience. As a result, they tend to be more engaging as a presentation tool than automated slideshows. However, they usually need to be moved into a position where the audience can read what is written or drawn and, if they are used in conjunction with projected slides, they have to be moved out of the projection beam when not in use; this can be tricky with flip charts that are not easily moveable. Also, because the legs to the flip chart tend to sit at an angle, they offer an opportunity to trip over them on most occasions. A flip chart pad can be used to retain ideas and images for use later in the presentation or for follow-up work, which in some situations is extremely useful.

Whiteboards offer similar advantages to flip charts, but they are often fixed, which means that they may not be easily viewed by some audience members. If this is the case, it is best not to use the whiteboard and ask for a flip chart instead. Further, whiteboards have to be erased in order to be reused, which can mean you lose information unless you have a smart whiteboard with a printing facility.

Some key things to remember when using a flip chart or whiteboard are listed below.

Pens

Make sure you have working pens. Pens don't seem to last for any time at all, so, for an important presentation, bring a brand-new set with you and don't rely on those provided by the venue. If you have to rely on the pens provided, make sure you check that they will write before beginning the presentation. And, a very important tip, always check that the pens are non-permanent before using them on a whiteboard; there have been many instances of images being drawn on whiteboards with permanent markers. At best, this can be very embarrassing, but at worst you may seriously damage your reputation.[23]

[23] If you have inadvertently written on a whiteboard with a permanent marker there is a way of removing the image as long as you realise what you have done reasonably quickly. Use a non-permanent marker to write or draw over the permanent image, then wipe off immediately with a cloth or paper towel. The non-permanent ink will lift the permanent image.

Writing and drawing

Make sure your writing and drawing is sufficiently large to be read by the audience, and if your handwriting isn't all that great, use capital letters. Further, try to write straight rather than sloping downwards. Do this either by standing square on to the flip chart (although this may not help with audience engagement) or by fixing your eye line straight across on the far side of the paper and writing towards that point. Some flip chart pads have faint lines drawn on them, but in our experience they are rarely available.

If you wish to develop a complex diagram apparently spontaneously, draw it faintly in advance in pencil on the flip chart and then go over it with the marker pen during the presentation. Faint pencil lines can't be seen from the audience position.

Engaging with the audience

The time taken to draw a diagram or write down text on a flip chart or whiteboard will slow down the presentation and limit your ability to maintain eye contact with the audience. **Pausing to comment or ask questions while building the image helps to continue the engagement with the audience, allowing you to look at the group members and re-establish eye contact.** Doing this smoothly can take a bit of practice and confidence. Also, bear in mind that neither flip charts nor whiteboards are very useful when presenting to a large group, say over 20 people, because they will not be read easily by everyone and are unlikely to provide space for a sufficiently large image; both of these issues will result in a lack of audience engagement.

DELIVERING THE PRESENTATION

Rehearsing

As any actor or dancer will confirm, there is no substitute for thorough rehearsal if a performance is to succeed. The same is true of a presentation, which is, after all, a performance itself. The presenter should go through the whole presentation several times, speaking the words out loud and synchronising with the slides. Family members or close colleagues can be very helpful here, although they may have to be cajoled if they are expected to sit through the presentation over and over again. Initially, the presenter should use the full script they wrote when creating the presentation but, gradually, that can be replaced by more abbreviated cue cards. Delivering the presentation out loud will reveal any parts that looked acceptable on paper but don't work that well in practice, allowing adjustments to be made before the real event. It also enables you to ensure that the links between slides or points are seamless. Presentations where the presenter is continually hesitating or failing to show any connection between the different ideas in the speech can seem, at best, unrehearsed and, at worst, unprofessional.

The following adage is a cliché, but correct nevertheless:

> Fail to prepare, prepare to fail!

Arriving at the venue

Always try to arrive at the venue where you will be delivering the presentation in plenty of time. It is often the case that the equipment will need to be set up, the computer linked to the projector, the slides located and so on. Arriving early will provide the opportunity to rework your plans and handle any difficulties.

In the majority of presentations, you will have little control over the venue and you may have to use whatever equipment is available. (This is particularly the case in competitive sales presentations, where the various bidders are invited in one after the other to explain their offerings.) If you have arrived early though, there is a greater chance that you can take a look at the venue, check the equipment beforehand and resolve any issues.

The equipment

One common problem is getting a laptop computer to communicate properly with a data projector. This can take some time if the settings need to be adjusted or the machines need to be switched on in a particular order. Arriving early avoids the need for setting up the equipment while an expectant audience looks on.

Even the low-tech flip chart and whiteboard can present problems. The whiteboard or flip chart may be fixed to the wall and the location may not suit your presentation. Sometimes, they are fixed so high on the wall that anyone of low to medium height cannot reach them or have to begin writing halfway up the board. Alternatively, there may not be any boards available and you may need to request one. Or additional paper may be needed because the pad has run out. Again, arriving in plenty of time helps to make sure these issues are resolved before the audience turns up.

Impact and communication

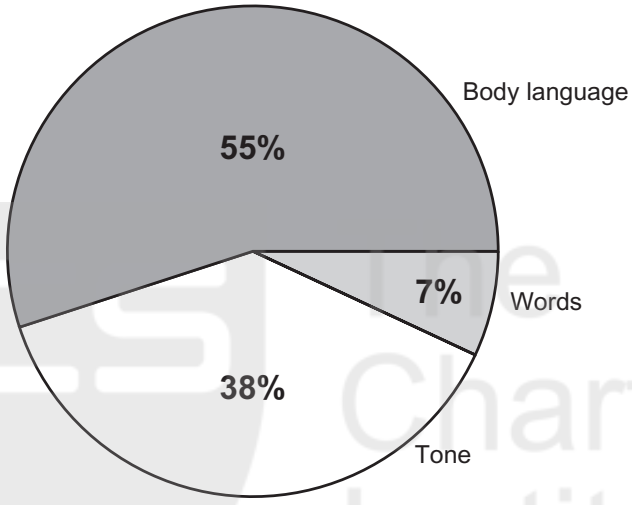
A presenter needs to look businesslike and appropriate to the situation in order to be taken seriously. A key thing to avoid in a presentation is that the presenter's appearance distracts, or detracts, from their message. This means that, if the presenter neither works for the organisation nor has a good understanding of the organisation's culture, some research is needed to find out what is the expected mode of dress in the organisation. As mentioned in Chapter 2 'Building rapport and sustaining relationships', we have assumed that professionals will have thought through the 'what to wear' issues and will have recognised that some items are inappropriate when delivering a presentation.

Some people seem to have a natural dress sense and know what will work for most situations. For the rest of us, the important point is to think about the image you wish to project, ensure the image is appropriate and dress to achieve this. There are various consultancies, books and even websites that can provide good advice; some are listed in the 'Further reading' section for this chapter.

During a presentation, we are presenting concepts, ideas and visions, and trying to persuade the audience that they are valid. But we are also, to a greater or lesser extent, presenting ourselves. A lot of people refuse to accept this, arguing, apparently logically enough, that it is the quality of the ideas and of the evidence that should sway a decision; but, to put it very bluntly, they are wrong. The way we look, and the way we sound, does have an impact on the audience, both positively and negatively.

The most widely quoted model on this subject, and also very widely misinterpreted, is the 7–38–55 rule put forward by Professor Albert Mehrabian in 1981 and illustrated in Figure 8.9. This rule was discussed in Chapter 2, but we have repeated it here because of the relevance when communicating via a presentation.

Figure 8.9 Mehrabian's elements in communication



The reason why Mehrabian is so often misquoted is that, in his research, he was specifically looking at the way a person conveys their like, or dislike, of something. He never claimed that his 7–38–55 breakdown was true of all communication, and other studies have come to slightly different conclusions. Nevertheless, and with this caveat in mind, let us consider these three elements of impact.

Words

These are the words that the presenter uses and must be chosen carefully and articulated clearly. It is important not to use sentences that are too convoluted or the audience will be confused. Similarly, avoid using jargon, unless it is common within the organisation. Be aware, though, that it will be the key phrases and themes that will be remembered and most of the words will soon be forgotten. This is another reason why it is vital to identify the (small number of) key themes and reiterate them throughout the presentation.

Tone

The tone and inflexion adopted by the presenter can make a greater impression than the words themselves. Humans seem to have well-developed antennae that can detect, for instance, uncertainty or insincerity in the tone of voice. The lesson here, then, is clear: know what you are talking about and make sure you really do believe in it. Enthusiasm is infectious in a presentation. Also, people do have verbal mannerisms (like using the word 'actually' to preface every sentence) and it is important to understand what these are and get them under control because they can otherwise prove irritating to the audience.

Body language

According to Mehrabian, body language is the most powerful element of communication. Chapter 2 discusses body language and the particular areas to consider when building rapport with people – another important element when presenting.

Annoying habits

Related to the last point, presenters can display unhelpful body language. Here are some things that can, at best, distract and, at worse, downright antagonise an audience.

Fiddling and jiggling

If you have something in your hands as a presenter, you are almost bound to fiddle with it. People open and close telescopic pointers, they uncap and recap pens, and they jingle the coins in their pockets. **So, empty out your pockets before the presentation and put other things down.** Probably, in the 21st century, pointers aren't a good idea anyway because they evoke images of Victorian schoolmasters or generals giving pep talks before battle. (The modern equivalent, the laser pointer, is almost as bad and the little red dot jiggling around on the screen can get very irritating indeed. Try not to start using it too much because using a laser pointer is a difficult habit to break.)

Walking around

Without being totally static and wooden, it's a good idea to remain in roughly the same place because excessive moving around is distracting to the audience. In particular, if you're projecting slides, don't walk in front of them.

Hand movements

Hand and arm movements can be very distracting to the audience, to the point that they cease to listen to the presenter. There is also the possibility that the message conveyed by the hand or arm movements (which are read more or less subliminally by the audience) contradict what the presenter is trying to say. If this is something that you find difficult to stop, try using a whiteboard or flip chart during presentations; they enable you to write, draw or even just rest your hands, and stop you from waving them around.

Engaging with the audience

Surveying the group

When presenting it is important that you face the audience members and engage with them. Try not to look solely at the people you feel are supportive to your cause, tempting though this might be. The objects of your focus will feel they are under the spotlight and the rest of the audience will feel that they are being ignored. **Instead, use a 'lighthouse sweep' technique, where you survey the entire audience, moving your gaze slowly from left to right and back again.** At the same time, focus on the rear of the room for most of the time, occasionally moving towards the front if you feel sufficiently confident.

Handling questions and interruptions

Handling questions during a presentation can be a tricky issue. It is usually a good idea to state how questions will be handled at the outset of the presentation; the alternatives are to allow questions to be asked during the presentation or to require

them to be kept to the end. Obviously, addressing each question as it arises can prove disruptive to the flow of the presentation and to understanding any argument that is being advanced. However, asking for questions to be kept to the end risks alienating the audience if it would be more appropriate for questions to be taken as they arise. It really depends upon the nature and context of the presentation. For example, in a training session, it is vital that questions are asked during the presentation because doing otherwise risks losing some of the audience along the way; if someone is trying to learn a topic or technique, they need to be able to ask questions to clarify their understanding. On the other hand, a more formal presentation involving a sales pitch or a business case explanation will be improved if the thread of the presentation is maintained with questions left until later.

One annoying problem for attendees at presentations is where a member of the audience asks a question that everyone else cannot hear properly and then the presenter responds. This now becomes virtually a private conversation. **It is always a good idea for the presenter to repeat the question clearly for the audience before answering it.**

The ultimate risk with asking for questions is that you do not know the answer. This is always a danger with a presentation because no one can have all of the answers and questions can range far and wide. Here are a few tips for answering questions:

- Research your subject before giving the presentation. Don't give a presentation on a subject you do not know well. This is particularly the case if you are presenting in an 'expert' or training capacity.
- If you don't know the answer, admit it. Paradoxically, you will have the confidence to do this if you have researched your subject thoroughly and prepared well. This will enable you to feel you know the topic as well as it is possible, so a question that you cannot answer will not diminish your confidence. If necessary, you can always offer to find out and report back later.
- Ask the audience. It is a well-tried presenter's technique to throw out a question for discussion by the audience; there is almost always someone in the audience who can help. However, use this with care; the senior managers may not appreciate this technique if used in a sales presentation.

THE TEAM PRESENTATION

There will be additional difficulties when a presentation is to be delivered by two or more presenters. The following, additional issues have to be thought through and planned for if the presentation is to be successful.

The number of presenters

It is vital to consider carefully the number of presenters. Two or three is likely to be fine as long as the presentation is planned to allow for this; more than three is probably overkill. Each presenter will need to be introduced to the audience. While one person is presenting the others will need to know what to do and where to stand or sit. It is usually best if they sit to one side unless they have a particular role to play, such as scribing, because they can otherwise look rather aimless and

may detract from the presentation. If you have more than three presenters, much additional time will be wasted on introductions and the following problems will be compounded.

Who presents what?
The presentation needs to be divided between the presenters during planning and development. Choose the person who knows the most about a particular topic to present it. However, if you have a subject matter or technical expert who isn't a confident presenter, it might be better to let someone else do the actual presenting and reserve the 'guru' for answering questions. Whatever the decision, the key point is to make sure each presenter knows exactly what they have to cover.

Handing over
Transitions between presenters can cause the presentation to lose pace and expose a lack of forethought and preparation. It is important to avoid too much 'clashing of gears' and too abrupt changes of personnel. It is a good idea to have a 'noise' (blank or header) slide between the sections and for the outgoing presenter to use a title slide to introduce their successor; this will smooth the transition, emphasise that the whole presentation, including transitions between presenters, has been prepared, and enhance the professional impression.

Dealing with questions
The guidance given earlier in this chapter also applies to a group presentation, but there are additional issues to be considered. If questions are directed to individual presenters, then they should respond unless they feel another member of the team is better placed to do so. However, if there is a question and answer session at the end, where questions are addressed to the group as a whole, it is a good idea for one person to act as facilitator and direct questions to specific members of the team. Again, the approach to be taken needs to be thought through and roles allocated to individuals.

CONCLUSION

Various surveys quoted on the internet reveal that a fear of public speaking, which is inevitably involved in giving a presentation, tops the list of popular phobias, above snakes, spiders and even death. Even famous and experienced actors admit to 'stage fright' and one of two have had to take career breaks because they just could not persuade themselves to go on stage.

So the first thing to understand about giving a presentation is that it is normal to be nervous about it. In fact, it's often people who **aren't** at all apprehensive who come over as underprepared or insincere, and whose presentations do not succeed because of this. A degree of nerves sharpens the senses and means that you can better empathise with the reactions of the audience.

The second thing to realise is that, usually, we get better and less nervous the more practice we get at delivering presentations. In fact, sometimes, a person can start out being extremely anxious about speaking in public and end up rather enjoying the experience.

Third, it is important to accept that thorough preparation really does pay dividends. If you have completely mastered your material and practised the presentation, then you are less likely to be thrown if something does go slightly wrong or if an unexpected question comes in your direction. Just don't believe people who try to tell you that too much preparation ruins the spontaneity of a presentation; it's more likely to be spoiled by an unrehearsed delivery.

FURTHER READING

Bradbury, A. (2010) *Successful Presentation Skills*. 4th edition. Kogan Page.

Gross, K.J. and Stone, J. (2002) *Chic Simple Dress Smart Women: Wardrobes That Win In The New Workplace*. Warner Books.

Gross, K.J. and Stone, J. (2002) *Dress Smart Men: Wardrobes That Win In The New Workplace*. Warner Books.

Jay, R. and Jay, A. (2004) *Effective Presentation*. 3rd edition. Prentice Hall.

Mehrabian, A. (1972) *Silent Messages: Implicit Communication of Emotions and Attitudes*. Wadsworth Publishing.

Tufte, E.R. (2006) *The Cognitive Style of PowerPoint*. Graphics Press.

9 COMMERCIAL AWARENESS

INTRODUCTION

The State of the IT Market 2011 report (Modis, 2011) looked at the changing role of IT in organisations. IT Directors and Heads of IT Departments from 110 companies across the UK were surveyed and asked what they believed the impact of the tightening in the economy would have on their business, how they viewed the role of IT and the skills that would be required of the future IT professional. The report's findings make interesting reading.

Although the report acknowledges that many IT teams work under the shadow of a legacy that views them as nothing more than implementers and fixers of technology, the tightening economy is increasingly forcing a change in approach to IT. Rather than being simply a business enabler, for some organisations it's a direct route to securing greater competitive advantage and staying ahead of the game by pre-empting changes to customer demand. No surprise then that more than a third (34.8 per cent) of organisations are demanding improved commercial awareness from their IT function.

However, skills gaps are emerging that are 'impinging on the speed of evolution' and commercial acumen is one of the key skills areas that the report identifies as required of the IT professional.

Specifically, possessing skills in 'commercial acumen' means:

- understanding what your customers want;
- improving cost-effectiveness;
- anticipating market trends to improve business strategy.

Although we agree with this definition of what 'commercial acumen' is, it doesn't represent the full picture. The purpose of this chapter therefore is to explore the nature of commercial awareness in its widest sense, and consider why it's such an important tool in the professional's box of tricks and how you should go about acquiring it.

CONTENTS OF THIS CHAPTER

This chapter covers the following topics:

- what is 'commercial awareness'?
- making sense of:
  - the economic environment and the market;
  - the organisation;
- appreciating culture;
- financial literacy.

WHAT IS COMMERCIAL AWARENESS?

Look at any job vacancy for a senior professional role and chances are that 'commercial awareness' (or 'business acumen') will appear in the list of essential skills required of applicants. Likewise, most industry surveys investigating skills gaps in the workplace cite it as something employees, in particular graduates, urgently need to develop.

But what exactly is 'commercial awareness'? It's an amorphous term, with no single cohesive definition and is often used interchangeably with 'business acumen', 'commercial acumen' or 'business savvy'. Many people assume it refers purely to an ability to understand financial information, presented in a budget, profit and loss account or balance sheet. Whilst financial literacy is certainly a key aspect of, or contributor to, commercial awareness, it's not the sum total; after all, there are many finance professionals who are distinctly lacking in the skill. Rather, commercial awareness is an understanding not just of **what** financial data is telling you, but **how** it is derived.

Let's explain. Whatever your business is, whether private, public or third sector, it needs to deal with money. However, an organisation's financial performance is dependent on a whole range of internal and external factors, which are in a constant state of flux. Being able to monitor what's going on in the wider world and understand how it might have an impact on the way your organisation develops and delivers its products/services to customers is critical to your ability to survive and thrive.

Economic, market and competitor intelligence, as well as financial literacy, are therefore important ingredients of commercial awareness. Organisations need the senior professionals they employ to capture relevant information about external developments, such as environmental issues, social changes and new market entrants, often by using specialised systems and services. Many organisations utilise systems that scan the internet and social media sites for early warning signs with regard to different issues, such as employee demotivation or customer dissatisfaction. However, having access to all this data is not enough. Professionals need to be able to analyse effectively complex data from multiple sources to come up with definitive answers to the simplest of questions: 'So what?'

COMMERCIAL AWARENESS

The ability to see the 'big picture', anticipating customer, economic and market trends, by capturing and analysing relevant data, in order to impact positively strategic decisions about the business and its customers.

To illustrate the above points, consider someone you know at work whom you consider to be financially literate. They can 'read' the company's annual report and tell you not only what sales and profits the company achieved, but what the average return on sale was. They might even be able to comment on the 'gearing' ratio. However, using commercial awareness, that same person would also be able to tell you how company strategies have impacted the numbers, why those strategies were introduced in the first place and what current initiatives are expected to impact the numbers in the coming year.

MAKING SENSE OF THE ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT AND THE MARKET

In today's world, seemingly insignificant events happening in distant countries can have a direct impact on our economy and our organisations. Who, for example, realised that the bad news from French bank BNP Paribas announced on 9 August 2007, which triggered a sharp rise in the cost of credit, was just the start of the serious and long lasting global financial crisis popularly known as the 'credit crunch'?

In fact, the roots of the credit crunch started much, much earlier. The BBC reported (2009) that:

> 'Between 2004 and 2006, US interest rates rose from 1 per cent to 5.35 per cent, triggering a slowdown in the US housing market. Homeowners, many of whom could only barely afford their mortgage payments when interest rates were low, began to default on their mortgages. Default rates on sub-prime loans – high risk loans to clients with poor or no credit histories – rose to record levels. The impact of these defaults were felt across the financial system as many of the mortgages had been bundled up and sold on to banks and investors.
>
> [In April of 2007] New Century Financial, which specialises in sub-prime mortgages, files for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection and cuts half of its workforce. As it sold on many of its debts to other banks, the collapse in the sub-prime market begins to have an impact at banks around the world. [By that July] investment bank Bear Stearns tells investors they will get little, if any, of the money invested in two of its hedge funds after rival banks refuse to help it bail them out. Federal Reserve chairman Ben Bernanke follows this news with a warning that the US sub-prime crisis could cost up to $100bn (£50bn).'

The rest, as they say, is history.

PESTLE analysis

Although the full economic fallout from the credit crunch would have been almost impossible to predict, for professionals there are clear lessons to be learned. **If we are to be seen as trusted advisers in our areas of specialism, we must keep abreast of current affairs, particularly in the commercial world.** The origin of the credit crunch was in the banking and finance industry, but its impact has been felt across every sector.

This might seem like an impossible task. No single individual can possibly be expected to know everything about what's going on at a macro-economic level and how it might directly impact their organisation. There are numerous factors in the macro environment that will affect the decisions and recommendations of the professionals and specialists working in any organisation. For example, tax changes, new laws, trade barriers, demographics and government policy are all examples of macro change. To help you sift through the mountain of information available to you and identify quickly which factors have the most bearing on the work of your organisation, you can use the PESTLE model.[24]

PESTLE is an acronym and stands for: political, economic, social, technological, legal and environmental. It guides your thinking to question what is going on in each dimension of the model in the environment in which your organisation operates. Below is a checklist of some of the areas to consider:

- Political
  - political reform;
  - trade policies;
  - employment laws;
  - taxation;
- Economic
  - growth or decline;
  - interest rates;
  - inflation;
  - foreign exchange rates;
  - unemployment;
- Social
  - population growth;
  - age distribution;
  - health consciousness;
  - consumer attitudes;
  - ethnic/religious factors;

[24] The PEST or PESTLE analysis model is unattributed.

- Technological
  - maturity;
  - emergence of new technologies;
  - licensing/patents;
  - social networking;
  - barriers to market entry;
  - outsourcing/in-sourcing;
  - virtualisation;
- Legal
  - employment law;
  - sourcing/procurement;
  - imports and exports;
  - taxation;
- Environmental
  - planning regulations;
  - green taxes;
  - global warming;
  - sustainable sourcing;
  - waste recycling.

In effect, PESTLE enables you to audit an organisation's business environment influences, for the specific purpose of using this information to guide strategic decision making. Typically, the analysis will involve a group of people with diverse skills and viewpoints to ensure you obtain balanced perspectives across all dimensions. Due to the rapid pace of change, it will also be appropriate to repeat the PESTLE analysis at regular intervals. As such, it is extremely useful to make sense of the 'big picture', but it can also be used to review the future direction of a company, a new market, product proposition or idea.

Porter's 'five forces of competitive position' model

Having considered the need to be commercially aware at a macro level, we now need to consider the importance of understanding the features of the market(s) in which our organisation operates. A market quite simply is a place where people gather for the buying and selling (or exchanging) of goods and services. In our world today there are innumerable markets for the purposes of trade. Some markets take place in a physical location (e.g. Billingsgate fish market), whereas others may be virtual (e.g. Amazon and eBay).

It is very important for an organisation to be able to define its market so that it can:

- understand the market's size and calculate its own share;
- forecast growth or decline;
- identify competitors and ascertain its own respective performance;
- appeal to customers who exist in the market or attract new ones.

Porter's 'five forces of competitive position' model is a well-recognised tool for helping you understand your organisation's strength relative to competitors in your chosen market. Developed by Michael Porter in his 1980 book *Competitive Strategy: Techniques for Analyzing Industries and Competitors* (new edition 2004), it is most commonly used to identify whether new products, services or businesses in an industry have the potential to be profitable. 'Five forces' analysis assumes that there are five important forces that determine competitive power in a business situation. These are:

- **Suppliers** – The bargaining power of suppliers to increase your costs of sale.
- **Buyers** – The bargaining power of your customers to reduce your sale price.
- **Intensity of competitive rivalry** – The level of competition in your business domain.
- **Threat of substitution** – The extent to which different products/services can be used in place of your own (including technology advancements, e.g. buying online).
- **Threat of new entry** – The ease with which new providers can enter the market.

By thinking about how each force affects you, and by identifying the strength and direction of each force, you can quickly assess your position and the likelihood of being successful in the market. The tool really comes into its own, however, when considering what actions you can take to tip the balance of power in your favour, for example: strategic partnerships; copyright agreements; new technology; product innovation.

The value chain

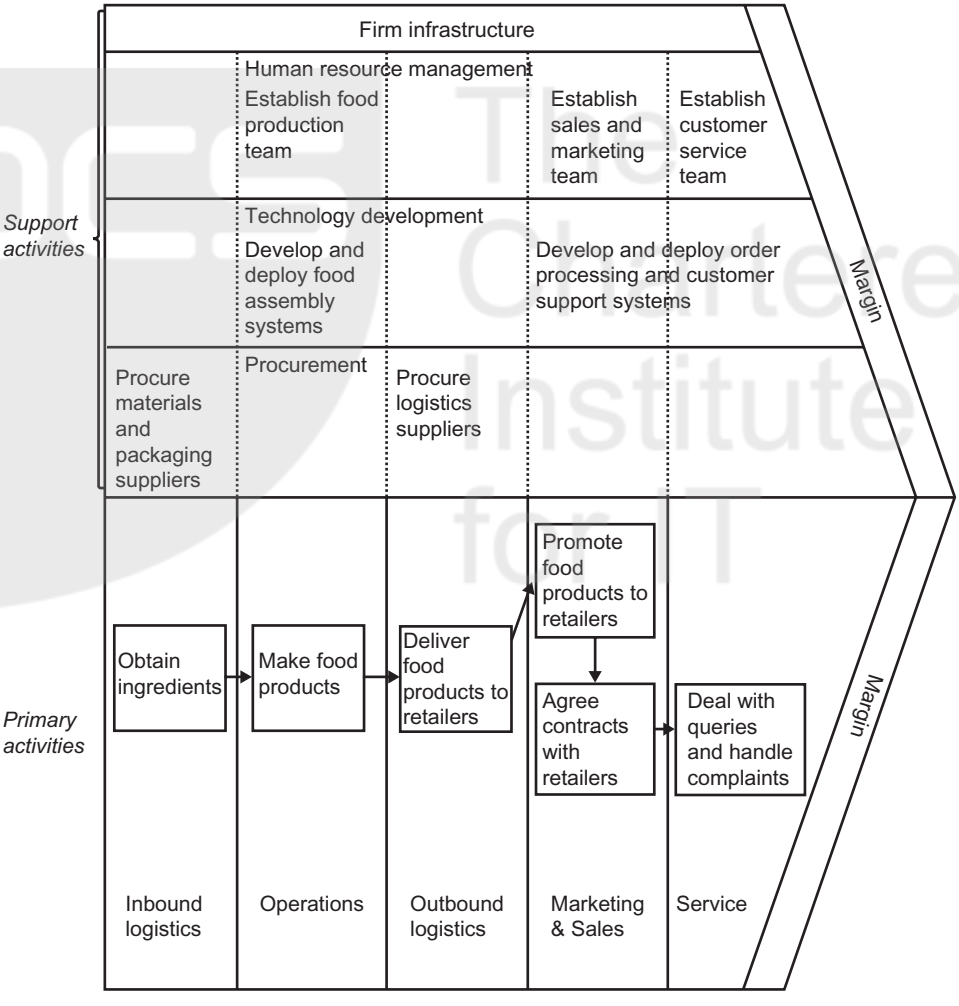
If you have a background in business analysis, you will already be conversant with, if not an expert on, value chain analysis, closely associated as it is with business process modelling. A business process begins with a need generated by a client (who may be internal) and ends with the satisfaction of that need. What happens in between is the creation of value.

In his 1985 book *Competitive Advantage: Creating and Sustaining Superior Performance*, Michael Porter (new edition 2004) stressed that understanding how your company creates value and looking for ways to increase that value without adding significant cost, is a vital ingredient in the development of a successful competitive strategy. The more value an organisation can create, the more profit it will be able to generate; and when you provide more value to your customers, you build advantage over your competitors. Ultimately, this is

the *raison d'être* of an organisation. **Any organisation that isn't creating value for its customers, regardless of its sector, will almost certainly cease to exist.**

Porter's concept of the 'value chain' helps to identify where value is added across an organisation. It's a general-purpose value chain that any organisation can use to examine all of their core business activities, and see how they are interconnected in order to deliver products or services to the customers. Figure 9.1 shows an example of a value chain specific to a food production company.

Figure 9.1 Example value chain for a food production company



The value chain can be used in several ways. One possible use is to consider which primary activities need to work collaboratively in order to ensure value is delivered to the customer. Alternatively, the costs of the primary and

support activities may be aggregated in order to determine the total cost of delivering the service or product to the customer, and when profit margin is added, the price to be charged can be calculated. This tool can help you understand not only where value exists, but, as importantly, where waste and inefficiencies reside.

MAKING SENSE OF THE ORGANISATION

Organisations enable objectives to be achieved that could not be achieved by the efforts of individuals on their own. Each organisation is as unique as the people who work within it, but all organisations are seeking to resolve a set of common problems – how to divide up the work, whilst at the same time ensuring it is integrated, has a sense of purpose and a collective identity. Ultimately it is the collaboration of people to achieve objectives that forms the basis of an organisation, and some form of structure is needed within which people's interactions and efforts can be focused, typically by management. 'Herding cats' is a phrase that may resonate for anyone who has attempted to gain the commitment of a group of individuals, all with different needs and objectives, to achieving a shared organisational goal.

Being able to make sense of an 'organisation' means appreciating the collective beliefs, values and behaviours of the people who work within it, as well as understanding its strategic business plans and goals. Organisational behaviour is a complex field of psychological study, but gaining a fundamental understanding of the factors that govern it will provide you with the ability not only to understand, but also to predict and influence the behaviours of others in an organisational context. Every professional needs this knowledge to address the people issues effectively when trying to move strategic initiatives forward and, as such, it is a key component of what we term 'commercial awareness'.

The influence of industry sector

The sector in which an organisation operates certainly has an impact on its personality, purpose and the way it operates. Professor Rob Paton (1992) of the Open University suggests that differences between sectors arise from the logic on which they are based:

- Commercial organisations are based on a logic of profit, which implies notions of competitive positioning, measurable targets, the division of labour, optimisation, performance-related remuneration and so on.
- Public sector organisations are based on a logic of accountability, which rests on concepts of service, impartiality, strict hierarchical control, universality and the like.
- The social economy or third sector is based on a logic of commitment, in which people 'do what needs to be done' and are strongly influenced by shared values.

There is a pervading sense in the popular imagination, however, that:

- private sector = entrepreneurial and efficient;
- public sector = bureaucratic and wasteful;
- third sector = enthusiastic amateurs.

The truth, as ever, is somewhere in between and there is infinite variation in the organisations within each sector. For example, banks have a completely different ethos and modus operandi to car manufacturers, though both are in the private sector. A housing association is run very differently to a charity.

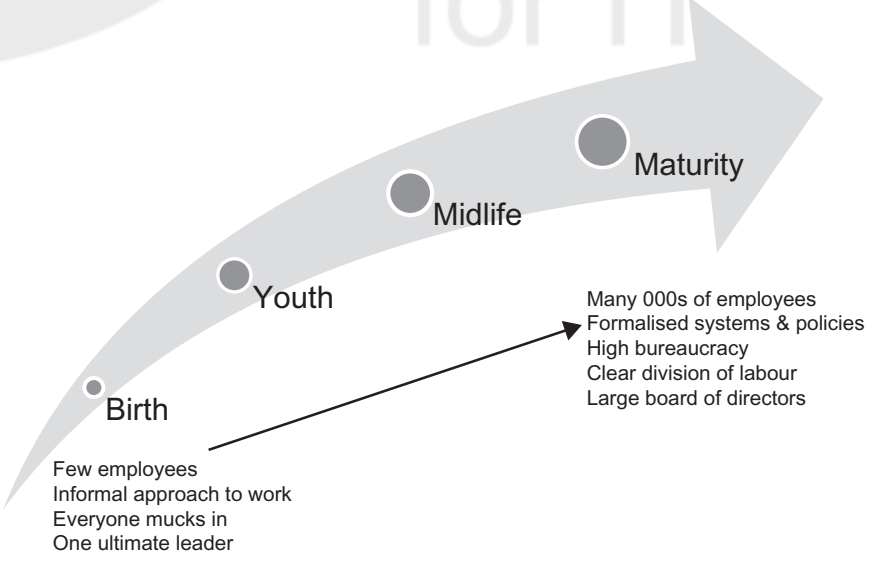
The impact of size and maturity

Size, as well as sector, is also a determinant of organisation behaviour. Small companies tend to run quite informally with little clear division of labour and few regulations; strategy is frequently made up, or changed, 'on the hoof'; the atmosphere is usually energised. The people that work in small businesses thrive in this kind of environment, they like having their fingers in a lot of pies and may struggle to adapt to the necessary restrictions that are introduced as the business grows. Someone working for a business that had grown from 10 to 200 people in five years once said that 'things were much better here before we had processes'. Try suggesting to IBM that they should run without processes.

Obviously, size is to some extent a function of the age of an organisation. Richard L. Daft, in his book *Organization Theory and Design* (2010), says that in a typical organisational life cycle, organisations are 'born, grow older and eventually die'. But for the purposes of this chapter, we shall ignore the death stage. Each stage in the life cycle creates a set of organisational 'features', a selection of which is presented in Figure 9.2.

Of course, this is perhaps an oversimplification and few organisations will follow this life cycle exactly, but you may be able to relate to some of the features in your

Figure 9.2 The organisational life cycle (McNamara, 2012). ©Carter McNamara, MBA, PhD, Authenticity Consulting, LLC



own organisation. Understanding where your organisation is in its maturity cycle can help you identify the best methods to get growth plans off the ground. After all, decline is easier to deal with the earlier it is spotted: this is where transformational leadership really comes into its own (see Chapter 5 'Leadership').

Digging deeper

The Soft Systems Methodology outlined in, for example, Checkland and Scholes (1999), provides a very useful technique that we can use to understand the values, drivers and mindsets of people working in any organisation. Professor Checkland proposed that one could develop a 'root definition', a paragraph or so of text that would encapsulate what people believe about an organisation or business system, and he offered the mnemonic CATWOE to indicate the elements that might be included in such a definition. Of these, the W and the T are the core elements and the others provide additional richness to our understanding. This technique is invaluable in trying to get an understanding of what makes an organisation and the people within it 'tick'; and that understanding is a major part of commercial awareness.

Below, we explain the six elements of CATWOE.

- **C – Customer(s)** – The customers are the beneficiaries of the business system; in other words those who receives its output. People may have legitimate differences about who they think the customers are. A discussion of who they think their customers are is often instructive and very revealing of their priorities.
- **A – Actor(s)** – The actors perform the transformation; in other words they carry out the business activities.
- **T – Transformation** – All organisations perform transformations, in the sense of turning their inputs into outputs that their customers want, but different people in an organisation might have differing views about the exact nature of these transformations (in other words about what are the main business activities).
- **W – *Weltanschauung*** – The German word *Weltanschauung* translates roughly as 'world view' and it indicates a particular stakeholder's underlying beliefs about an organisation.
- **O – Owner** – Who has the ultimate authority over this business system? Who could change its direction or, even abolish it?
- **E – Environment** – These are the 'givens' within which the work of the business system is conducted. You cannot change these, but an understanding of them provides awareness of the constraints within which the organisation operates.

The essence of CATWOE is the 'world view'. Merely questioning the world views held by different stakeholders can often expose differences, conflicts and confusion within an organisation. For example, looking at an organisation that sells outdoor equipment, someone working in sales might hold the world view that the organisation exists for them to sell as much as possible and earn lots of commission; a product development person might believe that the organisation exists to offer high quality equipment to customers who need them. As you can see, there could be some interesting conflicts between those world views.

As we have suggested, performing CATWOE-type analyses for the key stakeholders within any organisation provides an invaluable understanding of what people think and, if there are big divergences of view, of the tensions within the organisation.

Internal politics

Most people in large organisations, indeed, most people in all organisations, complain about internal politics – the amount of time taken up by people manoeuvring against each other, 'scoring points' off each other, agitating to grow or preserve their 'empires' and so forth. One executive we know remarked, 'If only the senior managers in his firm devoted half of the effort they wasted on internal politics to driving the business forward, the company would be vastly more successful.'

Excellent examples of internal 'politicking' could be seen in the British TV series *Yes Minister*, where the senior civil servant, Sir Humphrey Appleby, would repeatedly manipulate his hapless minister, Jim Hacker, with such phrases as 'that would be very courageous minister'; in other words, possibly dangerous to the minister's career prospects. For some people, the pursuit of power becomes an end in itself and they will devote a lot of their time and energy to achieve it.

In fact, internal politics are not necessarily destructive or engaged in for bad reasons. People will naturally hold views and opinions, and believe they have the best ideas for taking their organisation forward; and they will attempt to marshal support, and form coalitions with like-minded people, in order to get their ideas accepted.

So what can we do about internal politics? Indeed, what should we do about them? Well, the first thing to do is to accept that they are a fact of life and they aren't going to go away because we want them to. Just taking the ostrich position, burying your head in the sand and pretending all is OK may mean that others take unfair advantage of you. Furthermore, you will miss the opportunities to advance your own interests, and those of your team and your project. So how can you ensure that your results are not thrown off course by the office politics? There are a number of strategies that you can employ:

- Create a 'power map' of the organisation. This is very different to the organisation chart, which tells you who simply has authority. Similar to a stakeholder analysis, but with a different purpose, a power map will help you identify who the real influencers are and who is in their networks. You need to be very observant and engage in many conversations at multiple levels to arrive at an accurate power map, but once you know how it works (there may be more than one), you can take steps to build your own links into it, forming relationships with the key players. The social network analysis shown in Chapter 3 'Team working' is a useful technique for building a power map.
- Use techniques like CATWOE, discussed earlier, and also keep your ears open to discover where there may be differences of view between stakeholders and where they may be trying to build alliances against each other.
- Avoid, if you can, getting drawn into one 'camp' or the other. The usefulness of a professional adviser of any sort is diminished if they are seen to be backing one side or the other in a political battle and, even if their 'gang' wins this round, they may find themselves out in the cold in future. It is much better,

if you can, to play the 'honest broker' than to be seen as partial to one group or another.

- Act like Caesar's wife: above suspicion. Tempting though it may be to build rapport by joining in the office gossip, taking sides or flattering the boss, it's important to maintain your professional integrity. Your goal is always to be positive, promote the organisation's best interests, manage conflict proactively and manage the disclosure of sensitive information very carefully.

Someone working within an organisation (assuming they have been there for some time) has an obvious advantage over, say, an external consultant in understanding organisational politics. But they also have the disadvantage that they belong somewhere in the organisation (in a particular department, for example) and it is difficult to avoid being associated with that department's management and their aims and aspirations. Also, and depending on the culture of the organisation, being associated with the 'wrong' people can prove career-limiting. An external consultant faces the opposite problem; they aren't (or should not be) allied with any faction but, equally, they probably don't understand the nuances of power and influence and can find themselves 'walking into brick walls' because of this.

APPRECIATING CULTURE

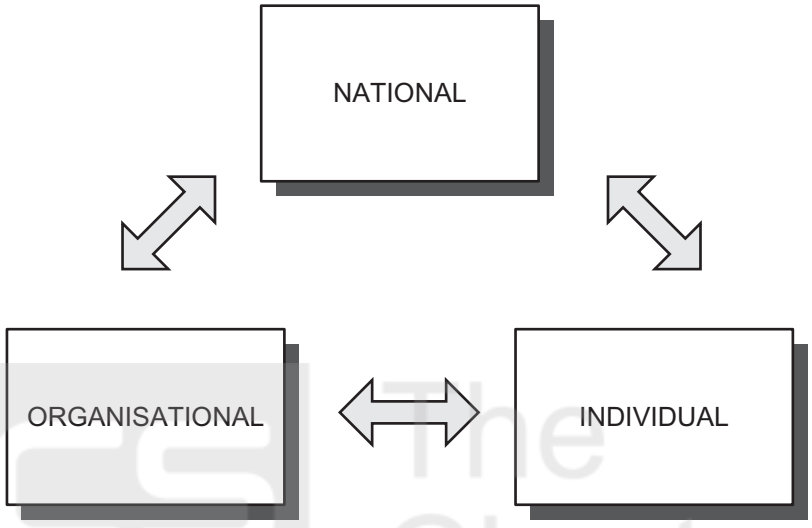
What do we mean by 'appreciating culture' in the context of commercial awareness? It is first helpful to understand a little of the background to culture as a business concept. The Open University tells us that 'the word "culture", as a concept in management thinking, has its main roots in social anthropology, where it was used to refer to a community's shared way of life' (OU, 2012). Indeed, a visit to the British Museum reveals that, historically, anthropological research often studied religious artefacts, rituals and symbols as the most obvious manifestations of the beliefs and values of societies in other parts of the world; just consider for a moment what the cross represents to Christians, or the Shiva lingam to Hindus. In turn, those beliefs and values became a significant, but often hidden, influence on people's attitudes and behaviour, both as individuals and as groups. And it is as true of the workplace as it is of society at large.

Each of us belongs to multiple cultures that give us messages about what is normal, appropriate, and expected. When others fail to meet our expectations at work, it can be a signal that our cultural expectations are different. What is normal to one team may seem strange, counterintuitive, or just plain wrong to another. How many times have you heard, 'For goodness' sake, where's their common sense?' or words to that effect. The cultural differences between groups of people sitting in adjacent offices can be as large as those between the UK and Japan.

The three main cultural orientations are depicted in Figure 9.3.

The pull of each of these cultures affects each individual to create a unique blend of attitudes and behaviour. In this section, we focus on what 'national' and 'organisational' culture mean for the 21st-century professional.

Figure 9.3 Cultural orientations



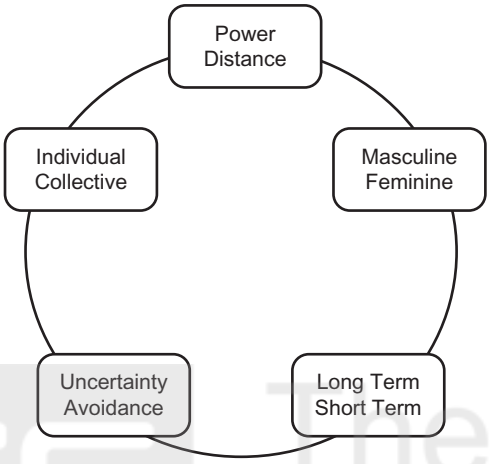
National culture

The growth of offshoring over the past 20 years has put cultural awareness firmly on the corporate agenda, as the work of formerly internal departments (particularly in the IT and finance functions) has transferred to suppliers based overseas, typically in India and Asia–Pacific (APAC) countries. One study, which helps us make sense of national culture is by Geert Hofstede, who identified five dimensions of culture (Figure 9.4):[25] Each dimension's features relative to national behaviours are summarised below.

- **Power distance** – This is the degree to which the less powerful members of society expect there to be inequalities in the levels of power. A high score suggests that there is an expectation that some individuals wield larger amounts of power than others. Countries with high power-distance rating (for example, Latin American countries) are often characterised by a high rate of political violence. A low rating, scored by countries such as Sweden and New Zealand, reflects the view that all people should have equal rights.
- **Individualism versus collectivism** – This refers to the extent to which people are expected to stand up for themselves, or alternatively act predominantly as a member of the group or organisation. Unsurprisingly, the USA is identified as a highly individualistic culture.
- **Masculinity versus femininity** – This refers to the value placed on traditionally male or female virtues. Masculine cultures value competitiveness, assertiveness, ambition, and the accumulation of wealth and material possessions, whereas feminine cultures place more value on relationships, collaboration and

[25] http://geert-hofstede.com/national-culture.html

Figure 9.4 Hofstede's five dimensions of culture



quality of life. Japan is considered by Hofstede to be the most 'masculine' culture, Sweden the most 'feminine'. The USA and UK are moderately masculine.

- **Uncertainty avoidance** – This reflects the extent to which a society attempts to cope with anxiety by minimising uncertainty. Cultures that scored high in uncertainty avoidance prefer rules (e.g. about religion and food) and structured circumstances, and employees tend to remain longer with their present employer. Latin European countries and Japan rank highly on this dimension.
- **Long- versus short-term orientation** – This dimension reflects the extent to which a long-term or short-term approach prevails. Long-termism is concerned with perseverance while short-termism emphasises the need for quick results. The USA tend towards short-termism while The Netherlands is ranked highly for long-termism.

In Hofstede's latest edition (Hofstede *et al*., 2010) of his *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind* book, a sixth dimension has been added, based on Michael Minkov's analysis of the *World Values Survey* data for 93 countries: indulgence/restraint. Societies that tolerate a high degree of personal freedom of expression and enjoyment of life score highly for 'indulgence'; those societies that suppress and constrain such freedoms score highly for 'restraint'.

All of this research is quite academic. So how can we use it in our professional work? Knowing where your own culture lies along these dimensions and appreciating that another's may lie in a different place can genuinely help us take these differences into consideration when we're communicating with our international colleagues. If you are wondering, Hofstede's analysis for the British illustrates strong feelings towards individualism and masculinity (similar to the USA) while the power–distance and uncertainty avoidance are ranked considerably lower. However, it is long-term orientation that ranks the lowest, indicating both that change may be achieved more rapidly than in many other countries, but also

that business is geared towards short-term results. One can't help but be reminded at this point of the behaviours that led to the recent 'credit crunch'.

A practical tool for communicating with colleagues from other national cultures was developed by another anthropologist, Edward T. Hall, in his book *Beyond Culture* (1997). He identified 'high context' or 'low context' factors as influencing the way people in a nation behave and interact with each other. High-context or low-context communication is based on the amount or specificity of information that is passed through the communication process (i.e. is the message itself explicitly meaningful or is the total environment of the message important?). The key differences between high-context and low-context cultures in the way they communicate are compared in the Table 9.1.

Table 9.1 High- and low-context cultures

Low context	High context
● communication is frank, explicit and direct;	● communication is diplomatic, implicit and indirect;
● feelings and thoughts are expressed by speaker;	● feelings and thoughts are for interpretation by listener;
● assumes views and 'rules' are those literally given;	● assumes high commonality of knowledge of 'rules';
● dependence on 'truth' of what is written or said;	● 'truth' in the underlying message;
● precision of language;	● promiscuity of language;
● rules firm and fixed;	● rules open;
● left brain/logical/detail;	● right brain/intuitive/big picture;
● objective;	● subjective;
● task-focused;	● relationship focus;
● often individualistic.	● often collective.

It's important to note that a nation is not 'either' high or low context, but refers to its respective position on the theoretical continuum. Your own experience will tell you that the Germans and Swiss prefer your communications to be exact and precise (low context), whereas people from nationalities at the other end of the scale (Japan and China) may find that direct style rather rude. The key, as ever, is the ability to attune and adapt appropriately. Awareness of the key differences between national cultures is just the first step to being able to develop successful professional relationships across geographic borders. It's interesting, as a final note, that

this model also applies within organisational areas (e.g. IT, finance and engineering tend to be low context; marketing and HR tend to be higher context).

Organisational culture

An important part of commercial awareness is the appreciation of the impact of culture, not just at a national level but at an organisational level. Organisational culture according to the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development is 'a system of shared values and beliefs about what is important, what behaviours are appropriate and about feelings and relationships internally and externally' (Purcell *et al*., 2004). In other words 'the way we do things around here', which is what gives us our sense of collective identity. This identity is what differentiates one organisation from another, even when they operate in the same market, with the same portfolio of products/services and the same target clients. To take some obvious examples, the culture of an army is likely to be very different to that of a university common room and much has been made in the UK press about the so-called 'canteen culture' of the police service.

However, culture is one of those things that we don't actively think about until we're going through a period of organisational change, for example during a merger, where two cultures can often clash. Your organisation's culture can hinder business growth by not evolving with its market or it can spearhead the company to stratospheric success.

Charles Handy (1995) identified four types of organisational culture that, although perhaps oversimplifying a complex subject, is useful to gain a broad understanding of organisational culture and its impact on the way people work and behave:

- **Power culture** – Handy uses the analogy of a spider's web for this type of culture where power is concentrated in a single or very few pairs of hands. Power cultures have little bureaucracy: only one person has supreme executive power, so decisions can be made quickly. Entrepreneurial businesses, founded and run by charismatic individuals (Apple and Microsoft spring to mind), tend to have a power culture.
- **Role culture** – In a role culture, illustrated as a Greek temple with supporting columns and beams, people have clear levels of authority within a rigid, highly inflexible structure. Although delegated to an extent, power tends to derive from a person's position in the hierarchy rather than their expertise, with government departments being a prime example.
- **Task culture** – Task culture is project-oriented, so teams of the right people with the right skills are formed to solve particular problems. Often a matrix-type reporting structure prevails. Handy illustrates this culture as a net. Organisations that regularly undertake projects (e.g. IT service providers or civil engineers) often exhibit this form of culture.
- **Person culture** – A person culture is the least common and is represented as a cluster of stars, the implication is that the individual is more important than the collective. It is perhaps most common in professional practices, such as law firms. Since the emphasis is on the individual, with no overriding group culture, it can be quite difficult and challenging to work in. Everyone for themselves!

The works of both Handy and Hofstede offer useful insights from the point of view of commercial awareness. Understanding the culture of an organisation is fundamental in enabling us to 'fit in' and to work out how, for example, to get one's ideas listened to. For example, in a power culture (Handy), it is clearly important to get to a sufficiently influential person and convince them; if that is achieved, their personal power will ensure that things happen. In an organisation with a long-term orientation (Hofstede), proposals that offer a payback or advantage in the long run will probably be more interesting to senior management than would be the case in an organisation with a shorter-term focus.

Obviously, if one works in an organisation for any period of time, someone with any degree of sensitivity should develop an instinct for its culture and an awareness of how to 'go with the grain' (as opposed to going against it). One of the major challenges facing, for example, consultants going into an unfamiliar organisation, and also people changing jobs, is to assess the culture of the place they are now working in. There are no 'silver bullets' here and to a large extent one has to 'follow one's nose' but one useful piece of advice is to proceed cautiously until you have developed at least some idea of the culture. It may be, of course, that what you discover is uncomfortable, in that the organisation's culture turns out to be very different from what you expected and, perhaps, not to your taste; you may not, for example, like the deference and toadying that can sometimes be endemic in a power culture. If you are an employee, you need seriously to consider whether this is a place you can fit in for the long term. If you are a consultant, remember that a key part of your armoury of interpersonal skills is the ability to assess and work with a variety of cultures. Either way, a conscious effort must be made to deal with the cultural environment in which you now find yourself.

FINANCIAL LITERACY

It is not our intention to cover the principles of finance in this personal skills book, but we cannot complete a chapter on commercial awareness without at least touching on financial literacy and mentioning its importance. As stated earlier, financial literacy is about being able to read an organisation's financial statements, assess whether it is worth investing in a new initiative, understand financial terminology and, most importantly, using Porter's value chain analysis methods, knowing when a new process or system is likely to make a loss for the organisation, even if it delivers customer value.

It is a critical skill for an ambitious professional seeking to move up the career ladder. A clear appreciation of the organisation's finances is a prerequisite if they are to earn that coveted seat on the management board. The good news is that to be regarded as financially literate in your organisation, you really don't need to be able to explain the intricacies of the international tax regulation systems. Business finance for non-finance professionals is not especially complex, but you do need to invest some time to ensure you understand the fundamentals of how your organisation makes money in its chosen market(s).

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, we've provided a clear definition of what we understand by the term 'commercial awareness' and presented a selection of analysis tools to improve your understanding of your organisation and the markets in which you operate.

However, the problem with commercial awareness, as opposed to financial literacy, is that you can't go on a training course to learn it. Few, if any, organisations invest in formal skills development in this area, so few, if any, training companies offer it. Rather, acquiring commercial awareness depends on a lifelong, personal commitment to learning and research.

So where to start? To help you on your way, here are a few pointers to help you navigate through the mine of information:

- Read business publications and watch current affairs programmes. They will provide you with current, relevant information about commercial trends, markets, and other socioeconomic factors affecting your business. Remember the slogan 'No FT, no comment'?
- Join a professional institution or association dedicated to sharing business information with their members. This can offer you the opportunity to attend networking events, conferences and seminars.
- Find a mentor with a strong business experience. Your mentor can be a coworker, former boss or someone who is a member of the same professional association.
- Volunteer for a project that is outside your normal field of expertise, such as a fund-raising initiative. It will give you the opportunity to widen your network and gain some interesting perspectives on the work of your organisation.
- Invite a senior finance colleague to explain your organisation's key performance indicators and how they are derived. You may gain great insights into the mechanics of profit generation that are operating in your organisation.

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Further reading

http://geert-hofstede.com/
Geert Hofstede's website is a useful source of information on his latest research into national and organisational culture.

'Who on Earth are we?'
www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/webcast/tae_whoonearth_archive.shtml
BBC series about culture and how it affects us. Scripts are available as a webcast and Adobe PDF downloads from their website.

10 COACHING

INTRODUCTION

Not so long ago, coaching and mentoring was a personal development and support service your organisation offered only once you achieved a certain status in the organisation. Either you'd already made it to the boardroom or you had been identified as a 'top talent' preparing to take your well-earned place there.

However, times have changed. The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD, 2011a) reports that over three quarters of the organisations recently surveyed now use coaching and mentoring as a wider staff development tool. Whilst external coaches are still employed, the bulk of coaching in the workplace is delivered by line managers: evidenced by the fact that coaching skills now feature in most corporate leadership and management development programmes.

CONTENTS OF THIS CHAPTER

In this chapter, we discuss why the ability to coach and mentor is a key skill in the modern professional's toolkit and consider the steps we can take to acquire it. We look at:

- what is coaching?
- the distinction between coaching, mentoring, counselling and training;
- the business context for coaching and its benefits;
- the key qualities and skills of a manager–coach.

Although there are many models for coaching, we focus on two of the most popular and how they can be applied in coaching situations:

- the STEER model;
- the GROW model.

Finally, we give you a checklist of useful questions you can use when coaching and provide advice on some of the common pitfalls that are to be avoided when you're starting out.

WHAT IS COACHING?

Coaching has always been widely employed as a critical tool for performance improvement in sport. Significant amounts of money are invested by clubs in finding not just the sporting talent, but the coaches who will be able to unlock the potential of that talent for winning repeatedly. In football, the coaches might become as famous if not more, than their sporting stars (e.g. Sir Alex Ferguson, José Mourinho and Arsene Wenger to name but three).

Outside the world of sport, coaching has a much broader remit than simply creating 'winners'. You can engage a coach to help you with your career, your business, your relationships or your life. **The Coaching & Mentoring Network provides a helpful definition of what coaching and mentoring is, namely: 'a vehicle for analysis, reflection and action that ultimately enable the client to achieve success in one or more areas of their life or work'.**[26]

The focus of this chapter is how coaching can be used in the workplace for performance improvement, in terms of helping people develop specific skills or achieve certain goals. The process therefore typically lasts for a relatively short period of time. However, as a by-product, coaching may also have a positive impact on an individual's personal attributes (such as their self-confidence).

Although there is a lack of agreement about precise definitions, the CIPD identifies the following as characteristics of coaching in the workplace (CIPD, 2011b):

- It is essentially a non-directive form of development (though this is not a hard and fast rule).
- It focuses on improving performance and developing individuals' skills.
- Personal issues may be discussed, but the emphasis is on performance at work.
- Coaching activities have both organisational and individual goals.
- It provides people with feedback on both their strengths and their weaknesses.
- It is a skilled activity, which should be delivered by people who are trained to do it.

The business contexts in which coaching takes place are typically performance management, talent development or the transference of learning to the workplace.

DISTINGUISHING BETWEEN COACHING, MENTORING, COUNSELLING AND TRAINING

In the business world, you will find that 'coaching' is either joined at the hip with 'mentoring' by the word 'and', or the words are used interchangeably. We take the view that in the workplace a coach deals with a person's tasks and responsibilities, has a specific agenda or development approach, has a focus on improving a

[26] http://www.coachingnetwork.org.uk/resourcecentre/whatarecoachingandmentoring.htm

person's job performance and will often be the person's line manager. A mentor, however, deals with someone's personal career, has no specific agenda and focuses only on the individual and is therefore highly unlikely to be their line manager. As someone anonymously posting in an online blog said: 'Mentors are like lovers and mistresses; whether someone has one or not is very interesting, but nevertheless, none of your business!'

Mentoring, particularly in its traditional sense, enables an individual to follow in the path of an older and wiser colleague who can pass on knowledge, experience and open doors to otherwise out-of-reach opportunities. A mentor is a guide; someone who is experienced in areas that you may not be; who is loyal and interested in your future success; and whose advice will not be compromised by organisational politics. This person provides you with motivation and inspiration to achieve your goals, helping you to find ways to deal with immediate difficulties as well as help you plan a long-term career strategy.

Coaching and mentoring do, however, share many similarities, so it makes sense to outline the common things coaches and mentors do whether the services are offered in a paid (professional) or unpaid (philanthropic) role.

COACHES AND MENTORS

- facilitate using questions to assist a person in discovering their own solutions to challenges, rather than explicitly direct them;
- support the individual in setting appropriate goals and actions that will enable them to progress towards achieving them;
- actively encourage the individual's desire and will to stay focused on the achievement of the goals, in the face of setbacks and distractions;
- observe and listen, as well as speak, remaining supportive and non-judgmental at all times;
- maintain a professional distance to ensure an unhealthy dependency does not develop or that the engagement does not unwittingly evolve into counselling.

Counselling, however, is very different to coaching, even though the underpinning theories, such as cognitive behavioural therapy, can be applied in a workplace context. Coaching does not, and should not, aim to address the root causes of deeply personal problems like lack of confidence and low self-esteem. Whilst it's perfectly possible for a person who has underlying emotional problems to see a real benefit from coaching, it may become obvious during the sessions that what's needed is a professional therapeutic intervention. **As professionals looking to develop our coaching skills, it is therefore extremely important that we are able to work objectively within our limitations;** we need to have the ability, humility and insight to know when we're out of our depth. Some 'red flags' that suggest a person may be in need of a therapist rather than a coach are if they are asking for help in resolving a personal issue that involves drugs, alcohol, domestic abuse

or anger management. Likewise, if a person is unable to articulate their thoughts clearly and tends to respond in an extreme way to a challenge, it may suggest a level of emotional instability, which is best left to someone suitably qualified.

The distinction between coaching and training is much more blurred. Both are complementary approaches to learning, often used in conjunction in skills development programmes. Here are some of the distinctions that we would make between the two disciplines:

- **Training** helps you get the skills you need to achieve your development goals; **coaching** helps you identify what those goals should be.
- **Training** is directive: 'do it this way'; **coaching** is facilitative: 'I will help you discover the way for yourself'.
- **Training** usually takes place in a group setting; **coaching** is usually one on one.
- **Trainers** need to be subject-matter experts; **coaches** need to be experts in the coaching process.

It is common practice for coaching to be used as a follow-up to training, to help the learning 'stick' and encourage an individual to take personal responsibility for their success or failure. However, a new school of thought suggests that perhaps coaching should come first with training as a follow-up to teach the skills necessary to accomplish the goals set in coaching sessions.

THE BUSINESS CONTEXT FOR COACHING AND ITS BENEFITS

A comprehensive *Learning and Talent Development Survey* from the CIPD (2010) was released in April 2010. Interviewing 724 (largely UK) respondents in 27 sectors, it presented key findings in the areas of employer support for learning, talent management, coaching, training and, importantly, the impact of the 2008/9 recession.

According to the survey, the skills gaps in UK organisations have not changed materially in recent years. Respondents cited the following skills as being in critical demand in their organisations:

- business acumen/commercial awareness;
- leadership skills;
- performance management (dealing with underperformance);
- leading and managing change;
- strategic thinking;
- accelerating change;
- front-line people management skills;

- communication/interpersonal skills for younger employees (school leavers/graduates);
- project/programme management skills, especially in the voluntary/community sectors.

Although the demand for core skills is very much in evidence, funding for formal skills development was badly impacted by the recession. This should be of no surprise when training is often deemed to be 'discretionary spend' and one of the first budgets to be cut when times get tough. This doesn't mean that training activity stopped during this period, quite the reverse in fact, with even more responsibility being devolved to in-house delivery teams. Many organisations also switched to more cost-effective alternatives to external training, such as elearning and coaching by line managers.

In terms of elearning, the survey reports that learning and development professionals are increasingly sceptical about elearning, giving it a lower value rating compared with other practices. The case study from the Borough of Newham (described in the CITP Learning and Talent Development Study) illustrates one of the challenges faced by many organisations in realising returns on their elearning library:

> 'Many staff commented that they did not have time to complete or consider properly the package due to pressures of work and so rushed the package at the last minute.'

For coaching, however, the picture was very different. Coaching has certainly grown in popularity, as stated earlier, with over three quarters of organisations surveyed by the CIPD offering it to their staff. The main aims of coaching in a business context are to assist performance management, prepare and support people in leadership roles and support learning and development.

For organisations it's very attractive as a learning intervention in these uncertain economic times, not just because there's no cash outlay if the coaches are line managers, but because:

- it offers a flexible, 'just-in-time' approach to skills development;
- it can be delivered in the workplace, even 'at desk';
- adults respond best to 'facilitative' rather than 'directive' learning;
- it is an effective form of 'employee engagement' in times of change;
- the skills and experience of managers can be leveraged to improve the overall capability and performance of the wider workforce.

The CIPD survey came to the conclusion that the biggest change facing organisations' provision for learning and development in the next five years is that greater responsibility for staff development will be devolved to line managers. However, they saw a significant risk 'for managers to be further empowered without the relevant skills development to support it'.

THE KEY QUALITIES AND SKILLS OF A MANAGER–COACH

We now know that coaching has become a key part of a general management toolkit, but what are the personal qualities you need to be effective as a coach? What are the critical attitudes, skills and knowledge required for coaching?

The most important question perhaps is whether a manager can be a coach at all. Unlike a professional external coach, who can focus wholly on the needs of the individual, the manager–coach needs to balance the needs of the coachee with those of other team members and the organisation as a whole. It's appropriate to appreciate that, given a manager's position of authority over the individuals in their team and the overarching necessity of doing what's right for the organisation as a whole, there may occasionally be a conflict of interest between the two.

However, we believe that whilst being in a position of authority is an important consideration, it need not be an insurmountable obstacle, as long as there is genuine trust and respect in the working relationship. It is also a fact that coaching frequently takes place between peers and even upwards on occasion, with some more enlightened bosses happy to be coached by their team members.

We firmly believe that managers can be coaches but, to be successful, coaching requires that manager to possess core qualities of empathy, integrity and objective detachment, as well as a willingness to adopt a fundamentally different approach to managing staff. The cheque, the key to promotion and the axe have no place here. Such qualities can't be gained from attending a training course, rather they require a genuine personal commitment to this set of values; it is important to recognise that some people may find this prerequisite harder to achieve than others.

As an approach to managing people, coaching requires a manager to:

- enable – rather than control;
- listen – rather than talk;
- question – rather than tell;
- feed back – rather than criticise;
- delegate – rather than retain power.

However, this is not just about being a fluffy 'tree hugger'; manager–coaches need to ensure an unrelenting focus on performance and results in every coaching session. As such, the ability to articulate clear goals is a fundamental prerequisite if you aspire to develop your coaching skills. So make sure that you're familiar with the process of identifying SMART goals. Cadle and Yeates (2007) clarify SMART as follows:

- **S – Specific –** There is a specific or precise outcome or deliverable; some new behaviour or achievement.
- **M – Measurable** – Progress towards the achievement of the deliverable can be measured.

- **A – Achievable** – The objective is capable of being reached. It doesn't have to be easy or simple; it should be stretching and developmental.
- **R – Relevant** – The person or people given the objective must be able to have an impact on it. It needs to be sensible for them and relevant to their work.
- **T – Time-framed** – The timescale for starting and finishing the work, plus any reviews to assess progress.

Maslow and Herzberg

Excellent aids to setting SMART goals, which also motivate the employee, are Maslow's 'hierarchy of needs' and Herzberg's theory of workplace motivation. This theory differentiates between 'hygiene factors' that need to be met to ensure an employee is not dissatisfied with their job (e.g. remuneration) and 'motivation factors' (e.g. recognition) that are needed to motivate an employee to higher performance (see Chapter 5 'Leadership' for further details). For example, there is little point in setting stretching performance goals to enable someone to achieve self-actualisation (Maslow Level 5) if the individual is dissatisfied with their remuneration (one of Herzberg's 'hygiene factors'). **You should therefore ensure that you have a good understanding of where the individual is relative to Maslow's hierarchy and Herzberg's two factors in order to identify appropriate goals, which enable them to genuinely progress in workplace performance.**

The seven key coaching skills

There are many skills a coach needs to develop in order to be effective. We have chosen the seven which we believe are critical to the manager–coach.

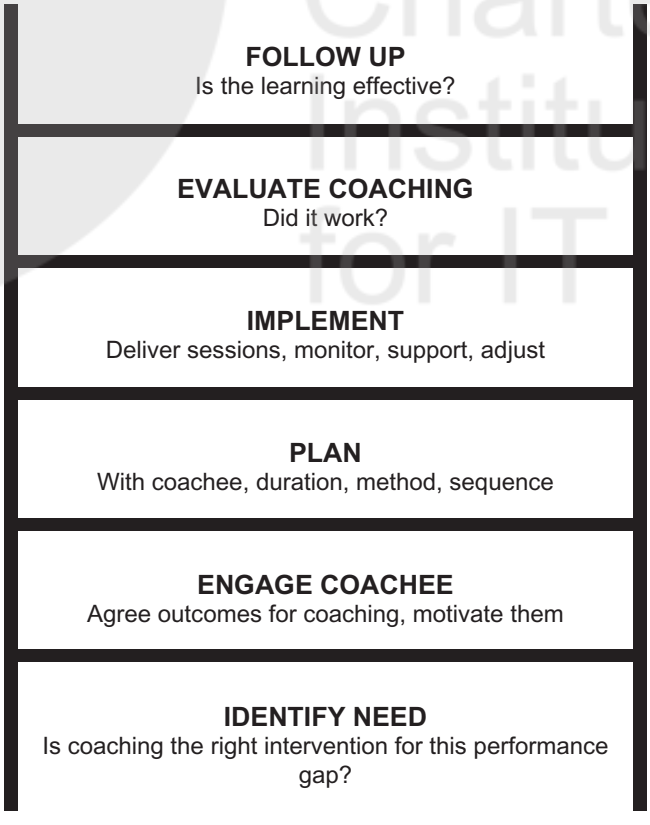
- **Active listening** – This means acknowledging not just the words the coachee is using, but the emotions that they are conveying, through tone, body language and facial expressions. This enables the coach to check that their understanding of the coachee's message is accurate, or whether it needs to be further questioned or explored.
- **Suspending judgement** – Many managers will find this difficult when coaching their staff. It is tempting to leverage your superior knowledge and experience and dismiss the coachee's suggestions as impractical. Instead, you need to hold back, remain objective and hear them out before using questions to discover the 'right' answers.
- **Giving and receiving feedback** – Despite best intentions, feedback often manifests itself either as criticism or ineffective observations. As a coach, your feedback needs to be thought through, honest and delivered without excessive emotions (i.e. balanced). The emphasis should always be to provide the coachee with an opportunity to appraise their own performance. For example the coach could ask: 'What do you do well?'; 'What do you think could be done differently?'
- **Recognising feelings** – Linked to the skill of active listening, a successful coach understands the importance of not only reading emotions, but acknowledging how they may be influencing performance at work and offering empathy towards the coachee.

- **Summarising** – Coaches must therefore be able to repeat succinctly in their own words what they believe has just been said, to ensure a common understanding of a key point before moving forward. It is a quality check of your coaching session, but also enables rephrasing to help the coachee gain additional insights into their challenge or solution.
- **Questioning** – Using open questions (who? what? when? where? how?) ensures that thoughts and feelings expressed by the coachee can be explored to an appropriate level of depth to enable not only **a** solution to be achieved, but the right one.
- **Silence** – Some people will find this skill more difficult to acquire than others. Remember, the session is about the coachee, not the coach, therefore the ability to create 'space' for their thinking through your silence at key moments is critical.

A PROCESS FOR COACHING

Although a coaching session is a conversation, it is most emphatically not a 'chat', but part of a wider learning process, which is best represented as a ladder (Figure 10.1).

Figure 10.1 The coaching ladder



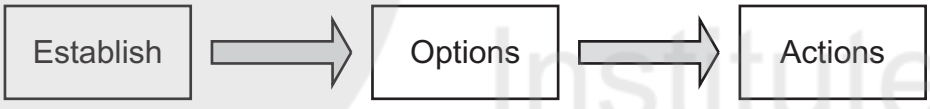
The coaching ladder as a process has several benefits for both the coach and the coachee:

- You confirm that coaching is the right learning intervention in the first place (e.g. on some occasions, a formal training course may be a better option).
- The coachee knows what to expect from your sessions and has confidence in you.
- The coachee has some control over the structure the sessions will take.
- You have opportunities to adjust the approach if necessary.
- You obtain evidence on the effectiveness of your coaching and its benefit to the person/business.

A SIMPLE STRUCTURE FOR AN INFORMAL COACHING SESSION

Whichever model you use to underpin your coaching session (we will look at two of the most widely used shortly), the structure of the session will broadly follow the three stage process shown in Figure 10.2.

Figure 10.2 Informal coaching process



The purpose of the 'establish' stage is to confirm the issues the coachee is facing and probe for a deeper level of understanding. Initial ideas will be discussed, thinking reframed (where appropriate) and outcomes clearly identified.

We then progress to look at the 'options' for the coachee, where we discuss what can be done and the advantages/disadvantages of each solution. Next, priorities are considered and solutions redefined.

Finally, through guided questioning and discussion, the coachee is helped to select the best option and identify the 'actions'. These are the 'who/what/when/how?' steps required to implement the plan. It is also wise at this final stage to create a contingency plan.

You may find that a significant majority of your workplace coaching, especially in the early days, is conducted 'at desk' and 'just in time'. It may involve just one or two 10-minute conversations on a specific topic. This structure is highly scalable and can be successfully employed whatever the duration or context of the coaching.

[27] The origin of the STEER model is unknown.

FORMAL COACHING: THE STEER MODEL

The STEER model is a tool that is ideal for managers when formally coaching a direct report on a specific task.[27] It helps a manager–coach structure formal on-the-job coaching. The acronym stands for:

- **S – Spot** – Opportunities for coaching often arise in a business, often as a result of change. You can 'spot' opportunities for coaching individuals in your team on specific issues by observing their behaviour at work, as a response to a formal performance review or specific feedback from others in the business (a colleague or another manager).
- **T – Tailor** – It's important for you to 'tailor' the coaching so it can be put into the individual's own personal context, so that they can get the best out of it. To tailor the session, you will need to know a little about the coachee beforehand (e.g. are they a new or an experienced member of staff, what is their learning style?).
- **E – Explain** – You must 'explain' to the individual what the coaching session will be about, what you hope to achieve from it, how the session will run and approximately how long it will last. You will find it beneficial if this is done before the session itself, so you can check your mutual understanding and agreement of what will be achieved, and prepare the coachee by asking them to reflect on a few key questions.
- **E – Encourage** – Once you have agreed the coachee's actions at the end of the session, it is time for you to 'encourage' them as they make progress towards their goals. Your job as coach is to offer praise as they take their first hesitant steps, not just to tell them where they're going wrong. Constructive feedback should be given, so the coachee is aware of what they have mastered and what needs further practise.
- **R – Review** – A progress 'review' at agreed intervals is important so that the coachee is aware of whether they are close to achieving their goals. Formally acknowledging progress, however limited, helps maintain their motivation towards achieving agreed goals. The review checkpoint is also valuable to the coach, in understanding how effective your coaching has been.

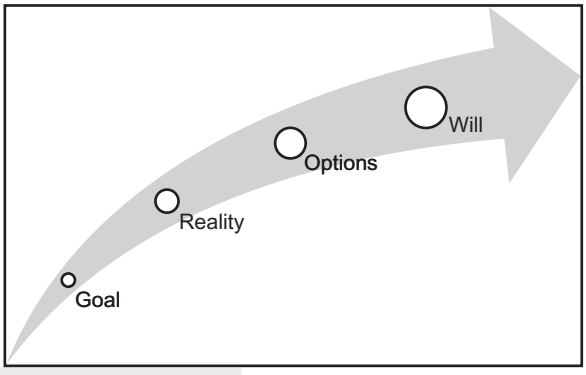
FORMAL COACHING: THE GROW MODEL

The GROW model (Figure 10.3) is probably the most widely used model in performance coaching today. There are several versions in use, all are correct, but the clearest we believe is the following:

- **G – Goal** – where the person wants to be.
- **R – Reality** – how far the person is from that goal, and why.
- **O – Options** – generating ideas for new approaches to reaching the goal.
- **W – Will** – deciding on and committing to a plan of action.

Written about by Sir John Whitmore (2009), Max Landsberg (2003) and others, the basic method of GROW came out of Timothy Gallwey's ground-breaking work with

Figure 10.3 The GROW model



tennis players, described in his 1974 book *The Inner Game of Tennis*. His principle is that performance can be seriously hampered by one's own internal (often invisible) dialogue, which prevents us learning from our experiences, or, to be more specific, putting into practice what we've learned. However, coaching can positively influence that dialogue to achieve startling results. Gallwey explains:

> 'While teaching [tennis] one day, I realized that many of my teaching instructions were being incorporated in the student's mind as a kind of "command and control" self-dialogue that was significantly interfering with learning and performance. When I inquired into this, I found that there was a lot going on in the mind of my tennis students that was preventing true focus of attention. I then began to explore ways to focus the mind of the player on direct and non-judgmental observation of ball, body, and racquet in a way that would heighten learning, performance, and enjoyment of the process.'[28]

In the context of business, the same principle applies. This is why the GROW model is so useful in addressing performance challenges with highly skilled, often senior people. It enables the coach to work 'behind the scenes' with the coachee; to delve deeper into the psychology behind a particular situation and facilitate the identification of an effective strategy for dealing with it.

It's important to note that coaching can begin at any of the stages of the GROW model. A coachee may begin by telling you about a current problem (reality), rather than the goal they want to achieve. As a coach, it's fine to follow their lead, at least to begin with, by asking a few questions to elicit more detail. Then you can go back to their goals. In fact, few coaching sessions of this nature will follow a rigid step-by-step structure, and trying too hard to do so may negatively impact your rapport with the coachee.

[28]http://www.theinnergame.com

So, how do you use the GROW model in practice? The key is in asking different types of questions at each stage to inspire the thinking of the coachee. For example:

- **Goal**
  - What do you want to achieve?
  - Why is it important to you?
  - What is to be avoided?
- **Reality**
  - What is happening **now**?
  - What are the perceptions of your stakeholders?
  - How does that make you feel?
- **Options**
  - What have you tried already?
  - What haven't you tried yet, and why?
  - Could anything else work?
- **Will**
  - What actions will you take and when?
  - What do you need to make it happen?
  - When do you expect to see results?

You may sometimes hear the GROW model referred to as 'T-GROW'. The 'T' simply refers to 'topic' and is a useful reminder that before embarking on a coaching process, there needs to be a mutual understanding of the purpose of the coaching, its boundaries and context. In the workplace, this would normally take the form of a pre-engagement consultation with the coachee, which in practice would mean a quick five minutes over the phone or an email exchange.

USEFUL COACHING QUESTIONS

Whatever model you intend to use, it really helps to have a stock library of standard questions prepared to get the conversation flowing and moving in the right direction. In this section we have selected a series of tried and tested questions for each stage in the coaching process.

Useful questions that can be asked at the start of a session are:

- What do you feel are the key issues to talk about today?
- Where shall we start?
- How can I help?

To ensure that the coachee can develop and expand their thinking, the following open questions work well:

- What makes you think that?
- What are your thoughts about…?
- What do you mean by…?
- How do you feel about…?
- What do you think you should do?
- What would you like to do?

Some things that the coachee will say will need to be drawn out or expanded. Non-threatening probing questions include:

- Do you have examples of this?
- What specifically do you mean by…?
- For what purpose?
- What's your intention?

To help the coachee in considering their desired outcomes, ask:

- What do you want to happen?
- How will you know when you have it?
- When you get it, what will you see, hear and feel?

In guiding their exploration of the options available to them, it is important that they think about the option holistically, rather than just from one perspective. The following questions elicit rounded thinking:

- What will happen if you do…?
- If you don't…, what will that do for you?
- What effect will this change have on others?
- How do you think you might do this?
- What would need to be in place for this to happen?

Finally, in defining the course of action, ensure you ask:

- How willing are you to…?
- How will you make time to…?
- By when will this happen?

COACHING PITFALLS

When you're new to coaching, you may feel that the biggest potential pitfall is not being able to provide the answers the coachee needs; you have to be an expert in whatever they choose to throw at you. **Nothing is further from the truth. Remember, your job is not to provide answers, but to steer and guide the coachee to achieve their own conclusions.**

That said, there are some pitfalls, which you should take care to avoid when starting out as a coach. Here are ten of the most common pitfalls:

- sitting opposite the table from the coachee – it's an adversarial position;
- giving advice when it is not needed;
- imposing 'shoulds' and 'oughts' on the conversation;
- pushing your own perspective – 'what I think...';
- skirting around the issue (or worse, total avoidance), in case it upsets the coachee;
- rushing the session or calling 'time' when the coachee is mid-flow;
- not asking enough questions;
- focusing on following the coaching process at the expense of listening;
- faking in your desire to help the person – they will detect it;
- forgetting that the ability for 'silence' is one of the key skills of a coach.

However, don't let a fear of failure stop you from trying out a coaching approach. As an experienced professional, your skills and knowledge will be much in demand in your organisation. Contributing in a very tangible way to the performance improvement of others increases your value as an employee even further.

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11 MANAGING EXPECTATIONS

INTRODUCTION

Consider this scenario. It is a very special occasion and a couple go out to dinner in a famous restaurant. It has three Michelin stars, scores highly in all the food guides and the chef is widely hailed as a genius. The food itself is wonderful, but the evening is marred by a few small service issues; the table, for instance, is laid up for the wrong number of diners and, when the main course arrives, the waiter cannot remember who ordered what. These are trivial matters that in a less-fêted establishment would go unremarked. But that is the point, this is not a lesser establishment, it has been praised to the absolute limits in restaurant reviews. The chef is discussed in tones of wonderment. It is acknowledged as one of the world's finest restaurants, so the couple expected every aspect of the evening to be absolutely perfect, and, against the backdrop of expectations, it wasn't. Excellent food, yes; but perfect in every way, definitely no.

This story illustrates perfectly why expectations matter. It is against them, not against any objective criteria (even if such can be established), that performance is judged.

This is the case in any professional relationship. If the garage advertises 'two-hour servicing', but takes two and a half hours, we are disappointed; if the doctor prescribes tablets and says we should feel better in the 'next couple of days' and we don't, we are unhappy; and if the IT professional says our new system will be intuitive and easy to use and it isn't, we may complain. But, if the garage had said 'same day service' we could have planned for that and would have been happy with a turnaround time of five or even six hours, as long as it had been completed within the day. Or, if the doctor had said the ailment needed some time to dissipate, we would have been not exactly happy, but certainly prepared to suffer a little longer. And, if the IT professional had advised the customers that the new system contained some complexity so a training session would be needed and they would need to develop expertise in using it, they would have expected some difficulties and adjusted their thinking accordingly.

In many situations, it is not the service delivery that is the problem, it is the mismatch with the expectations. In the examples above, our expectations might cause us to plan, to think through what time we will pick up the car and what we might do afterwards, to agree an appointment because we know when we will have recovered, or to expect to clear more work because the new IT system is easier to use. This is the crux of expectation management: we need to understand the

expectations and find out where they originated and we need to analyse the context for the expectations and work out how to manage them; our aim should be to align what is delivered with what the recipient is expecting.

FOCUS OF THIS CHAPTER

Expectations can cause disconnects in many business situations. The most frequent and obvious are those where we are in a customer/supplier relationship. In the rest of this chapter, we use the words 'customer' to indicate those for whom the product or service is being provided and 'supplier' for those who are providing it. Sometimes, the situation is one where the 'customers' are actually work colleagues and we are working as internal suppliers without a formal contract to govern the relationship. We might argue that, in this situation, the need for effective expectation management is even greater because there is not a contract to fall back on if difficulties and disputes arise. Other situations may arise that do not concern customer expectations, but peer, staff or manager expectations. While this chapter explores the topic from the customer/supplier perspective, many of the principles are equally applicable in this broader context.

CONTENTS OF THIS CHAPTER

This chapter covers the following topics:

- categories of expectation;
- sources of expectation;
- a process for managing expectations – discover, analyse, manage, monitor.

CATEGORIES OF EXPECTATION

When looking at the range of possibilities for expectations, it is useful to categorise them. **The project management 'triple constraint' of time, cost and quality offers a good basis for categorising expectations.**

- **Time** – As we saw in the garage and doctor examples earlier, time expectations apply to many situations. These may involve delivery on a set date or a by a specific time within a date. A time expectation is very easy to measure, so if it is not met the customer will realise this very quickly. If we have not delivered on time, whatever the required product or service, then the customer will be unhappy.
- **Cost** – Cost expectations are also common. Whether it is the price to be paid for a product or service, the level of discount to be given, the budget for a project or assignment or the cost of components, this area has a lot of scope for expectation and disappointment. As with time expectations, it is often straightforward for customers to measure whether cost expectations have been met.
- **Quality** – This third category is more difficult though. Understanding what is expected in terms of 'quality' is not as straightforward as time or cost.

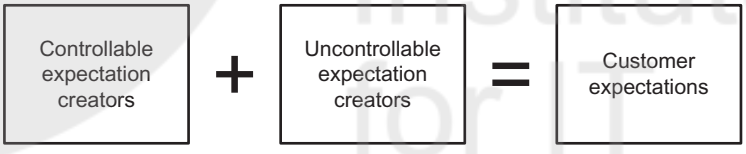
We may feel we have delivered exactly what was promised and still disappoint the customers if they had a quality expectation of which we were unaware. Pointing out that we have delivered 'to the specification' or what was agreed contractually also risks creating an impression of rigidity and lack of concern. The expectations and the 'contract', in whatever form, do not always align. In fact, it is extremely difficult to align them, particularly if we are unaware that the expectations exist. Some customers hold tacit expectations and while they feel they are obvious (and so do not need mentioning), we are likely to remain in blissful ignorance until we fail to deliver.

SOURCES OF EXPECTATIONS

Before we can manage expectations, we have to understand how they originate. **We are able to manage expectations from a more informed basis if we are aware of the sources of expectations.** Further, if we keep abreast of developments within our market and understand our customers' priorities, we can build additional features into our products and services. This will enable us to meet additional expectations in the future.

Essentially, the origins of expectations fall into two main categories, 'controllable expectation creators' and 'uncontrollable expectation creators'. Together, these constitute the customers' expectations (Figure 11.1).

Figure 11.1 Sources of expectations



In the case of controllable expectation creators, we create the expectations through our communications with the customers and their experiences in working with us. If we are not careful, we can unwittingly create high expectations. For example, we may have failed to prepare for a discussion with a customer and, by not choosing our words carefully or promising too much, have created an expectation of service that we cannot deliver.

The expectations that are less amenable to our influence are the 'uncontrollable' expectation creators. However, the term 'uncontrollable' may be a little misleading, since there are some things we can do to influence customers' thinking in these areas.

Controllable expectation creators

These expectation creators may relate to a particular assignment or purchase, or they may be longer term and may be, concerned with the ongoing relationship between the customer and supplier.

First impressions

The first impression we create with the customer is a powerful expectation creator. If we present ourselves as 'experts' we can hardly blame the customer if they expect us to be able to provide them with a high level of skill. Expectations can also be raised through the CVs we present to the customer of the people who will be working with them. While it is important not to send out standard CVs, but to tailor them to the specific needs of the customer, it is very unwise (as well as being unethical) to claim expertise that the people do not, in fact, possess. Claiming expertise you do not have is guaranteed to cause problems at a later stage. Nowadays, social networking sites, online profiles and blogs provide additional sources for customers to find out about people, which can expose where CVs have been embellished to promise skills that we do not have.

Sales promises

In the short term, the customer's expectations are very heavily influenced by the sales promises that we make. If we say that our product will do something, will be ready by a set date and will cost a defined amount, we can hardly complain if the customer believes us and assesses our performance against the expectations we have set. Often, the professionals, who will ultimately have to deliver against these promises, blame the salesperson for promising too much in order to make the sale, but it is rarely as simple as that. Salespeople naturally need to put a positive slant on the offering and, sometimes, they do not have the in-depth knowledge that would enable them to see when a feature is not available or would be impossible to deliver. However, if sales were left to more cautious consultants or project managers, there might not be much business won in the first place.

Deliberate omissions

A more subtle issue that sometimes arises is the failure to point out what is not included in the proposed offering. It can be difficult to point out a shortcoming in a product or service, especially if a competitor can provide this feature. However, if the customer is left with the impression that the product does something when in fact it does not, this will raise serious issues later. An organisation could then point at the contract but, as we discussed earlier, this is not an effective approach in the longer term because, whatever the actual contract says, customer dissatisfaction will ultimately be the result.

We encountered a situation a few years ago where an organisation delivered an IT system and there was a problem with document production. The system was printing the document pages in the wrong order and they required reorganising before they could be issued. Now, this might be fine, albeit a little irritating, for one or two documents of a small number of pages, but it is a different matter, and a higher degree of annoyance, where the documents are over 50 pages and several copies are required. The customer, not unreasonably, expected that the documents would be printed correctly. The supplier tried to point out that there was no specific mention of the print order in the contract and received a pretty short shrift.

Promotional information

Even before they contact us, customers may be aware of any promotional information we publish. Firstly, this information needs to be accurate if we are not to find we are hostage to fortune. Secondly, we need to be aware what the information says because it may have created expectations that we need to manage.

Previous purchases

The most obvious of these, if we have had dealings with this organisation before, is any previous experiences of our products and services. If they have purchased something previously and been so pleased that they wish to buy from us again, they will have an expectation based upon their previous purchase. It may be that this is fine because we have been able to maintain that level across all of our products or services, but this is not always the case. Sometimes organisations change their offerings over time, not necessarily to improve them. The current economic situation has caused many organisations to reduce slightly the level of quality that they offer. For example, items that were once standard on a model of car may now be optional; or, a restaurant may have reduced the size of the portions served. Where a customer is purchasing for the first time they may not have particular expectations in these areas, but if they have been a customer on a previous occasion, these longer term expectations will exist and will cause dissatisfaction with the reduced level of quality.

Branding and reputation

Another long-term expectation creator is a long-term commitment to quality on the supplier's part. Companies such as Hewlett-Packard and Mercedes-Benz have, over many decades, positioned themselves as providers of high-quality products and services and this creates an expectation in the customers that they will benefit from this high quality. This impression is long-lasting too: Mercedes' problems some years ago with their A-class car, which rolled over in an obstacle-avoidance test, were generally regarded as a 'blip' and probably had limited impact on sales of their larger, prestige models precisely because there is a general expectation that Mercedes is committed to making safe and reliable cars.

Similarly, your organisation may have a reputation for being innovative in the range of products and services you offer. This is not always an advantage because some of the innovations you have made might not have been commercial successes. However, some companies, such as Apple, have a history of bringing clever, useful and very easy-to-use technology to the market, and many people wait excitedly for its new products. So, a customer who is dealing with a company known for its innovative approach will expect an innovative solution.

Finally, over the long run, a company can develop a public image of itself through its marketing efforts that will create expectations for its product. Recently, some of the major management consultancies have taken to advertising in journals such as the *Harvard Business Review* and even on television to create an expectation of the benefits that their services will offer for their clients.

This is, of course, a long-term process and it is not possible to create, or change, an image overnight. But the gradual success of the Skoda car company, part of the Volkswagen Group, to improve its image shows what can be done. It also illustrates, incidentally, that marketing will not succeed on its own; there has also to be a tangible improvement in the quality of the products or services offered.

Of course, long-term marketing is outside the scope of an individual to control, although there is nothing to stop someone applying upwards pressure to company management to step up or alter its marketing efforts. However, we all

need to be aware of the image that customers are likely to have of our organisation when assessing what are their expectations; are the company's marketing efforts likely to have created a good image, a poor image or no image at all? And, based on that assessment, what do we have to do to create the right impression, correct a wrong one or to manage a situation where expectations and reality do not match?

Uncontrollable expectation creators

So far, we have examined expectation creators that are directly influenced by our own organisation. There are, however, other expectations that are less amenable to control in this way. We have called them 'uncontrollable expectation creators' though it would be more accurate to say 'less controllable expectation creators'. The principle here is that if we are aware of them, we can at least do something to try to counteract any negative effects should they arise.

Competitor experiences

If the customer has not done business with us previously, they may have purchased from one of our competitors. This can have two impacts: the experience with the competitor may have been poor in certain areas, in which case we may have to make sure we convince the customer that we can deliver better quality; alternatively, the experience with the competitor may be very good in some areas and this will have set an expectation that we need to know about.

Whatever the previous impression, it will create expectations for future projects, which is why it is so vital that each piece of work be regarded not as a stand-alone job, but as part of a continuing relationship with the organisation. Of course, there may be circumstances where there will be no further business with the organisation, but these are very few and far between and it is much safer to assume that we may at some point wish to bid for further work. What is more, people tend to move around and you may encounter an individual again with another organisation. So, in considering how to approach an issue on a project, we need to take account both of the current circumstances and also the potential future opportunities.

Competitor marketing

When competitors market their services, they will emphasise what they are good at and will have created an impression in the customers' minds. They may also cause the customer to ask questions about our organisation. For example, if they make great play of their extensive range of products and options, this will cause customers to question the extent to which we can provide such coverage. If they state that they have several experts in a particular technology, the customers may require all their suppliers to offer this level of expertise.

The market positioning of your competitors may also have an effect on the customer's expectations. For example, a competitor may decide to take a risk and offer a fixed price in an area where your organisation feels it more prudent to insist on a time-and-materials approach. This leaves you vulnerable to the charge that you are not confident in your proposal and are not prepared to stake your reputation on a fixed-price deal. This can be a two-edged sword, of course, and you may be able to

create the impression that, whereas your company is realistic and professional, the competition is making rash promises that may not be achievable.

Negative information

A further possibility is that competitors may provide disinformation about your organisation to customers. Although there is widespread agreement in marketing circles that disparaging the competition is generally counterproductive, this does not stop some companies from doing it, often in a subtle way. An example concerned an account manager for a major systems integrator who left an article from a technology magazine with a customer because it made some unfavourable allusions to a competitor company.

Aside from speaking to our competitors, however, customers also speak to people from other organisations. They belong to trade organisations, chambers of commerce and the like, and they attend conferences and exhibitions. These 'word of mouth' contacts are more or less impossible to control. There is little you can do about any of this except to realise that any bad impression gained by any customer has the potential to come back and haunt you later, either with that customer or in some apparently unconnected way, which is why consistently excellent customer service has a habit of paying off in the long run.

Customer preferences

A further issue is one relating to customer preferences. Some customers have different preferences for the type of company, and the type of individual, that they like to do business with. As we said in Chapter 2 'Building rapport and sustaining relationships', 'people like people who are like them' and customer/supplier relationships tend to apply this principle.

A common example relates to size of organisation: a large, multinational company may want to deal with suppliers that have a similar coverage; a small local firm may prefer the informality of smaller suppliers. Another typical requirement is for the suppliers to have experience of business domains or market sectors.

These preferences set expectations for the customer; for example of supply volume and coverage, and of knowledge and experience.

Industry norms and standards

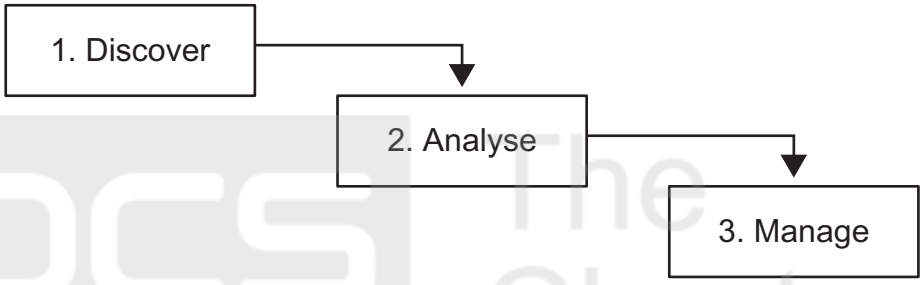
Finally, it should be borne in mind that there are norms of performance within every industry and that these also set customers' expectations. If we think about the restaurant example with which we started this chapter, there are many popular guide books that establish standards of food and service within the restaurant industry. These books assess restaurants and categorise them into grades with specified standards, and, as a result, define what customers could reasonably expect at each establishment.

So, all of these things, controllable and uncontrollable expectation creators, combine to form the customer's expectation of the product or service we are to provide for them and how doing business with us will be. In the next section, we present some ideas on how to go about managing the customer's expectations.

A PROCESS FOR MANAGING EXPECTATIONS

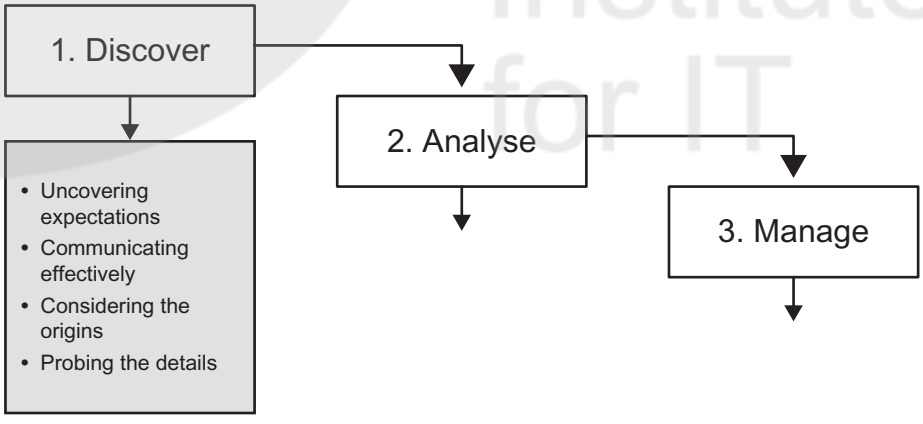
We must always look for expectations and, once uncovered, it is important we manage them in a considered, thorough way. Ad hoc responses to particular issues may result in some expectations being overlooked or promises being made that cannot be met. Figure 11.2 sets out a process for managing expectations which we explore in further detail below.

Figure 11.2 Process for managing expectations



Discovering the expectations (Figure 11.3)

Figure 11.3 The 'discover' process



Uncovering expectations

Firstly, we need to uncover the customer's expectations and determine what they want us to deliver in terms of timing, costs and quality. Sometimes this is straightforward because they will state them outright. At other times, it is more difficult because there may be expectations that the customer assumes will be met and, as a result, does not think to mention them. In the former case we still have to ensure that we record the expectations and take further action. However, in the latter case,

we may not realise that the customer has information that has not been mentioned. This 'tacit knowledge' can cause many difficulties, causing people to make unsustainable assumptions and act on incomplete information. Problems will arise if we fail to uncover the expectations because we will be unable to assess whether they are achievable and will not be able to manage any discrepancies.

Communicating effectively

When dealing with customers we have to take a proactive approach to uncovering their expectations, particularly if we are to uncover tacit knowledge. One of the key factors here is to ensure that we communicate effectively. **We need to listen actively (see Chapter 4 'Negotiation and conflict' regarding active listening) and pick up any cues in the customer's tone or body language.** The iceberg analogy is very relevant when we are considering expectations: we only see a small section above the surface, far more is hidden below.

So, if there are documented requirements, even if relatively informal, it is important to look at these carefully, ensure we have addressed all of the points made and ask ourselves what is missing. Where a customer states or documents a requirement that is vague or unclear, we need to work out the underlying need by careful questioning and listening. It can be all too tempting to brush over a comment that exposes an issue we cannot address or a standard we cannot achieve, but this is a short-term sticking plaster; **in the longer term, any expectations we have glossed over, will return to bite us.**

Similarly, discussions can also elicit useful information about where people have had poor experiences in the past because their expectations were not met. Information gleaned from such discussions can be invaluable in uncovering expectations and will also flag up warnings about how they might react in the future.

Considering the origins

We also need to think about where the expectations originated. Was it something one of our colleagues said during the sales process? Was it something we failed to point out in our initial contact? Is it something our competitors offer? An idea that derives from the industry or the particular nature of the customer's market? Understanding the source of the expectation will help us devise an approach to managing it.

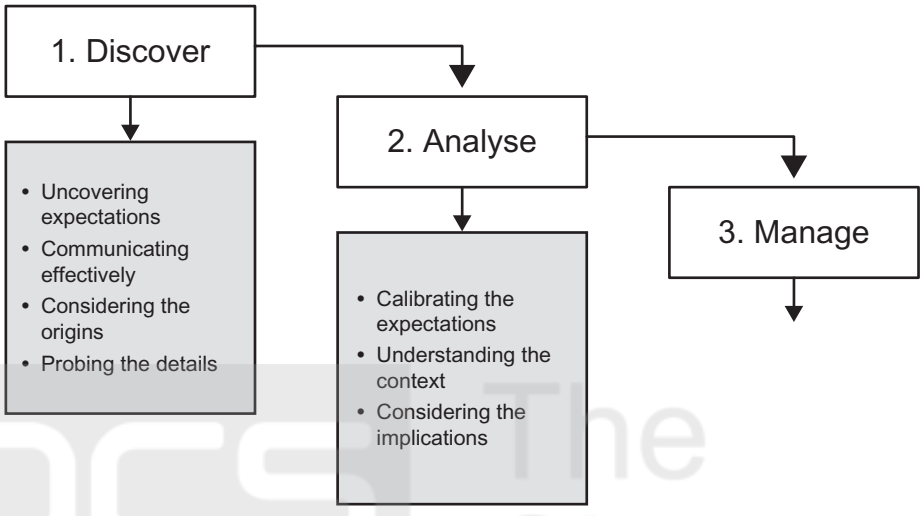
Probing the details

Once an expectation has been raised, it is a good idea to probe further to find out more about the expectation. For example, there may be a stated time frame of two days to respond to a request for information from a supplier. However, while this may be the stated time frame, the customers' needs may be satisfied by a slightly slower response as long as they are kept informed of progress. On the other hand, two days could be a maximum and, perhaps due to other pressures, the customer is actually hoping for a faster response.

Analysing the expectations (Figure 11.4)

Next, we need to analyse and assess the expectations. An obvious first step is to consider whether they are achievable, or, possibly, may be surpassed. Often this will be the case, allowing us to delight our customer and form a basis for a long-term

Figure 11.4 The 'analysis' process



relationship. However, if we cannot meet the expectation we need to analyse what is required in order to determine our response. There are several aspects to this, starting with understanding how strongly the customers are likely to feel about their expectations.

Calibrating the expectations

The expectations may arise from a provable business need for the customer. For example, if one were designing a stock control system for a retailer, it would be obvious that they would need a facility to find out the volumes of items in stock at any given time. This may, however, have been missed out of the specification that formed the basis of the contract. Whether or not the customer technically asked for the facility, however, they will be expecting to receive it and will be understandably unhappy if they do not.

Alternatively, the expectation may be something that is not essential, but is eagerly anticipated. This is less strong than an outright business need in that the customer could probably live without the feature, but they may be most unhappy that, having looked forward to it being delivered, they will not now receive it.

Lastly, the expectation may be something that the customer has assumed will be delivered, but is not really of great importance. We need to know this because, if the priority is low, it will be easier to manage the expectation away if necessary.

Understanding the context

Thus far, we have used the term 'customer' in a general sense, often referring to the customer organisation as a whole. It must be remembered that, ultimately, customers are individuals and that, even within a single organisation, we will have to deal with many customers, each with a different perspective, need and, possibly,

personal agenda. This is important because in calibrating an expectation we need to take into account the personal view of the individual customer. Someone may have very strong views on how the product or service should be, or they may be fighting an internal political battle that will cause them to take a particular position. They may have promised their manager that they will deliver (through their suppliers) a particular feature and would be highly disadvantaged if they were unable to do this.

Similarly, there may be some strong reasons why an organisation is expecting a level of service or delivery of a particular component. It may be vital for their regulatory compliance or to meet the service levels they have with their customers.

Therefore, **it is important to explore beyond the stated reason for an expectation to see why it exists.** If a supplier can help an important member of the customer's management team in meeting the expectation, this will be beneficial in the future; conversely, being seen as unhelpful or obstructive could well come back to haunt the supplier later on.

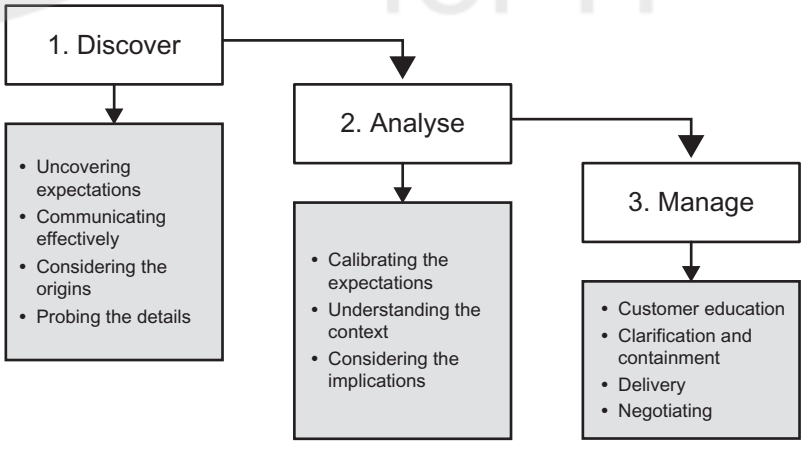
Considering the implications

Finally, it is important when analysing an expectation to consider its implications and its viability for the supplier. However much we may wish to accommodate a customer, it could be that an expectation is just unreasonable and that to meet it is either impossible or would render the work unprofitable.

Managing the expectations

Having identified the source of the expectation and calibrated its strength, we are in a position to decide on how to deal with it. Essentially, there are four aspects to this as shown in Figure 11.5.

Figure 11.5 The 'manage' process



Whichever strategy is taken, and often it is a combination of strategies, it is vital that no one inadvertently raises or sustains unrealistic expectations with the customer. It is extremely easy to do this unless you are very careful. **When discussing the delivery of a product or service with a customer, take care not to give the impression that you can deliver anything that is not included or possible.** Saying something like, 'I shall see what I can do' may sound to your ears as a vague suggestion that you will investigate further; to the customer who really wants this to happen, it sounds as if you are saying you will sort it out. If something is not possible, it is always worth repeating that fact a few times. It is amazing how often two parties have a conversation and both go away feeling that they have achieved what they wanted. When managing expectations, the onus is on the supplier to ensure that the customer does not think 'it is all sorted' when this is not, in fact, the case.

Educating the customer

Our first opportunity to 'educate' the customer occurs during the initial sales contact. It is important that we are clear about our offering from the outset, making sure that the customer is aware of what is included and what is not. Sometimes, we have to advise the customer that we cannot deliver what they require. Success in managing expectations can derive from demurring as well as from agreeing.

When we have discovered unachievable expectations, it is important that we acknowledge the differences and educate the customer on the implications of the situation. Firstly, we need to explore with the customer what we are actually providing or doing, and highlight where this differs from what the customer is expecting. Secondly, we need to evaluate the time, cost and quality implications of doing what the customer expects, and advise them accordingly. For example, in the training arena, customers often think that tailoring a standard course to their exact needs is either going to be easy and cheap, or even free. The training supplier will need to explain where the differences lie and then discuss the amount of effort required to tailor the course in this way.

Where the expectations have emerged from the actions of competitors, whether through their marketing or advertising efforts, from the way they position their offering or through plain disinformation, you will need to advise your customer of the discrepancy between your offering and the expectations. In response, you must highlight those areas in your offering where you believe you have superiority and act to mitigate areas where you think you may be deficient.

Underpinning the success of the education approach are some of the standard skills that we have mentioned throughout this book: in particular, building rapport and trust (Chapter 2), communicating effectively (Chapters 7 and 8), in particular listening actively and negotiating (Chapter 4).

Containing the expectations

Containment is appropriate when it is not possible to meet all of the expectations and it is not possible to vary the constraints of time, cost and quality. The objective of containment is to help the customer understand what is to be delivered and what is not; and what can and cannot be achieved within the constraints of the situation. The supplier's aim should be to contain the expectations, to 'manage them downwards' towards what can sensibly be achieved within the terms of the purchase or agreement. Containment is also required when the customer believes

that what they have asked for is simple and therefore cheap (or free), whereas the supplier knows that it will be more difficult and costly.

Sometimes, all that is required for this to happen is to meet with the appropriate person in the customer organisation and explain the situation. But, more often, there will need to be several meetings with various different people over a period of time to build gradually an understanding of the reality of what is to be delivered. This may require a carefully coordinated strategy, with different members of the team all contributing to the expectation management effort: the manager with the key customer personnel, individual team members talking to operational staff and so on.

Delivering the expectations

Delivery is where we are able, or decide, to meet an expectation. Sometimes, it is possible to meet the expectation within the limits of the current offering. On other occasions, meeting the expectation will not cost a great deal (relative to the purchase) and the longer term benefits of the relationship with the customer will make the expense worthwhile. There may even be situations where it is worth meeting the expectation even thought the cost is relatively high, because this may open up additional opportunities that may be extremely beneficial in the future. Even in this case, however, it may well be worth managing the customer's expectations downwards, so that the 'extra' that is delivered is recognised as being above and beyond the contractual requirements. This will provide an opportunity to delight the customer and ultimately help the customer/supplier relationship. One important point, though: if we promise to deliver additional features so that we meet the expectations, then we must do this. **Failing to deliver what has been agreed is worse than a refusal at the outset.**

Another possibility is to look at the situation as an opportunity for creative problem solving. Just because an expectation exists of a particular solution, it does not mean that this is the only option. Sometimes, there is another route that will satisfy the customer's needs without causing the supplier too much difficulty. The chunking technique described in Chapter 4 can be extremely useful here. **Once we understand the source of the expectation, the customer's perspective and the business context, it may be possible to find an alternative way to a resolution that is mutually acceptable.** Further, creative problem-solving techniques, such as those described in Chapter 13, can also help us to identify acceptable solutions.

Negotiating a new agreement

There are some situations where it is not possible to contain the expectation, either because it is something the customer really must have (even if it was not stated in the requirements) or it cannot be provided within the constraints of the business context. In this case, the strategy is to bring the customer to see that the feature required is not covered by the current contract or agreement and it can only be delivered if a variation is agreed. Essentially, there is a two-stage process involved:

(1) Securing agreement that the requirement is outside the scope of the current arrangement. This can be quite tricky because often the specification is not in sufficient detail to determine what is in and what is out.

(2) Only then, discussing and agreeing the impact (time, cost and quality/performance) of meeting the expectations.

From the expectation management point of view, efforts need to go into stage (1) because it is important to help the customer understand that what is required is not within the current agreement. This may require the multilevel approach already described for expectation containment. Once it has been achieved, it will be much easier to proceed to stage (2) and a renegotiation of the agreement.

If it is impossible for the customer and the supplier to agree on what is, and what is not, within the scope of supply, then we have to accept that we are in a potential conflict situation. A conflict situation is clearly not what either customer or supplier will be aiming for, but, if one arises, it is impossible to manage the issue effectively without acknowledging the conflict situation. Therefore, the resolution of conflict begins with the recognition of the conflict by both parties and the understanding that conflict-management mechanisms will have to be employed to resolve the situation. More detail on conflict management is contained in Chapter 4.

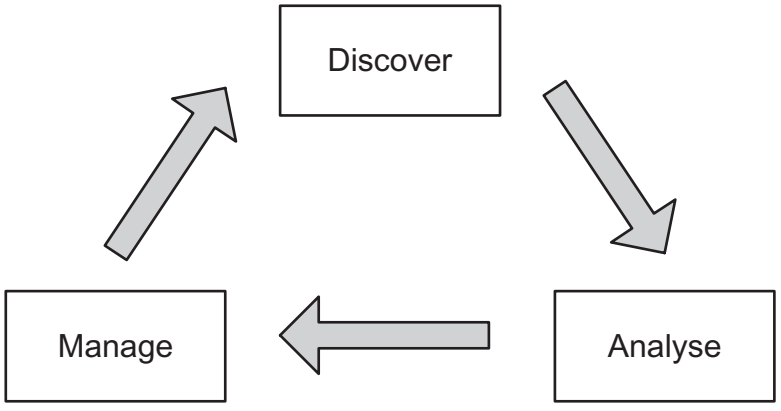
It may be possible to negotiate away an expectation that is desired, but not essential, by exploring other options or pointing out the impact; this may be necessary if the expectation is very difficult to satisfy.

MONITOR THE EXPECTATIONS

While our model in Figure 11.2 shows a linear process, it is rarely the case that an expectation is handled at the outset or when it emerges, and that is the end of the matter. In any long-term customer relationship, there are opportunities for expectations to appear at any time, bringing with them new difficulties to be managed. We need to be vigilant for such situations and continue communicating with the customers to ensure that we identify any expectation difficulties at an early stage.

Managing expectations is a continuous process (as shown in Figure 11.6) and, as a result, we need to be constantly alert for new customer expectations.

Figure 11.6 The continuous process for expectation management



POSITIVE USE OF EXPECTATIONS

Although we have discussed the management of expectations in this chapter, there is another angle that we need to consider. While we have talked about our competitors or the market setting expectations for our customers, this may be something that we also want to do. For example, if our organisation has particular skills or other resources not widely available, we want to ensure that we mention these to our customers and explain how they are of benefit to them. In this way, we ensure that our customers appreciate the additional aspects we can offer and set an expectation should they be approached by our competitors. If these aspects are in scarce supply, the expectations may be very difficult to meet and manage, which would help us to maintain a competitive edge.

CONCLUSION

Managing expectations is a key component of working successfully in business; here are some key points that are useful to remember:

(1) Firstly, and possibly most importantly, recognise that a staged proactive approach to managing expectations will yield more benefit than reacting once they have surfaced. You could look for (low-risk) opportunities to try the approach.

(2) Then, try to identify what people expect, and the context within which their expectations have arisen.

(3) Next, analyse the expectations. Are they reasonable and how important are they?

(4) Finally, decide on and deploy a strategy for managing the expectations. This may include education, containment or even negotiating a new deal.

It is always important to remember that failing to manage expectations will lead to problems, if not disaster. If we lower expectations and then exceed them, people are delighted. If we fail to meet high expectations (even if they are unreasonable), people are unhappy. However, ultimately, if we don't know about the expectations, we have no chance of managing them successfully.

FURTHER READING

Burch, G. (2011) *Resistance is Useless: The Art of Business Persuasion*. Headline.

Johnson, S. (2004) *The One Minute Sales Person*. William Morrow & Company.

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12 FACILITATION

INTRODUCTION

The dictionary (OED, 1999) definition of the term 'facilitate' is 'to make easy or easier'. The term is derived from the Latin word 'facile', meaning 'easily done' or 'doing something easily'. So, we could define facilitation as:

> A process through which a person makes it easier for others to do something.

In our professional world, we need facilitation to ease the path towards decisions and consensus. In other words, facilitation is used to ensure that a group of people remain focused on what they are trying to achieve and move in the desired direction towards agreement.

A facilitated event can take many forms, for example:

- a meeting to discuss business problems and opportunities;
- a workshop to define requirements for improved processes and IT systems;
- a seminar to advise on a new business approach or standards;
- a training course to provide instruction on a professional topic;
- a presentation to persuade decision-makers to invest in a new initiative.

In this chapter, we focus on the use of facilitation in workshops and meetings. However, the principles are applicable to any of the events listed above.

CONTENTS OF THIS CHAPTER

The following topics are covered in this chapter:

- why facilitation is important;
- the essence of facilitation;
- roles in a facilitated event;

- structure of an event;
- the elements for successful facilitation;
- preparation and planning;
- effective facilitation behaviours;
- workshop techniques;
- participation preferences;
- the benefits of effective facilitation.

WHY FACILITATION IS IMPORTANT

Meetings, workshops and seminars are used with increasing frequency in today's business world. Projects are initiated via workshops, committees perform their work through regular meetings and seminars are organised to consider new business methods and processes. But, often, people feel that their time has been wasted as yet another meeting drags on endlessly or a workshop descends into argument. These events can easily become stuck or veer off at tangents and, when this happens, waste the time of the participants. Even worse, decisions that are reached during the meeting are then overturned subsequently. Or, a workshop fails to achieve the set objectives so another one is arranged to consider the issues again. All in all, meetings, workshops and other events that are not facilitated well can become the bane of many people's working lives.

But it doesn't need to be like this. A meeting can achieve the defined objectives and workshops can succeed in reaching an agreed way forward. A seminar can advise and inform, leading the participants to adopt improved ways of working or new ideas. However, to achieve these things, it is vital that there is a facilitator who ensures that the event is kept on track, all voices are heard and the issues are debated professionally. A skilled facilitator delivers business benefits by ensuring that the focus remains clear and constant and the participants' time is not wasted.

THE ESSENCE OF FACILITATION

When we talk about facilitation, we are referring to the application of a range of behavioural skills that will assist the successful running of business meetings or workshops. In essence, in a professional business context, facilitation means enabling a group of individuals to achieve a stated business outcome.

The facilitator is usually highly skilled in working with groups of people and enabling them to work successfully together. The facilitator plays a key role in helping a group to improve its ability to resolve problems or make decisions, keeps the discussion on track and ensures that each participant contributes.

A well-run event will result in any decisions attracting a greater degree of consensus and ownership, and the quality of the decisions made is likely to be improved too. The group may be encouraged to develop novel solutions to problems by working as

an effective, creative team. Or they may be given the opportunity to voice concerns and air conflicts. The facilitation of the event ensures that this is planned, sufficient time is available and the required objective is achieved.

ROLES IN A FACILITATED EVENT

There are four roles to be performed during a facilitated workshop. These are the facilitator, the sponsor, the participants and the scribe.

Facilitator

The success of a facilitated workshop is very dependent on the skill and experience of the facilitator. It is the facilitator who plans the approach, including the techniques to be used during the discussion, and acts as the catalyst to ensure that everyone participates fully and effectively. Accordingly, effective facilitators need certain attributes as described below.

Organised and thorough

The facilitator must be willing to prepare thoroughly for the event and needs to know how to do this. While this may sound relatively straightforward, in practice this is not the case. Every workshop or meeting involves different stakeholders, issues and required outcomes and, as a result, needs the facilitator to decide on the best approach and the most relevant techniques. One size will not fit all. The facilitator also needs to be able to analyse the views of the stakeholders and think about where their priorities might lie and how these need to be addressed in the discussion.

Quick thinking

The facilitator needs to be able to think and act quickly. Although preparation and planning is vital, it is also rare that everything goes according to the plan. Unexpected opinions may be aired, previously hidden agendas may emerge and unforeseen impacts may be identified. Given the fluidity of these meetings, it can be critical to adapt the process when the situation changes. The facilitator needs to be able to recognise when this is needed and change accordingly. In essence, the facilitator needs to keep the focus on the desired outcome and keep that in mind when adapting the approach.

Participative and empathetic

The facilitator must be able to sense the mood of the group, not just by what is being said, but also by interpreting tone and body language. **Understanding body language and sensing when participants are not in agreement or, even worse, not voicing their concerns, is key to a successful workshop.** Consensus is not achieved if only the voiced opinions are considered. Sometimes there may be a lot of emotion in the room and the facilitator must decide how to handle this. In some situations it may be necessary to lower the temperature, or defer the discussion until a later point, or divert to a discussion about how people feel in order to allow the participants to release their inner emotions and tensions. Where participation is low or irregular, it is important to use techniques to engage and involve some participants. It is important that the facilitator is aware of the range of participation styles and preferences and is able to adapt to these. For example, some people may be very uncomfortable with free format discussion,

preferring to talk only when they are asked to do so. The facilitator needs to use techniques that will help everyone to participate.

Experienced, knowledgeable and credible

Facilitators need to have some 'presence' in order to gain credibility with the participants, some of whom may be senior managers whose respect must be gained early in the meeting. The support of the sponsor can be extremely useful in establishing the facilitator's credibility, but this will only help to a degree. The facilitator has to be able to build on this and ensure that his or her authority is clear and unchallenged. Therefore, the facilitator will need to be assertive, confident and in control. This is vital if it is necessary to get discussions back on track, to call 'time' when an issue is bogged down and to move on to other areas. The facilitator may need to handle conflicts and manage any disruptive behaviour. Where there are different levels of management and seniority present, the facilitator needs to ensure that all voices are heard and opinions expressed.

Business knowledge

It is not necessary for a facilitator to have a deep understanding of the business area if they are not required to provide input on the content of the discussion. In practice, the facilitator needs to remain neutral in most situations. However, a facilitator does need to understand the business issues in general, so some research is required as part of the planning process, and it is very wise to have learnt some of the terminology to be used by the participants and understand the important issues that the participants are discussing. Where it is expected that the facilitator will be able to contribute to the content of the meeting, it is vital to have a good understanding of the situation. This is sometimes called 'content facilitation' and requires a great deal of skill because it adds another dimension to the already crowded facilitator role.

Sponsor

Many workshops are run to decide on a course of action or to respond to a situation that has arisen. This may be a result of a particular problem, or because a business opportunity has arisen or just to review an earlier decision. There is usually a senior manager who is responsible for the area under discussion and who requires the outcome of the event to be successful. This person is the business sponsor and can be a very valuable ally in organising and running the workshop. The sponsor can help to identify who should attend or be represented and can ensure that the group has sufficient authority to make decisions. The sponsor can also ensure that the required resources are available. Sometimes, **it can be useful for the sponsor to attend the session, at least at the outset, to demonstrate the senior management support for the facilitator, commitment to the objectives and agreement to the approach for achieving them.** Where the discussion will be difficult, perhaps because there are strong disagreements, visible support from the sponsor can help the facilitator to establish and maintain authority.

Participants

Deciding on the participants is vital to the success of a facilitated workshop. Everyone with an interest in the outcome of the event (the stakeholders) needs to be involved. They may not all attend, but they must all be represented. During the discussion, the participants must have the authority to contribute to the decision

making; there is nothing worse than a group deciding on a course of action only for the decision to be overturned by senior management afterwards. This is not only demotivating, but also wastes everyone's time. Similarly, all participants must be prepared to participate. While this sounds obvious, it is important to reiterate the responsibilities of the participants: they should be prepared, informed, on time, open and keen to contribute.

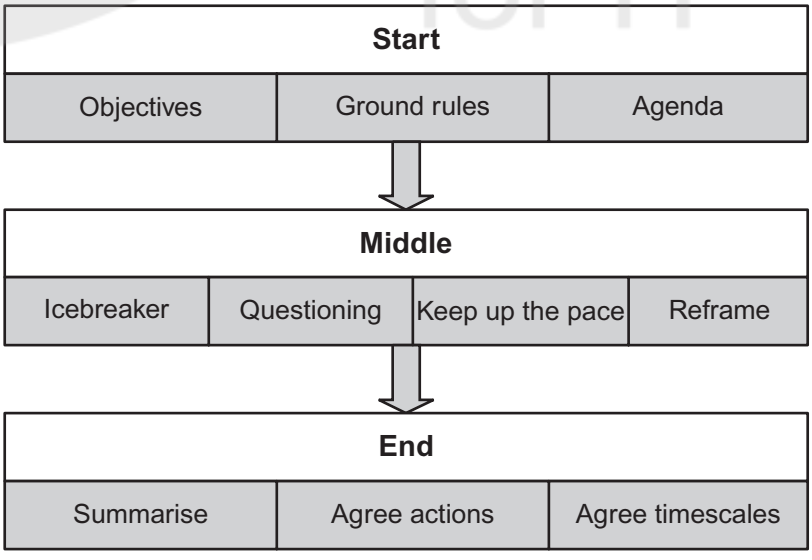
Scribe

Keeping a record of the discussion, any actions and the decisions, is very important. Failure to do so will result in little being achieved and time being wasted. This is usually the province of an attendee, known as the scribe, who supports the facilitator by keeping the notes. To be effective in the role, the person designated as the scribe needs to understand the language and terminology of the participants, have a clear understanding of the level of recording required (detailed, verbatim notes are rarely useful) and be able to produce and distribute the record very quickly. Sometimes, the record is very limited and just comprises a summary of the main actions, in which case the facilitator may take on the role of scribe. However, if more than a short list of key points is required, combining the roles is not desirable. Facilitation is difficult and, at times, stressful and it is simply not practical to make detailed notes at the same time. Doing this will prevent the facilitator from reading the mood of the group effectively and may cause the participants to switch off while waiting for the points to be written up.

STRUCTURE OF AN EVENT

The generic structure for a facilitated workshop or meeting, with some of the key areas highlighted, is shown in Figure 12.1.

Figure 12.1 Structure of facilitated events



At the outset

It is vital that the facilitator sets the scene at the outset. It is always useful to open with an introduction of the facilitator, scribe, participants and, if present, the sponsor. Once the introductions have been made, the facilitator needs to remind the participants of the objectives of the workshop and check for any concerns or different expectations. It can be helpful at this point to ask the sponsor to make an opening statement that shows their commitment to the process and support for the facilitator. **The objectives should be displayed prominently in the room where they will provide a reminder of the overall purpose and will be available should the facilitator wish to draw attention to them;** this can be very useful if the discussion is drifting off the desired track. The agenda for the workshop, setting out the structure, content and order, should be agreed with the participants.

It is often useful during the introduction to agree some ground rules for behaviour during the session. These do not have to be draconian or rigid, but they can help enormously if you set expectations for behaviour at the outset. Ground rules provide a reminder for the participants and can influence their behaviour in a positive direction. At the very least, they save having to ask someone not to do something once the discussion is underway. Examples of ground rules are shown below.

Ground rules for a facilitated session

- Turn off all mobile phones.
- Share all relevant information.
- Focus on concerns and interests, not positions.
- Disagree constructively with other members of the group.
- 'Check your ego at the door'; everyone's contribution is equal in a workshop, irrespective of grade or status.
- Challenge assumptions.

During the session

Once the introduction has been completed, it can be a good idea to hold an exercise that helps to break the ice. This is not so relevant if the participants know each other but, where this is not the case, it can be very helpful. The exercise can be as simple as each participant finding out something about their neighbour, which they then share with the group. The icebreaker helps to get the group talking and can save time during the rest of the workshop.

The facilitator needs to ensure that the discussion is in line with the agenda and progresses towards the objectives. The discussion may encompass topics that are not completely relevant to the objectives because sometimes a wider exploration of the issues can be helpful and important. Having said that, it is important to ensure that the workshop does not go completely off the track and keeps moving in the general direction of the objectives.

During the discussion, the facilitator needs to pose questions, introduce techniques and challenge perspectives. Opinions need to be probed to ensure that all of the argument has been considered and developed fully. It is the responsibility of the

facilitator to ensure that the participants consider the issues fully and do not just accept received wisdom as in 'that's how things are always done here'.

The facilitator may need to ensure that the pace is maintained and the workshop energy does not drop. Suggestions and statements may need to be reframed in order to ensure understanding. It is very important that everyone's views are respected and that the most active participants do not overshadow everybody else; the facilitator has an important responsibility to make sure that all parties are brought into the discussion.

It is important for a facilitator to understand how groups of people develop as teams. It is worth bearing in mind that while a workshop or meeting has a limited duration, some of the principles relating to team working still apply. Chapter 3 'Team working' describes the key points to be aware of when working with teams. For example, Tuckman's model of team formation can offer useful insights when facilitating, particularly if a discussion becomes heated or even argumentative. The 'storming' phase of this model is a vital step because this is the point when the group members begin to open up and previously hidden opinions and agendas emerge. The disclosure of personal agendas is essential for any form of consensus to be achieved. Some groups congratulate themselves on reaching agreement without any form of dissent, but this is a dangerous approach; this situation usually means that opinions have not been expressed openly, agendas remain hidden and no true consensus has been reached.

All of the discussions, suggestions and conclusions need to be recorded; this is normally the job of the scribe. Key points should be written on flip charts or whiteboards in large text that is readable by everyone. Coloured pens or sticky notes may be used to organise or categorise ideas. Sheets should be numbered so that an audit trail is maintained. All such records should be displayed in the room so that they can be easily seen and referenced if necessary.

Concluding the session

As the discussion moves towards a conclusion, the achievements should be summarised and compared with the objectives stated at the outset. All actions that have been listed need to be confirmed by the group, assigned to an owner who will take responsibility for performing the action and allocated a timescale for completion.

Follow-up

The decisions made and the actions agreed in the workshop should be written up in a post-session report if we are to ensure that they will be enacted. Typically we should include in this report a brief written account of the workshop, including the agreed actions, their owners and timescale. **Allocating ownership and timescales is very important because it is all too easy for other work commitments to take over once the meeting has ended.** Further to this, there should also be an agreement during the workshop about who will monitor the implementation of the decisions and completion of the actions.

THE ELEMENTS FOR SUCCESSFUL FACILITATION

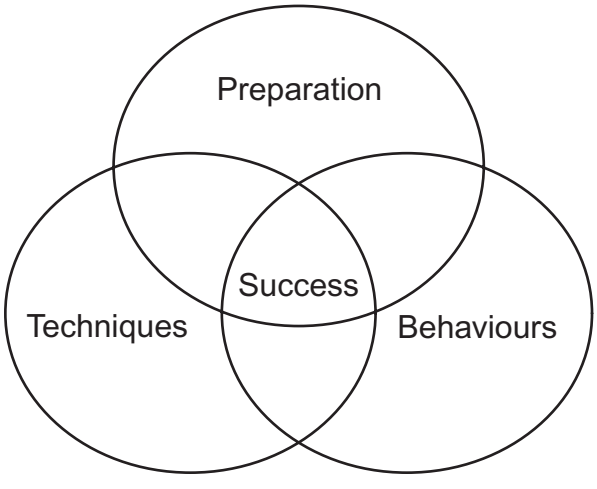
There is a school of thought that believes that effective facilitation results solely from a powerful, charismatic facilitator. This is sometimes known as the 'cult of the personality'. While it is surely the case that facilitators need certain behavioural

attributes in order to command a group, relying on personality alone is never a good idea. You may have attended workshops where the facilitator is clearly underprepared; perhaps there is a lack of understanding of terminology, or the timing goes widely awry, or the room isn't prepared adequately. In these, and other similar, situations the group feels a sense of dissatisfaction, which can then take a superhuman effort, and personality, to overcome. And, even the most charismatic of us can fail to win over some people.

There are three aspects to ensuring that facilitation is successful (Figure 12.2) and all three are necessary:

- **Preparation and planning** – There is no substitute for this and failing to do it is a major mistake. Good preparation can transform a competent facilitator into an excellent one. It can make a workshop successful where it might have been a shambles. And everyone can learn to do it. We feel this is so important, and so undervalued, that we are going to discuss this in detail below.
- **Facilitation behaviours** – To run a successful meeting or workshop, the facilitator needs to have certain behavioural qualities and needs to apply them when working with other people. Without these behaviours facilitation can be doomed. While some facilitators are fortunate to possess some attributes naturally, again, these can be developed and are discussed below.
- **Facilitation techniques** – Many great thinkers have devised techniques to help us to communicate, provoke discussion, generate ideas, document situations and so on. Yet, although we know about these, we often prefer to fall back on the classic bullet-point flip chart list following the 'just shout out your ideas' instruction. While this can work sometimes, it does not fit every situation and weaker facilitators often miss opportunities to delve thoroughly into the possibilities with the group by doing this. Some techniques are described below; others, used for creative problem solving, are described in Chapter 13.

Figure 12.2 Aspects for successful facilitation



PREPARATION AND PLANNING

There is an overall structure to a facilitated event:

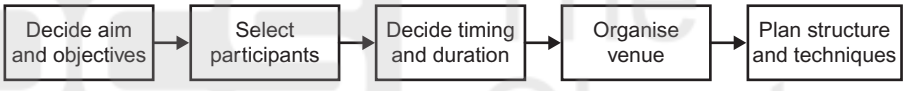
(1) preparation;

(2) running the event;

(3) post-event actions.

Some facilitators seem to believe that they can be successful by relying solely on their personality and charisma, and minimise, or even avoid, the preparation stage. This is never a good idea because all facilitated events require careful planning in order to be effective. The planning activities are shown in Figure 12.3.

Figure 12.3 Planning a facilitated event



These activities are based on the traditional analysis technique of asking 'Why? What? Who? When? Where? and How?' that always provides an excellent framework for planning. The particular issues to address are:

- decide on the overall aim (why) and the specific objectives (what);
- select the participants (who);
- decide on the timing and duration (when);
- identify and book venue (where);
- plan the structure and techniques (how).

Decide on the aim and objectives: Why and what

It is always critical that we understand why a workshop or meeting is to be held. Too often workshops seem to be accepted as absolutely necessary without considering the purpose. On one project we know, the sponsor had organised the workshop and decided who was going to attend and issued the invitations before engaging the facilitator or considering whether a workshop was appropriate. When questioned about the rationale for the workshop the answer came 'because we always begin with a workshop'. Clearly, if we are to make good use of everyone's time, this is not good enough. We need to know why a workshop, meeting or any other type of facilitated event is required and, also, we need to ensure that this is the most appropriate approach. This requires the facilitator to establish the problem that is to be addressed and to consider how best to do this.

Once we have established the purpose of the workshop and decided that this is the best way to proceed, then we can consider the specific

objectives in greater detail. It is the responsibility of the facilitator to discuss and agree with the sponsor what the workshop must achieve. This is a key element of the planning because it helps with all of the other aspects, in particular when identifying the stakeholders who need to attend and the techniques required to address the issues.

Select the participants: Who

Once we understand the aim and objectives, we can decide who the participants should be. Some will be obvious because they will be stakeholders with a connection to the issue or situation; it is important to make sure that all of the key stakeholders are involved or represented. For the facilitator, and sometimes for the sponsor too, it can be tempting to limit the attendance to people who will be positive and supportive, but this can be a grave error. Anyone with strong views on the subject or who may be affected by the outcome will want to have their views taken into account. There may be other stakeholders without a direct connection but who have specialist knowledge or carry political influence that needs to be harnessed. We may want a few people not involved in the issue to provide a different and challenging perspective. We may also want to invite some people who are not involved directly with the issue but can provide an objective view or analysis. This can be extremely beneficial because it may raise issues or identify options that other more closely involved participants may miss. All of these potential stakeholders should be considered.

Decide on the timing and duration: When

The date, time and duration for the event also need to be decided. Timing can be problematic because people's diaries are often full. Sufficient advance notice and keeping to the scheduled time, rather than treating it as moveable, will help. However, in addition to this there are other difficulties. Some times are preferable to others: straight after lunch is always tricky because many people find it difficult to concentrate at this time (yes, this is a euphemism for falling asleep!) and some may fail to contribute; last thing on a Friday is even more difficult because many people want to go home, resulting in them agreeing with propositions they may otherwise veto.

The duration needs to be linked to the objectives for the workshop. The key point is to ensure that the objectives can be met in the duration allowed. Often, workshops are organised with unrealistic expectations and objectives that cannot all be met within the time frame. Sometimes, this results from the sheer difficulty of getting a particular group of people together; having achieved this, there can be a tendency to try to cover everything while everyone is in the same room. However, it is wise to avoid this. If we set unachievable objectives the result may be that we achieve nothing and waste everyone's time. **It is important to structure the workshop by allocating an objective, or sub-objective, to a time slot.** For example, it could be estimated that the first objective will require one hour, the next half an hour, and so on. Analysing the objectives, and the time required to achieve them, will provide a strong structure and help keep focus during the discussions. It will also help identify the required duration for the session.

It is often said that a meeting or workshop should not last longer than two hours. While there is some justification for this statement, it is not necessarily the case and can be overcome with careful planning. However, a clear structure

coupled with strong organisation will help to achieve both the objectives and manage longer durations. Objectives may need to be decomposed into sub-objectives to help track progress and ensure effective timekeeping. This is explored further below when we discuss planning for the techniques to be used during the discussions.

Identify and book venue: Where

Further concerns are identifying, and then booking, a suitable venue. In particularly problematic or contentious situations, a neutral location, such as a conference centre, is the best option because this will help to put some distance between the participants and the problem, and can help to lower the emotional temperature. However, even where the meeting or workshop is likely to be relatively straightforward, a location away from the working office (e.g. on another floor of the building) can be very helpful to remove work distractions.

It is always important to think about the size and style of room too. We have lost count of the number of times a room has been booked that is inadequate for the size of group. Sometimes the room is too small because the standard delegate number for the room is based upon everyone sitting around the table; but the facilitator will require some space and will need to be in sight of all of the participants, so, part of the table will not be available for seating. Typically a meeting room that will seat 12 delegates will only support eight workshop or training course participants. Forget this at your peril because consensus and discussion will be difficult if people feel they are in a cramped space. Alternatively, be prepared to facilitate from the doorway, as was required of a colleague when attempting to facilitate in a room that was too small. Also, if syndicate work is needed, make sure additional rooms are organised or, alternatively, that the room is large enough for groups to work separately.

The equipment to be used in the workshop is one aspect that is often forgotten. Often, a flip chart or whiteboard is sufficient, although it is always important to bring pens (and make sure they have not dried up), wall adhesive and sticky notes. Another tip is to check the sticky notes actually stick. Some will not stick to certain wall or window surfaces and, when this happens, it can destroy a carefully planned exercise. You will usually need equipment such as a flip chart, projector, laptop, smart board or whiteboard, and it is vital you organise them in advance. You may find, on arrival, that the required equipment, even just a flip chart, isn't available or that you are charged an additional hire fee.

Plan the structure and techniques: How

Planning the structure and techniques to be used is vital; again, just 'winging' it is a guarantee of limited, if any, success. The facilitator must consider what techniques might be used to help the participants achieve the defined objectives. There are a number of factors to take into consideration here, such as:

- the objectives and whether they need to be decomposed;
- the size and composition of the group;
- the individuals within the group and the roles they will perform or adopt.

While the plan need only be an outline, and an effective facilitator must be prepared to vary the plan as required, **it is still essential to have mapped out the general structure, content and progression of the meeting or workshop.** The next two sections look at two aspects to be considered when planning 'how' the session will be run: the participation preferences and the discussion techniques.

EFFECTIVE FACILITATION BEHAVIOURS

A successful facilitator has to be able to listen actively, read the body language of the participants and sense the mood of the group. These are fundamental attributes without which a facilitator is going to have difficulty in working well with a group. In addition to these attributes, there are some key facilitation behaviours that are required of the successful facilitator. These behaviours are described below.

Provide energy

A facilitator who is lacking in energy is going to have great difficulty in encouraging participation and ideas. We have all been in meetings or workshops where there is a point at which the energy levels drop: prime examples being straight after lunch or at the end of the day. Once this happens, it is very difficult to think through issues, identify possible ideas or analyse problems thoroughly. If the facilitator lacks energy, then this situation worsens and very little will be achieved.

Where the energy levels of the group have dropped, it is up to the facilitator to find strategies to re-energise the group. Effective energisers can be as simple as exercises where the group hold standing discussions rather than sitting, such as gathering around the flip chart, or even taking a quick break. Another option is to use specific energiser exercises that get people moving around, if possible while having fun. Such an exercise is 'victims and assassins'. Here, everyone decides on someone they want to move closer to and someone they want to run away from. Chaos often ensues, but a group doing this can become re-energised very quickly.

Sometimes, it is sufficient to allocate group work involving discussion of relevant issues or topics. This is particularly the case where the subjects are likely to engage the interest and concerns of the group. The key thing is not to hope that if you continue talking the energy levels will rise naturally. This is very unlikely to happen without some positive action. In fact, it is probable that the opposite, that is lower energy levels, will result.

Encourage positivity

Whether it is a team meeting, a training course or a workshop, participants are required to speak out if they want to contribute ideas and, for some, this is not an easy thing to do. If you are facilitating, **it is important that you recognise when someone has attempted to contribute and provide assistance to enable this to take place.** This may mean requesting that the rest of the group listen to the contributor.

Sometimes a participant offers a suggestion that is incorrect or unlikely to help address a situation. If this occurs, **it is important to try to find something of value in what has been said.** A dismissive, negative response will guarantee that the

particular attendee will cease contributing and it is likely that other participants will follow suit. Instead, you should try to recognise that someone has made the effort to contribute and try to find something from the suggestion that can be commented on positively. Perhaps you could develop the original idea and use this to move the discussion in the desired direction, or it may be possible to pose a further question based upon the participant's comment. Whatever the situation, it is important not to dismiss any contribution or give a negative response. The impact of such an approach will be to 'close down' the discussion and, ultimately, could result in the group ceasing to participate at all.

Ensure clarity

Sometimes participants offer ideas or thoughts that are not fully formed or are poorly expressed. **The facilitator needs to be able to reframe these statements quickly and accurately in order to ensure clarity of understanding within the group.** Sometimes, this can be difficult to achieve, but reframing is an important tool in the facilitator skill set.

Maintain neutrality

The facilitator's role is to enable the group to discuss and achieve consensus. The facilitator may have ideas and opinions, but it is never helpful to argue or dispute points with participants. **One useful technique is to ask the group for opinions and perspectives if it is felt that a participant has not been accurate or helpful.** Sometimes, the group encounters an issue that causes widespread disagreement or even threatens to fracture the group. In this situation, it is safest to apply the 'parking' technique whereby a particular issue is noted, usually on the flip chart where it can be seen by all, for discussion at a later stage. The issue may require further consideration or guidance, possibly from external parties such as the sponsor or senior management.

Be flexible

Each situation, problem or set of objectives will require different facilitation approaches and techniques. A skilled facilitator will have planned well and will have a toolkit of techniques to draw upon. Sometimes an unexpected issue or situation arises and the planned approach is not appropriate. At these points, the facilitator needs to recognise that a deviation from the plan is required and try an alternative technique that will address the issue in hand.

Allow pauses or silence

Breaks in the discussion can be extremely useful because they allow participants to consider points, develop positions and identify risks or impacts. Pauses and silence can be very effective during facilitation activities. Allow them to happen naturally and don't feel obliged to talk through them if you feel the participants would benefit from some 'thinking time'.

Don't force the pace

The facilitator is responsible for keeping the discussion on track within the time constraints, but extended and wide-ranging debates can be extremely valuable. Where the participants wish to examine their views and opinions in sufficient depth some latitude will be needed to allow for this. Trying to move the discussion too quickly or in a particular direction can cause difficulties and hinder consensus. Be prepared for this to happen. It is always a good idea to build some contingency into the agenda.

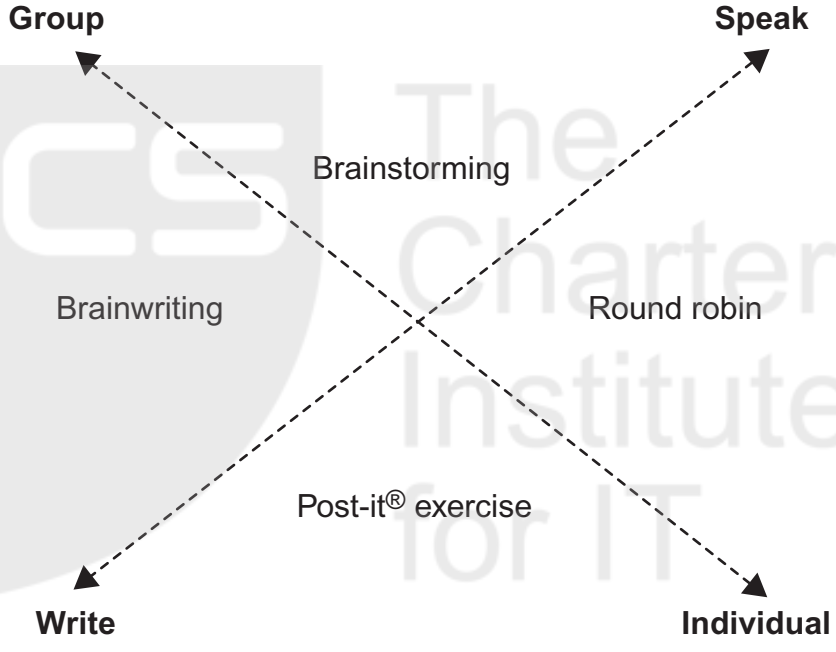
WORKSHOP TECHNIQUES

There are numerous techniques that may be used during facilitated discussions. These fall into two broad categories: techniques for discovery of information and techniques for expressing the results.

Techniques for discovery of information

Four key techniques for discovery are shown in Figure 12.4. The diagram shows how the techniques combine approach (writing or speaking) with group or individual participation.

Figure 12.4 Discovery techniques



Brainstorming: Group/speak

This is an extremely useful technique because, when it is used correctly, it can help to generate large numbers of ideas. It was invented in the 1930s by Alex F. Osborn who defined 'brainstorm' as 'using the brain to storm a creative problem'.[29]

Brainstorming has four main stages:

(1) State clearly the problem or issue prior to beginning the brainstorming session. This is a key stage and it is important that the problem is defined at the right level and is straightforward for the group to understand. It is important to break this down into subpoints if the problem is complex or multifaceted and then conduct separate brainstorming sessions for each point.

[29]Osborn, A.F. (1948)

(2) Conduct the brainstorm about the problem or issue. The aim is to amass as many possibilities as the group can identify. All suggestions should be noted. While the group should be encouraged to build on each others' ideas and give free rein to their thoughts, it is important that the facilitator controls the session. This may require the facilitator to encourage less participative people to contribute, possibly through using a round-robin approach, and to control those who have the propensity to dominate the discussion.

(3) Evaluate the ideas produced by the group. Critical judgement is reserved until everyone has finished contributing. This is an important approach because it allows people to offer suggestions without fear of ridicule or disagreement.

(4) Agree actions to implement the selected ideas.

Sometimes facilitators use brainstorming as an opportunity to ask the group to shout out ideas in an unstructured way. This is not advisable when discussing a serious issue or trying to ensure that all opinions and perspectives are heard. Osborn defined a set of rules that should be followed if we want to conduct a successful brainstorming session. The rules, based on Osborn's list, are:

- judicial judgement is ruled out;
- 'wildness' is welcomed – the crazier the idea, the better;
- quantity is wanted;
- combination and improvement are sought;
- all ideas should be written down;
- hold a single meeting – no break out groups;
- don't look for a perfect solution – it does not exist.

Round robins: Individual/speak

Round-robin sessions are exactly as they sound, that is working around the group and asking each person in turn for their views and ideas. This can be a really useful way to ensure everyone contributes. **Having said that, sometimes people dislike being 'put on the spot', so it is usually wise to allow people to 'pass' if they can't think of anything.** Some participants do not like being the focus of attention and it relieves the stress if they have an escape route.

Brainwriting: Group/write

Brainwriting is similar to brainstorming, but it uses pieces of paper placed in the middle of the table to capture ideas. Each participant takes a sheet and writes one idea on it before placing it back in the middle of the table and taking another sheet. Another idea is written on the new sheet and then that is placed back in the middle of the table. Very quickly, the participants will pick up sheets of paper that already have ideas written upon them and are able to build on the thoughts captured initially. The process continues until the facilitator decides that the allotted time has ended or everyone runs out of ideas. Brainwriting is especially useful if there are a lot of reflector/theorists present who may not respond very well to the more outgoing brainstorming approach.

Post-it® exercise: Individual/write

This approach involves using Post-it® notes to record ideas. Each participant is given a number of sticky notes and writes one idea on each. They continue to do this until the facilitator calls 'time' or everyone runs out of ideas. The facilitator then either collects up the notes or asks everyone to stick them on a wall or notice board. Similar ideas are grouped together so that the different themes emerge. It can be useful to allow the participants to add further ideas while their colleagues are adding their notes to the wall because this enables Osborn's 'combination' and 'improvement' elements.

It is a good idea to use creative-thinking techniques in conjunction with the discovery techniques because they help to provoke new ideas and innovative thoughts. These techniques are described in Chapter 13 'Creative problem solving'.

Techniques for expressing the results

As well as the techniques for discovery, we also need to find means to capture the discussion, record agreed perspectives and issues, and communicate them to the participants at the meeting and more widely across the organisation. The most important aspect to remember is that we need to represent information in a way that is readily understood by the participants because this will encourage understanding and discussion. You have various techniques available to you, including specific modelling techniques, such as business process modelling or flow-charting, or more generic techniques for documenting business situations, such as mind maps, rich pictures or fishbone diagrams. These techniques are described below.

Modelling techniques

The basic idea of 'boxes and lines' is always a useful standby in a workshop. They enable you to build models of processes, document flows, timelines and many other business situations. A visual representation of the work is invaluable in helping to generate discussion and show problems clearly. It can also expose differences in understanding and application very quickly.

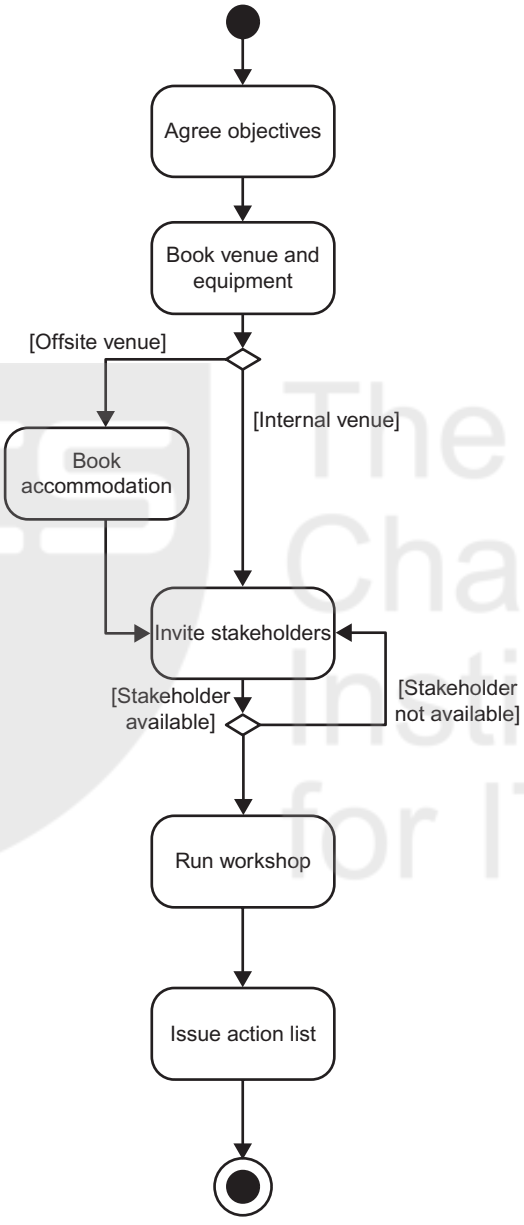
If a more formalised approach is needed there are many defined modelling techniques available. The Unified Modeling Language™ (UML®) offers numerous formal modelling techniques, mainly, but not solely, applicable to IT systems. A more business-oriented set of modelling approaches are explained in *Business Analysis Techniques* (Cadle *et al*., 2010).

Standard flow-charting techniques can be very useful to document a work or process flow. Flow charts help a group to understand the steps, flows and decisions involved in carrying out a task. Figure 12.5 shows a simple flow chart for organising a workshop, using UML® activity diagram notation.

Rich pictures

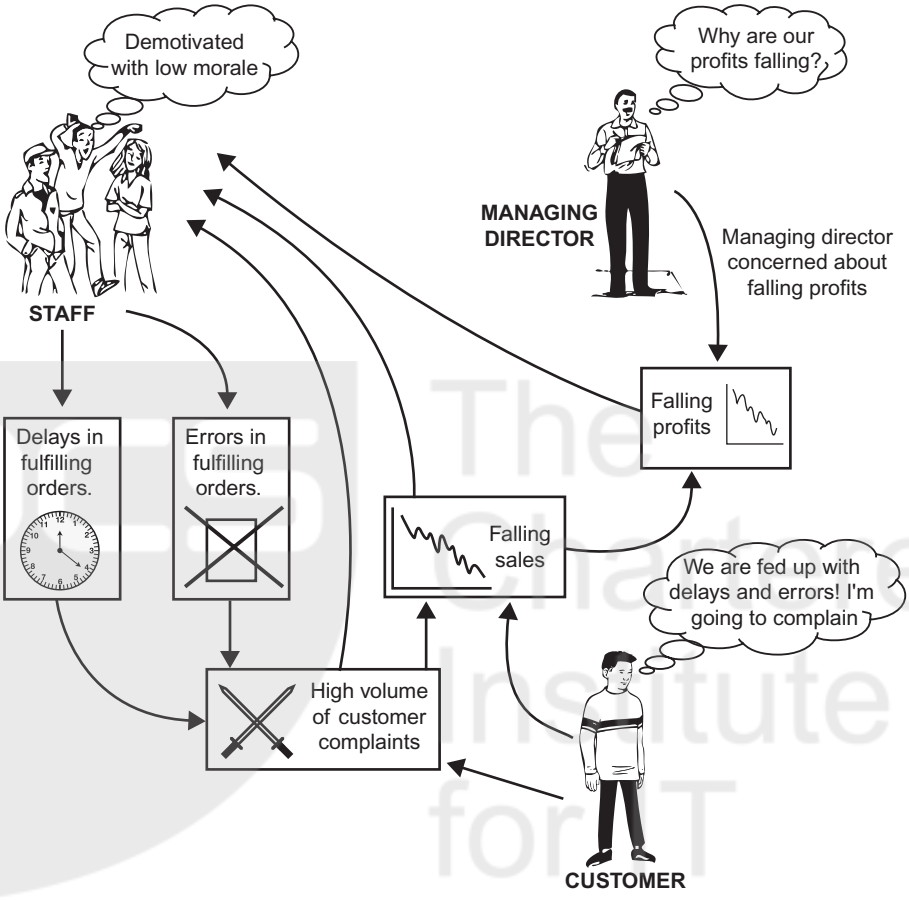
Rich pictures are free-format diagrams in which you can use any symbol to represent any part of a business situation. Typically, a rich picture includes aspects such as process flows, stakeholders and their views, equipment, organisational culture and buildings/locations. The lack of formal notation and the free-format approach ensures that rich pictures may be used in almost any situation and can capture

Figure 12.5 Example activity diagram (flow chart)



everything that is required. They can be kept very simple or can depict detail and complexity. The use of symbols means that they are also an excellent way to capture the emotion of a situation or issue. Figure 12.6 shows a rich picture of a business situation involving a sales organisation.

Figure 12.6 Example rich picture



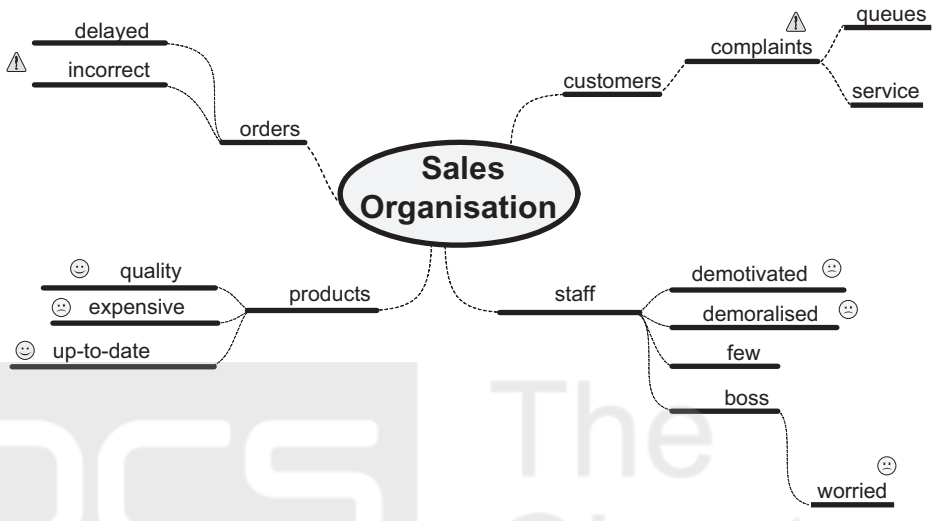
Mind maps

Mind maps are branch-and-twig diagrams that you can use to structure thinking about a business problem or issue. The issue is placed in the middle of the map from where major branches emerge; these represent the key elements to be represented. From each major branch, smaller branches emerge, each of which represents a particular aspect. These smaller branches can then host even smaller branches because each aspect is broken down further. The map can be extended until it captures all of the required information. Words are usually used to explain each branch or sub-branch, but these can also incorporate symbols to illuminate or highlight points. Figure 12.7 shows a mind map for the struggling sales organisation in our example.

Fishbone (Ishikawa) diagrams

Fishbone diagrams were invented by Kaoru Ishikawa and are useful for organising the results of a discussion about a business problem and its causes. The central

Figure 12.7 Example mind map for a sales organisation



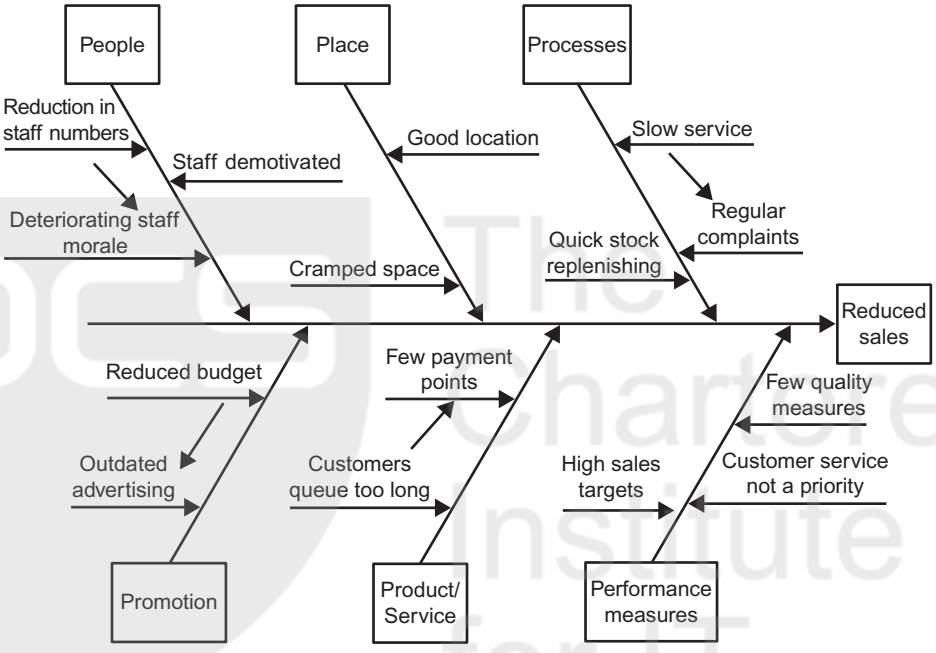
'spine' of the diagram leads to a box, the 'head', which contains the statement of the problem. Several bones emerge from the spine, each of which relate to a particular aspect. Fishbone diagrams tend to be drawn using a predefined structure for the 'bones' of the 'fish'. Table 12.1 shows some typical structures, although these may be varied or even combined; the key point is to address the issues inherent in the problem under discussion.

Table 12.1 Structures for fishbone diagrams

4Ms	8Ps	4Ss
Machine	Product (or service)	Surroundings
Materials	Price	Suppliers
Manpower	Place	Systems
Method	Promotion and profile	Skills
	People and partners	
	Process	
	Physical evidence	
	Performance measures	

Once the 'bones' have been drawn in, arrows pointing towards each bone showing issues within each area are drawn. These issues help to uncover the key reasons for problems in the business situation. An example fishbone diagram is shown in Figure 12.8.

Figure 12.8 Example fishbone diagram for sales organisation



Force-field analysis

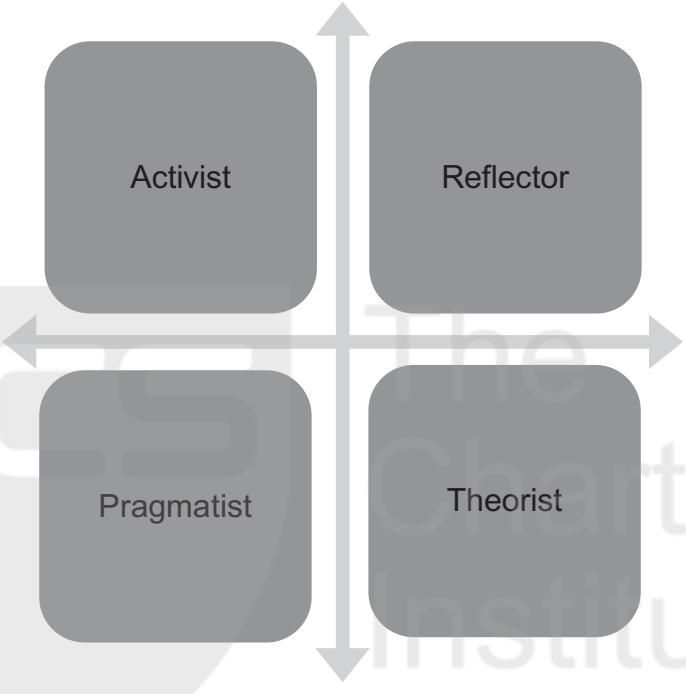
This technique is used to list the forces for and against an idea or proposed solution. The forces are listed as arrows acting upon the solution. Each arrow may be drawn so that the length of the line represents the relative strength of the force. For example, the line for a less powerful force would be relatively short compared with the line representing a more powerful force. Force-field analysis is covered in further detail in Chapter 13 'Creative problem solving'.

PARTICIPATION PREFERENCES

The facilitator may decide to vary the structure and techniques in order to suit the preferences of the participants. Aside from the overall behaviour of the group, the facilitator also has to contend with the individual personalities of the people in attendance. One way in which this may be explored is to consider the possible learning styles of the participants. **'Learning styles' were defined by Honey and Mumford and provide useful insights into how people learn and behave.** This approach can be invaluable when running a meeting or workshop because these styles also reflect how people prefer to participate in group activities.

There are four defined learning styles as described below and depicted in Figure 12.9.

Figure 12.9 Learning styles



- **Activist** – Someone with an activist preference likes to try things out, usually without reading the instructions or manual. Typically, they find reading the manual too tedious and prefer to learn by doing. They start by attempting to do something, then think about how that went and what went wrong, then try again, and so on, thus learning what to do in the process.
- **Pragmatist** – A person with a pragmatist preference tries to relate new information to their own experiences and, within this context, thinks about how this could be applied in practice. They like to learn techniques and skills by working out how they can help them perform tasks in the future.
- **Theorist** – A theorist likes to read the theory books and explore the research basis for information. They like to understand the theory and analyse the information in order to learn and understand.
- **Reflector** – The reflector learning style applies to people who like to think through the information without initially discussing or questioning. These people may not participate immediately because they prefer to reflect on what they are hearing.

Of course, we do not have one style as a preference; most of us use a combination of styles, but there are one or two that indicate our preferred way of learning and

participating. One combination that is found in many organisations, and particularly among IT professionals, is the reflector/theorist: someone who likes to know the theory and prefers to reflect upon how it might work.

A facilitator chooses the techniques used to run a workshop based on the relevancy of the learning styles. For example, activists are more likely to respond to 'open outcry' type of techniques, such as brainstorming or round robins (see the next section), whereas reflector/theorists may be very unhappy to be asked to respond to questions so immediately, without time for due thought and reflection; this may cause them to stop contributing. For such people, written techniques can be much more effective. **It is always useful to remember that some people say little but have a great deal of influence; alternatively, others talk a lot but are largely ignored because what they have to say is of little consequence.**

Honey and Mumford devised questionnaires that can be used to uncover your learning style and that of others, but it is not usually practical to survey people this way before a meeting or workshop. An experienced facilitator usually develops a sense for the type of people that they are working with and adjusts the techniques they use accordingly. For example, where the group contains many individuals with preferences for highly active exercises, the facilitator could decide to use techniques that require high participation. Alternatively, where the group appears unenthusiastic about participating, the facilitator may decide to use exercises that incorporate time for reflection and discussion.

Another issue that the facilitator should consider is the reluctance of some participants to contribute if their senior manager is also a member of the group. The presence of a senior person can deter people from participating. This is particularly the case when the 'open outcry' techniques are used. The facilitator has to ensure that techniques are used that enable people to participate without fear of criticism from their manager. Some popular techniques, which can help with these issues, are explored in more detail in the next section.

Having planned the workshop, the facilitator must tell the participants about the arrangements and the objectives to be achieved. You should prepare an agenda based upon the planning activities and distribute it to all participants in advance. The participants may need to prepare by studying documentation. If so, allow sufficient time for everyone to do so.

THE BENEFITS OF EFFECTIVE FACILITATION

Effective facilitation aims to overcome the difficulties typically faced during meetings and workshops. Just getting all parties together in a forum will not in itself guarantee that consensus is reached and good decisions are made. In fact, as we have seen earlier, sessions that are not facilitated can result in conflict, delay and even chaos. However, if we have effective facilitation some key benefits can be achieved.

- **Quality** – The quality of the decisions reached should be better since the pre-planning should ensure that all the interested parties are present or represented, a defined process has been applied and techniques relevant to the issue are used.

- **Ownership** – For many facilitated workshops and meetings there is a danger that some of the concerned parties do not buy in to the decisions made. Sometimes this is because they have not actually attended and so feel they can disregard any decisions; other times, they may feel they were not given sufficient opportunity to voice their concerns and so may undermine the decision following the session. They regard the decision as outside their control and therefore take no responsibility for it. Although using facilitation does not guarantee commitment, there is a usually a greatly improved chance of the stakeholders taking ownership of the results.
- **Productivity** – A facilitated workshop is usually more productive. It avoids the need for a series of one-to-one meetings, enables participants to build on each other's ideas and ensures that time is not wasted because people are not allowed to go off at tangents. However, increased productivity requires good facilitation; without this, the endless discussion and argument, or the over-elaboration of ideas, will still prevail.
- **Collaboration** – The facilitator should ensure that all of the stakeholders are involved in the discussion, and, where this is not possible, that empowered representatives attend. This means that all perspectives should be aired, a greater understanding of wider views should be appreciated and, as a result, there is a greater possibility for collaboration resulting in a high degree of consensus.

CONCLUSION

Facilitation is not easy, even for the most experienced facilitators. You have to combine many skills including the ability to read situations and react quickly, and you need to have the discipline to prepare properly. In business, we encounter many different situations where facilitation can be beneficial and, as we said at the beginning of this chapter, facilitated events can reap many benefits if run well. Often, though, they fail to achieve a successful outcome and waste a lot of time.

A facilitator who is prepared, focused and adaptable, and is able to work with the variety of people we find in professional situations, has the greatest chance of delivering successful outcomes. So, here are some key points to help you develop your facilitation skills:

- Practise whenever you can. Take opportunities to run informal sessions with colleagues where you are comfortable both with the group and the subject matter.
- Try out techniques for both eliciting information and documenting; find the ones you feel work for your business context and gain experience in using them.
- Run sessions with more experienced colleagues; these will be lower risk because you will have assistance if you run into difficulties and will also provide opportunities to learn from them and to gain confidence.
- Find a mentor with relevant experience, who you can ask for opinions and guidance in dealing with different situations.
- Finally, prepare and plan. This helps anyone, no matter how experienced, to facilitate effectively.

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13 CREATIVE PROBLEM SOLVING

INTRODUCTION

In business we often hear that people need to 'be creative' and 'innovate' as if this was (a) completely obvious, and (b) simple to achieve. In practice, this is not the case; creativity rarely appears on demand and sometimes 'creative' solutions may distract from a more straightforward course of action. However, there are many situations when pausing to think and identify less obvious ideas can be extremely beneficial. These may be when we are:

- addressing a problem with a project;
- identifying solutions to a business issue;
- improving a business process;
- finding a resolution to a conflict;
- creating a presentation.

In all of these situations, creative ideas can provide major leaps forward rather than smaller, incremental steps. As a result, in business, the ability to be creative and produce innovative ideas is well regarded and highly prized.

CONTENTS OF THIS CHAPTER

This chapter covers the following creative problem-solving topics:

- developing creativity;
- creative problem solving;
- idea generation techniques;
- De Bono's Six Hats.

DEVELOPING CREATIVITY

It is often said that creativity is innate and cannot be developed. In practice, it often seems the case that some people have more creative ideas than others. If we look at the Belbin team roles described in Chapter 3 'Team working', there is one

role, the 'plant', that specifically identifies people with a creative bias. While it is undoubtedly true that some people are more naturally able to suggest creative ideas, and usually enjoy doing so, everyone can develop this ability. Further, the theory of 'left brain thinkers' – those preferring logical thought – and 'right brain thinkers' – those who are creative – is becoming widely discredited.[30] One factor that can often make a difference is confidence. If we feel confident that we are able to generate ideas, we feel under less pressure to do so, which, in turn, helps the thinking process. Similarly, if we are happy to put forward suggestions, whether they are accepted or not, we often appear more creative. Sometimes, the simple act of believing we are creative make this a reality.

Barriers to creativity

It has often been observed that children have an innate sense of freedom and creativity but that many of us lose the freedom to be creative as we grow older and various barriers may be erected that deter creativity. Michael Hicks has suggested that barriers to creativity (creative 'blocks') can be identified in the five categories described below.

- **Perceptual** – Perceptual blocks are concerned with how we perceive and respond to problem situations. We may accept assumptions as fact, have a tendency to focus on solutions or find it difficult to isolate the real issues. We see perceptual blocks when working with someone who is set on a particular solution or course of action.
- **Emotional** – Emotional or psychological blocks concern an individual's feelings about situations. They may be demonstrated through an unwillingness to take risks, a fear of making mistakes, desire for order or a preference for evaluating, rather than generating, ideas.
- **Intellectual** – Intellectual blocks are manifested in inflexibility and poor communication. We may see these blocks in action where information is not communicated well or approaches to documenting information are used inappropriately.
- **Cultural** – Cultural blocks stem from the beliefs and values of society. These may relate to society in the widest sense, the culture of our employing organisation or our social circle of friends and acquaintances. These blocks often concern beliefs such as 'fun is for children', 'logic is better than intuition' or 'thinking wastes time'. They are often found in organisations where there is a reluctance to innovate or try out new approaches.
- **Environmental** – Environmental barriers are concerned with the physical world within which we work. Examples include distractions and intrusions, monotony and discomfort, lack of communication and lack of support for risk taking.

Overcoming the barriers

The first step in removing the barriers to creativity is to be aware that they exist. For example, some environmental barriers can be removed or diminished by ensuring there is a quiet space for thinking and some time is specifically allocated to doing so. Emotional barriers often relate to confidence or habit and these can be reduced by acknowledging their existence and adopting specific steps to address them.

[30] http://www.oecd.org/edu/ceri/neuromyth6.htm

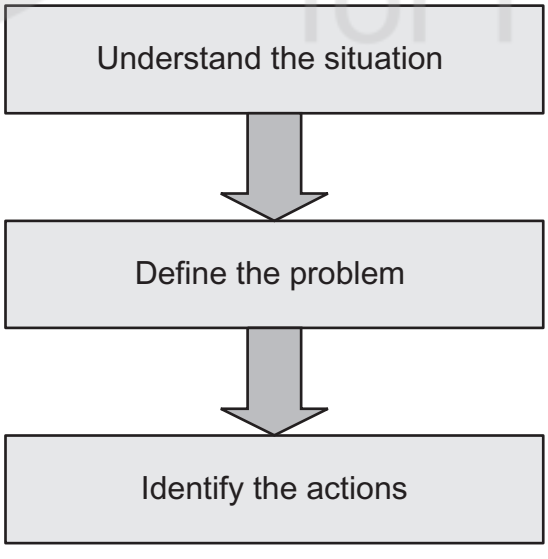
For example, the adoption of a creative problem-solving framework will provide a structure that can be very helpful in overcoming these barriers. Similarly, the creative-thinking techniques described below can also help, in particular with the perceptual, intellectual and environmental barriers. Cultural barriers are often related to the culture of the organisation or group within which we are working and effective facilitation (Chapter 12), coupled with carefully selected idea generation techniques, can help with this. However, the degree to which cultural barriers can be addressed will be limited where there is extensive ingrained resistance to creativity.

CREATIVE PROBLEM-SOLVING PROCESS

Creative problem-solving approaches and creative-thinking techniques help to free up our minds so that we are able to develop innovate ideas and solutions. However, it is a frequent misconception that creativity thrives where there is an absence of structure or boundaries; conversely, an organised approach can help creativity to flourish and ensures that we do not fall into some of the common traps, such as rushing towards solutions. Looking for solutions, or even deciding on solutions, without first understanding the problem, is the antithesis of effective problem solving.

A three-stage model that sets out a standard approach to creative problem solving is shown in Figure 13.1. Here, we can see that creative problem solving has to begin with a clear understanding of the situation before progressing to a definition of the problem and identification of the actions to address the problem. Gaining understanding and framing the problem are emphasised in this approach because they are the keys to successful creative problem solving and prevent a hasty dash towards inappropriate solutions.

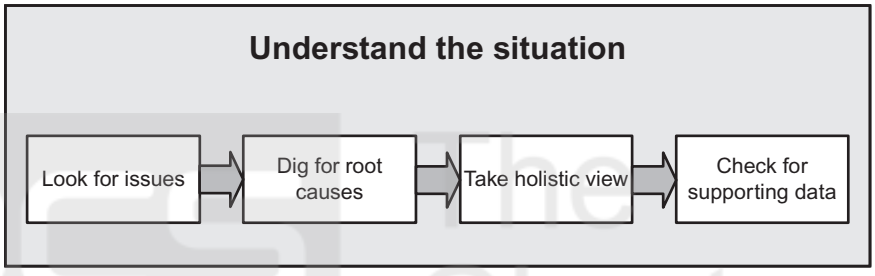
Figure 13.1 Creative problem-solving process



Understand the situation

It is important that we approach problems as situations. Too often, stakeholders identify the 'problem', which we then spend time attempting to resolve, only to find that this is a minor issue or a symptom of a deeper malaise. A great deal of time and budget can be wasted while we address a defined problem, only to find that our work has not helped the situation and may even have made it worse; the actual problem is often an array of issues, all of which need to be considered (Figure 13.2).

Figure 13.2 Understand the situation



If we are going to define the problem accurately and adopt a true 'creative' approach to problem solving, then we need to think as broadly as we can about what is going on within the situation that has been presented to us as problematic. The 'rich picture' technique (described in Chapter 12 'Facilitation') can be a useful aid to this work because it allows us to draw anything within the situation, encourages holistic thinking and does not enforce a defined notation set or prescribed views.

Look for issues

The stakeholders involved in the situation will by necessity have a range of perspectives: where one person identifies a problem with a task within a process, another may be very clear about why that particular process task is absolutely necessary; where a stakeholder feels it is vital some information is recorded, another sees duplication and redundancy. **We need to be aware that everyone may have a view on the problem, but it is likely to be informed by their own experiences, perspectives and knowledge. Understanding and appreciating the rationale for these different viewpoints is extremely important.** Failing to do this can cause us to understand only part of the problem, or, even worse, address the symptoms perceived by some stakeholders rather than the underlying problems that give rise to them. When we understand the stakeholders' views we are able to challenge entrenched ideas or conventional wisdom; this helps us to understand whether the views are well founded or based on opinion and judgement.

Dig for root causes

Talking to stakeholders enables us to begin uncovering the issues identified by those most closely involved with the situation. Too often it is assumed that stakeholders can tell you exactly what the problem is and where the solution lies. In practice this is rarely true given that business problems have complex roots and there are always several options available. Once we understand the expressed

issues, we need to analyse them in depth to uncover the root causes underlying them. Ishakawa's 'fishbone' diagram technique offers a useful approach, providing a structure for the analysis and uncovering the causes of the identified issues. This technique is described in Chapter 12 'Facilitation'.

Another technique that is often used to uncover root causes is called 'Why? Why?' As the name suggests, this approach involves challenging statements, asking 'why?' to delve sufficiently to understand the root cause of a problem. In seeking to explore causes of a problem, every cause suggested is challenged by the question 'why?' Whereas the fishbone diagram attempts to uncover the root causes of a problem in a systematic way by looking at different aspects of the situation, the 'Why? Why?' approach is more flexible and intuitive. While this can be effective when working with one stakeholder, it is probably more successful when used with a group. Care should be taken with this technique, though, because continuous 'why?' questioning can appear too pedantic and become irritating.

Early work by Isaksen and Treffinger (1985) into creative problem-solving approaches included a stage they labelled 'mess finding'. This depiction of a problem situation as containing 'mess' accurately reflects what we often find when attempting to resolve business problems. This is why understanding the problem situation and defining the problem is so important. It is fatal to accept that there is one stated problem and one obvious solution. Many problems are poorly defined at the outset and finding solutions when this is the case is extremely risky and likely to waste both time and budget.

Take holistic view

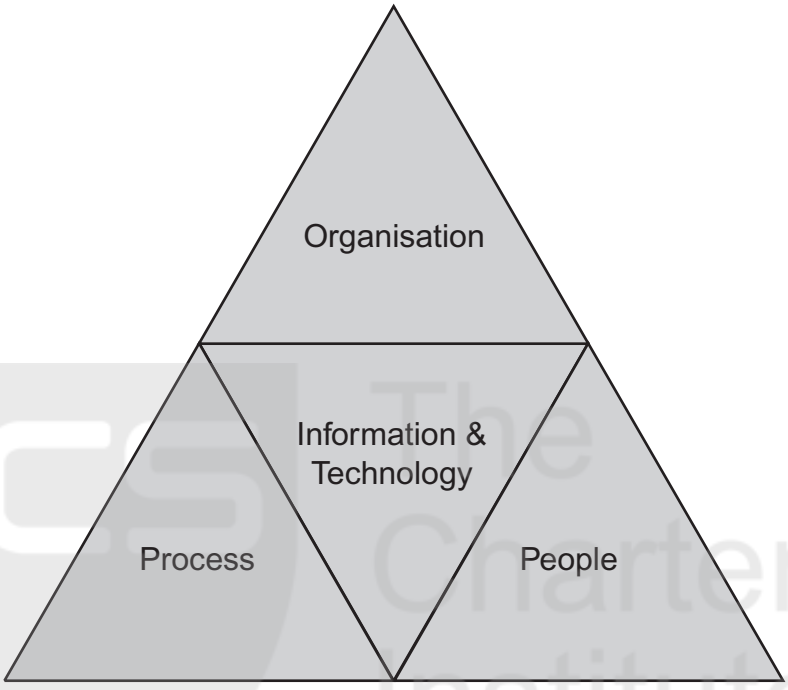
The need to look at the entire business situation is often referred to as taking a 'holistic approach' to business problem resolution. The holistic approach involves examining a range of aspects: the processes and systems; the people and management structures; the organisational values and culture; plus the interactions and dependencies between these aspects. The holistic approach differs from other more limited approaches, which focus on just the business processes or IT systems without considering how they interact.

Unfortunately, you see this in many responses to business problems, whether it is the IT practitioner who always seeks a technological solution to problems or the external consultant who wishes to adopt the same 'out of the box' approach used for other customers.

Abraham Maslow noted, 'If you only have a hammer, you tend to see every problem as a nail' (1966, 2002). Every situation is different and the holistic approach ensures that this is understood to and reflected in the analysis. **We use the POPIT™ (people, organisation, process, information and technology) model shown in Figure 13.3 to help ensure that we take a holistic view and do not overlook any aspects that might affect the situation.** This model identifies four areas for investigation, but also shows that they have to work together to form the entire business system. If one area is not working effectively, then that is likely to impact upon the effectiveness of the other areas.

Techniques such as rich pictures and fishbone diagrams focus on finding out about unclear, complex business situations. They are not prescriptive in order to allow

Figure 13.3 The POPIT™ model



for the variety of business situations encountered and the range of issues that may be uncovered. In some situations, more formal modelling techniques, that adopt a narrower, more defined view, can provide useful insights. For example, workflow diagrams or cross-functional flow charts, with their prescribed notation and structure, can be very useful to explore problems in business processes.

Check for supporting data

Understanding the root causes and the aspects contributing to the problem situation also helps identify where we can validate the information provided. We can do this in a number of ways, for example by searching through records, reviewing supporting documents or analysing data. Process improvement approaches, such as Six Sigma, lean heavily on the use of data when analysing and validating problems.

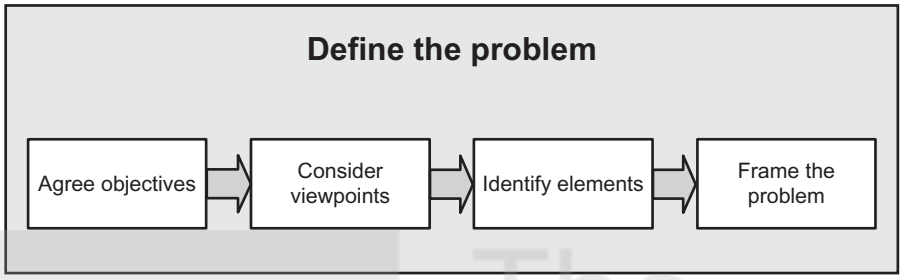
Define the problem

The research carried out to understand the situation is intended to help us define the problem to be addressed. This sounds simple and obvious but bears emphasising given the common predisposition discussed earlier, that is to focus on solutions prior to understanding the problem. Meetings can often fall into this trap when one attendee defines a 'problem' and the rest of the group respond by offering helpful 'solutions'.

As De Bono (2009) says, 'If you do not know what you are shooting at, you are rather unlikely to hit the target!' It is vital we understand a problem if it is to be resolved

effectively. We need to be vigilant and prepared to challenge if we are to ensure time is not wasted discussing symptoms or 'gut reaction' solutions. Figure 13.4 sets out a structure for defining the problem that is explored in further detail below.

Figure 13.4 Define the problem



Agree objectives

As a first step, it is important to be clear about the objectives for the business situation that are to be met by any solutions. Ultimately, if we are trying to find solutions to problems, the overall objectives provide a context for the situation and identify the longer term direction. Defining the objectives sets out a clear statement of intent for the organisation in general and the business situation in particular. The SMART approach is an accepted standard for defining objectives. As already mentioned in Chapter 10 'Coaching', Cadle and Yeates (2007) clarify SMART as follows:

- **Specific** – There is a specific or precise outcome or deliverable; some new behaviour or achievement.
- **Measurable** – Progress towards the achievement of the deliverable can be measured.
- **Achievable** – The objective is capable of being reached. It doesn't have to be easy or simple; it should be stretching and developmental.
- **Relevant** – The person or people given the objective must be able to have an impact on it. It needs to be sensible for them and relevant to their work.
- **Time-framed** – The timescale for starting and finishing the work, plus any reviews to assess progress.

Consider viewpoints

When defining the problem and the objectives, it is important, again, to consider the viewpoints of the various stakeholders. As mentioned earlier, people often have different ideas about where the problems lie. Furthermore, they also have views on what needs to be achieved and the direction for the business organisation. It is important to take this into consideration when framing the problem because the insights gained will help provide a greater understanding of the situation and ensure that aspects that could undermine any solution are considered.

Identify elements

Addressing business problems rarely requires one specific action; there is always a range of elements to be thought about. As shown in the POPIT™ model above, if we take a holistic view, we look at a set of interrelated aspects of the business situation. Each of these aspects and their dependencies on other aspects need to be analysed to see the totality of the problems and distinguish between these and the symptoms arising from them.

Frame the problem

Finding the right problem to solve is a vital part of problem solving. Once we have all of the information required we need to state the problem clearly. A problem statement is a concise description of the issues to be addressed and is important in providing a focus for the work to resolve the problem. An example problem statement is:

> *Customers are complaining about the quality of ordered products. Records show an average of 250 complaints per 1000 orders over the last six months. Each complaint requires between 30 minutes to one hour of effort to investigate because there are several possible reasons for an incorrect order. A range of responses is possible, including the provision of reduced prices or the manufacture of a new set of products. This has caused a 10 per cent reduction in the average profit margin per order.*

Here we can see that the problem is that the level of complaints is very high and each complaint requires the staff to investigate the cause and then decide upon the necessary action. The impact is being felt on the profitability of the business. In a few lines, it is possible to understand the problem and the impact it is having. The investigation will undoubtedly have additional information to support the statement, but the concise nature of the framed problem will focus work on identifying potential solutions.

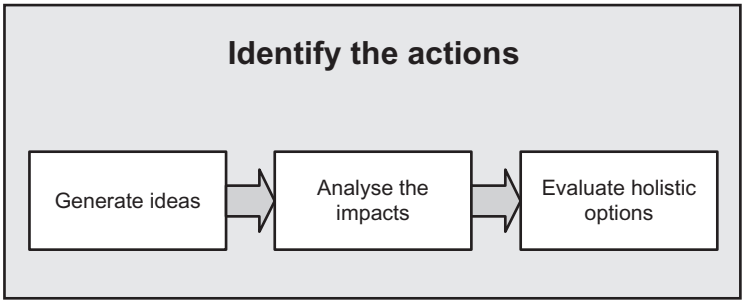
Identify the actions

Often, when people talk about creative problem solving, they focus on using creative-thinking techniques to generate ideas. However, it is only once we understand the problem that this work can be really effective. As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, sometimes people feel that they are not naturally creative and therefore cannot produce ideas or sometimes they feel that there is a particular type of person for whom creativity is innate. In practice, gaining a good understanding of the problem really helps with the development of creative solutions because all of the elements are understood, and during this activity ideas can often crop up naturally. Figure 13.5 sets out the steps required to identify the actions to take.

Generate ideas

It is can be difficult to work alone to generate ideas, but in some situations, and for some people, this is a beneficial approach. This can depend upon the learning style preference of an individual. We discussed the four different learning styles preferences in Chapter 12 'Facilitation': the activist, pragmatist, reflector and theorist styles. These preferences can also be reflected in how individuals like to work to generate ideas for problem solving. For example, an individual with a reflector preference may prefer to spend time thinking through the situation in an environment they

Figure 13.5 Identify the actions



can control. Many people report that thinking through problems in the early hours of the morning when sleep eludes them is beneficial; others find it helpful to think through problems while travelling. It is important that you recognise an approach that is useful to you and then create opportunities that allow you to use it.

The majority of business situations require group discussion, sometimes after individuals have had an opportunity to consider the problem, because this is more productive and enables the consideration of a range of views and ideas. Chapter 12 explores the importance of effective facilitation and the primary techniques used to interact with a group: brainstorming, brainwriting and round robin. Where the discussion is concerned with creative problem solving and idea generation, it is even more important to consider learning styles and preferences and adapt the techniques accordingly.

Whether running a brainstorming or brainwriting session, or adopting a round-robin approach, it is not usually sufficient to instruct the group to shout out creative thoughts and ideas. One of the easiest ways to stifle creativity is to give someone a blank sheet of paper and ask them to be creative. **Idea generation needs stimulus and can be helped enormously by the use of creative-thinking techniques.** Creative-thinking techniques help us to free our minds and inspire us to produce ideas. Some techniques encourage us to have fun and develop radical, if not outrageous, lines of thinking. However, this is often essential to break down the creative barriers. Albert Einstein considered playfulness to be essential to creativity. Some techniques encourage us to consider problems from different perspectives. There are numerous useful creative-thinking techniques and some of the most popular are discussed in the section on idea generation techniques below.

Analyse the impact

Once a shortlist of ideas for resolving the problem has been identified, it is important to analyse fully the impact that these ideas would have. While some ideas may look ideal on first sight, in practice the ensuing impact may cause additional problems. Impact analysis is one area of business change that is often ignored, possibly because it is difficult or forgotten. If not thought through properly, the impacts can completely undermine a proposed solution. In this section, we consider some techniques that may be used to analyse impacts.

POPIT™

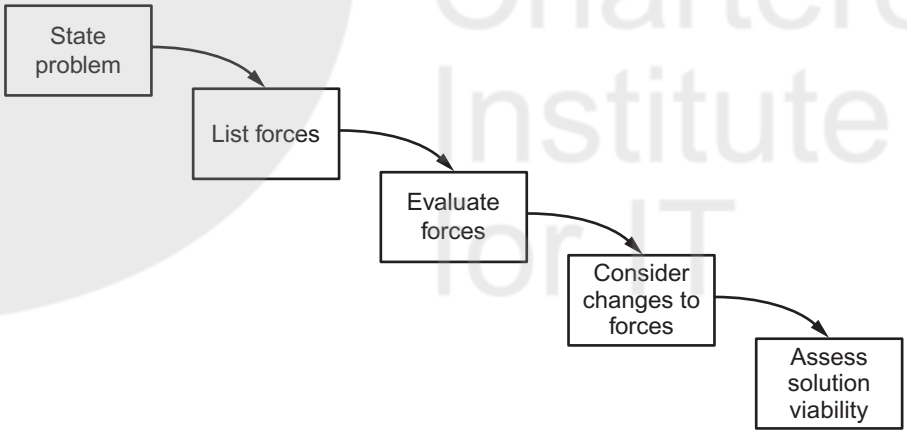
The POPIT™ model described earlier can be very helpful during impact analysis because it provides a structure for thinking about the different aspects that may be affected by the solution. We might think about each idea and ask the questions:

- How will this affect the people involved?
- Will this impact on other parts of the process?
- Will the organisation need to change?
- What additional, or different, information will be needed?
- How will this affect the requirements for the IT support?

Force-field analysis

Force-field analysis was developed by Kurt Lewin (1997). The technique is used to identify and evaluate the forces that will contribute to or hinder the successful implementation of a solution to a problem. The force-field analysis steps, as shown in Figure 13.6, are explained below.

Figure 13.6 Force-field analysis steps

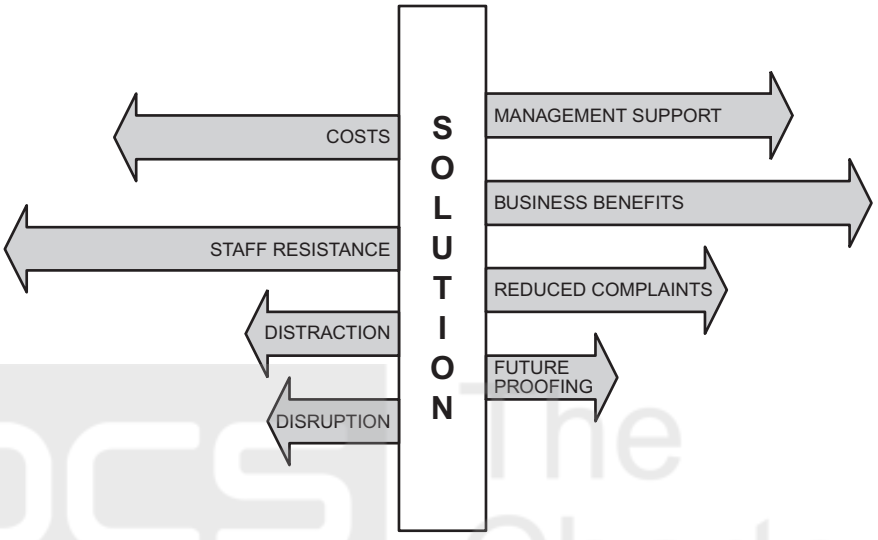


(1) Write a brief statement of the problem that you wish to solve.

(2) Develop two lists: one containing all the helpful and supportive factors (referred to as driving forces) and the other the unhelpful, constraining factors (restraining forces). These factors are then plotted on a diagram as shown in Figure 13.7. Each factor is written on a separate line, which is lengthened as the intensity of the factor increases. In the example shown in the diagram, we can see that resistance from staff is very high, so the corresponding line is longer than those for other, weaker forces.

(3) Evaluate the forces. If the intensity of the restraining forces is overwhelming, the chance that a solution could be implemented successfully is greatly reduced and the solution may be fatally flawed. However, the technique also allows us to

Figure 13.7 Restraining and driving forces



see the strength of the driving forces that are likely to support and facilitate the implementation of the solution. The example in Figure 13.7 shows that while costs are high and the organisation also risks both distraction and disruption from staff resistance, there is a high level of management support for the solution coupled with the expectation of significant business benefits.

(4) Identify the possibilities for reducing restraining forces or strengthening driving forces; the force-field diagram represents a kind of tug of war, and we want the supportive team to win. There are three ways to move the focus towards a more desirable outcome:

- strengthen an already identified driving force;
- add a new driving force;
- remove a restraining force.

(5) Consider the viability of the solution given the positive or negative view given by the force-field analysis. If on balance the driving forces are stronger than those opposing the solution, there will be a good chance that the solution will be successful.

Scenario planning

Another approach to impact analysis is to consider the range of alternative scenarios that may result in the future. Planning for different scenarios can help to uncover negative impacts that could derail a solution. We might look at different customer groups and ask how they might interact with the organisation once the new solution is in place. Another possibility is to consider how the business environment might change and look at the different scenarios that might result.

We could pose the question, 'How would the organisation be affected should uncertain economic conditions prevail for the next two years?' This could then lead to thinking such as, 'Would this change our approach or would we still do what is proposed?'

Scenarios provide a means of considering factors that may arise in the future and how they may impact upon potential business changes. Scenarios may also deter us from taking radical actions during periods of uncertainty. They help to identify which environmental factors need monitoring over time in order to take mitigation action where required. Scenarios are responses to defined events rather than general 'future histories'.

Evaluate holistic solutions

As a final evaluation, it is important to evaluate the situation holistically. The concept of holistic thinking was introduced earlier and is a means of ensuring that the overall aims of the situation are aligned with the new solution. Again, the POPIT™ model can be useful to ensure that all aspects and their interactions have been considered; this has to be in the light of the overall objectives and problem statement defined earlier. **The essence of holistic thinking is not just to consider the whole situation, but also to ensure alignment with the underlying purpose and rationale.** We could put forward an excellent set of ideas that are integrated into a coherent solution and address all of the POPIT™ aspects, but if they do not align with the world view of the organisation then success will be undermined, probably fatally.

IDEA GENERATION TECHNIQUES

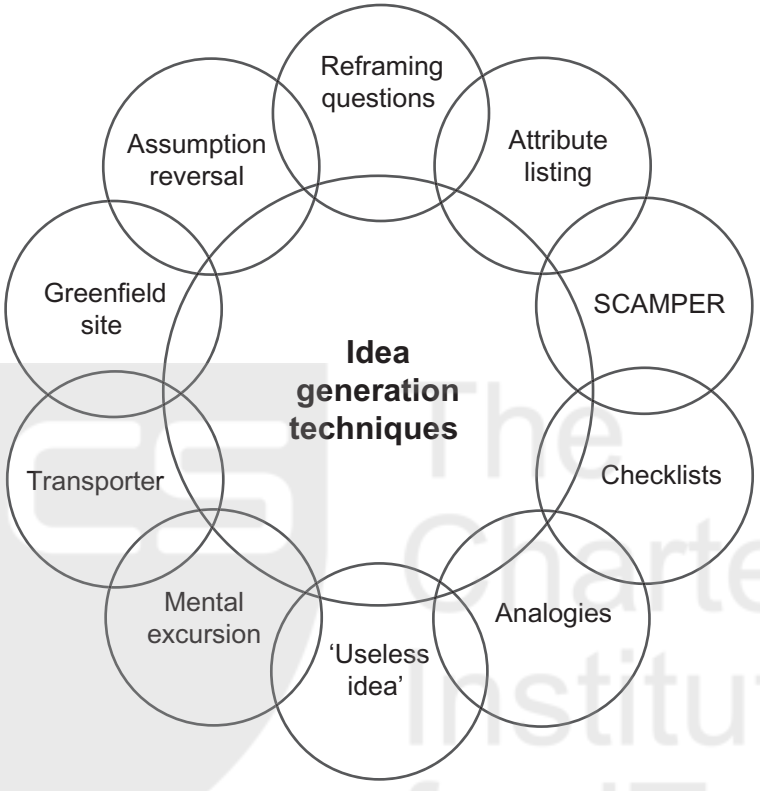
There are numerous techniques that may be used to generate creative ideas. Some popular techniques are identified in Figure 13.8 and discussed below. The techniques may be used formally within a setting such as a meeting or workshop, or informally, for example when working alone or discussing with a colleague. They all try to break through thinking barriers by providing a different perspective. These approaches, and others in a similar vein, are often used as examples of how to 'think outside the box' although it could be argued that they actually supply an 'alternative box'. Providing a new perspective or angle from which to think and generate ideas can be very useful and illuminating. Conversely, instructing people to 'think creatively' or 'be innovative' usually has the opposite outcome to that desired. **A framework for thinking will give sufficient structure to enable creativity without engendering panic and 'freezing up'.**

Reframing questions

When reframing, we ask questions about the problem in order to find new angles and viewpoints. Different definitions of the problem are developed helping to generate ideas to address each different definition. What we are trying to do here is to disrupt the logical thought pattern and bring out other possibilities. If we consider the example problem statement above, we might ask the following reframing questions:

- Is there any beneficial impact from interacting with customers even in the context of a complaint?
- What level of complaint is acceptable?
- Is there a minimum level of complaints that we require?

Figure 13.8 Idea generation techniques



- Would it be better just to replace any order about which there was a complaint? Or give a full refund? Would this be less expensive and more beneficial in the long run?

Some reframing questions look at the problem from an internal, organisational viewpoint, but an alternative approach is to reframe from an external perspective. In the example problem statement, it would be useful to think like a customer and identify questions they might ask:

- How long will it take for me to receive a satisfactory response?
- Does the organisation care that I have been inconvenienced?
- Are they aware of my needs as a customer?

Attribute listing

Attribute listing is a technique that looks at disaggregating a procedure, process or product into its constituent steps or components. Each one is then considered to see if it could be improved. For example, in our scenario above, the order fulfilment process would include the following tasks:

- order taking and payment;
- product construction;
- delivery.

Each task could be examined to see if the steps in each task could be improved. The procedure for the collection of goods and delivery to the customer may have been defined many years ago, continuing ever since without any thought of improvement. Examining the individual steps, particularly if done in conjunction with the reframing technique, could help to identify where the procedure is failing to consider the customers' views and issues.

Similarly, if the attributes, or components, of a product or service are listed, the problems with each one can be considered. Products or services need regular updating if they are to retain their currency given technological advances and increases in customer expectations. Attribute listing helps to identify the negative aspects of the elements within the situation and can help generate ideas to address these issues.

SCAMPER

The mnemonic SCAMPER was developed by Bob Eberle (2008) to identify questions that help generate ideas. The mnemonic stands for:

- **S – Substitute** – Are there any other tasks that could substitute for existing tasks?
- **C – Combine** – Could there be an opportunity to combine elements (e.g. could some of the tasks be combined within one department)?
- **A – Adapt** – Can we adapt the function or application (e.g. could tasks be adapted to provide different outcomes)?
- **M – Modify** – Is it possible to change the scale, shape or any other attribute (e.g. is it possible to extend tasks to offer additional benefits)?
- **P – Put to other uses** – Can we apply tasks to another situation?
- **E – Eliminate** – Can we stop doing a task?
- **R – Rearrange/Reverse?** – Can we change the order of steps in a task or turn them upside down?

When using SCAMPER, the questions are posed, typically to a group, to help provoke the emergence of ideas. For example, if working on a process improvement, you would define all of the tasks and use SCAMPER to think of different ways of performing the work.

SCAMPER is very helpful when developing products. For example, cardboard milk cartons were a substitute for glass milk bottles; the Ford Motor Company adapted heated rear windscreens to front windscreens. **The P of SCAMPER is a good prompt for lateral thinking because it suggests looking for alternative uses or meeting other needs.** The development of the sticky Post-it® note is a good example of this. The original adhesive was created in error because it did not dry and retained its stickiness. At a later point, an

application for this adhesive was identified and the sticky note was born (which then led to its use in facilitation exercises for which it is invaluable, if a little ubiquitous).

Checklists

An alternative to SCAMPER is the checklist technique. A checklist is a set of questions used to stimulate thinking about the problem from a different angle. While similar questions to those used in SCAMPER may be included in creating the checklist, we should identify new questions, in particular those that are pertinent to the given situation. An example checklist could be:

- What else could we do instead?
- Is there anything in the past that would suggest possibilities?
- Can we modify a suggestion?
- Can we magnify something (e.g. make it bigger, better, faster)?
- Can we minify something (e.g. take something away, make it smaller, split it up)?
- Can we rearrange ideas?
- Can we turn things inside out (e.g. what if we did the reverse of what's proposed)?
- Can we combine ideas?

Analogies

An analogy is an attempt to reframe a problem by considering how it might look in a similar situation or with similar people or objects. The analogy allows consideration of a problem, but within a different context. It can thereby generate innovative ideas. An overview approach to using analogies is:

(1) Generate a list of situations, people, objects or actions that are similar to the problem.

(2) Select one of the listed analogies and describe it.

(3) Consider the description and use to stimulate new ideas.

(4) Repeat steps (2) and (3) for the other analogies.

So, for example, we could look at an efficiency problem on a factory production line, where there are a lot of tasks being performed, and a lot of components being used, simultaneously. We might relate this to the context of a restaurant kitchen to see if this can give us any insights. In both situations, the work is highly pressured, with a need to work quickly and efficiently. Using the analogies technique, we would consider how the people, tasks and objects are combined within the food production process to produce successful meals. This might highlight areas of the factory production line that are not working optimally and generate ideas on how the work can be improved.

'Most useless idea' competition

In a 'most useless idea' competition, we nominate an object (e.g. a plastic bag) and invite the participants to think of the most ridiculous and impractical use for it. The point here is that people are encouraged to think very widely and the more extreme

their ideas the better. This technique can be used in two ways: firstly, as an energiser that helps to free up thinking; secondly, as an idea generation technique that removes barriers and encourages absurd ideas, which may then trigger real innovations. In the plastic bag exercise we might identify the following possible uses:

- hat;
- handbag;
- colander;
- parachute;
- picture;
- shoe;
- water bomb;
- catapult;
- draught excluder;
- bowl.

Now we take each suggestion and consider the positive aspects of it. For example, using a plastic bag as a hat:

- it is waterproof;
- it doesn't crush your hair;
- the handles could be tied to keep it from flying away in the wind;
- it can be adjusted to fit different sizes.

If we were considering the features we might want when buying a hat, these ideas would help us to think a bit more creatively and identify the qualities we would like to find.

Mental excursion

A mental excursion allows us to think about a certain aspect of the problem, but to generalise it to any situation. For example, if we are stuck with an issue over available room space, we might nominate 'ways of making things smaller' as the excursion and get the group to brainstorm around that. Having listed general ideas for making things smaller, we can then work through them to see if any apply to the situation in hand or can be applied to generate ideas that are more relevant.

Transporter

With transporter, we try to move the problem or situation to another context. So the group might be asked to think about how the problem might be addressed in another country or company. The idea is to think about how others might address the issue and then consider if we could do the same or similar. This technique is good for challenging received wisdom and tacit assumptions held within organisations. A variation is to consider how different people might approach the situation. If we are analysing a problem with a supermarket

cooked meats counter, we might consider the context of a local specialist shop to see if that can offer any insights into where the supermarket is failing. The local shop may excel at personal service (having greater familiarity with the customers) and at tailoring the goods sold to local needs. This might cause us to identify actions that the supermarket could take to provide an enhanced service to local customers.

Greenfield site

With the greenfield site approach, we try to free ourselves from the shackles of history by asking, 'If nothing in the past existed, what would we do?' Again, this tries to liberate the creative problem-solving exercise from the dead hand of tradition. Once a list of ideas has been generated, we can move on to thinking, 'Well, if that's the ideal situation, how do we get there from where we are now?'

One common use of this approach is in business process improvement. If we have a process that has developed over time and has extensive passing and returning of information between different groups, adopting the greenfield site approach can be very liberating. We start with a blank piece of paper, consider the start point and desired outcome and ask how we would design the process if nothing existed currently. Ultimately, we may not adopt all the ideas, but looking at the process from this angle would cause us to question assumptions and possibly identify completely new ways of operating.

Assumption reversal

The assumption reversal technique is useful to reconsider situations by listing all of the assumptions about a problem and turning the assumptions around. The reversals are then used to stimulate ideas and suggestions for solutions. The assumption reversal may be done in several ways as shown in the following example:

(1) The group defines the problem in a statement beginning 'in what ways might we …?' So an example could be, 'In what ways might we improve parking in our town centre?'

(2) A list of assumptions is drawn up by the group. Brainstorming or brainwriting may be used to do this. Some assumptions could be:

- people park in town centres;
- cars must be parked;
- cars are parked in car parks;
- people are free to drive into town centres;
- people dislike walking.

(3) The assumptions are reversed and all of the reversals listed. Some of them may appear silly or strange, but this is part of the process of freeing up the thinking of the group. The reversals that result from the assumptions given above could be:

- people walk to town centres;
- cars are parked by car park staff;

- cars are left anywhere;
- cars are parked in shops;
- people are restricted from entering town centres.

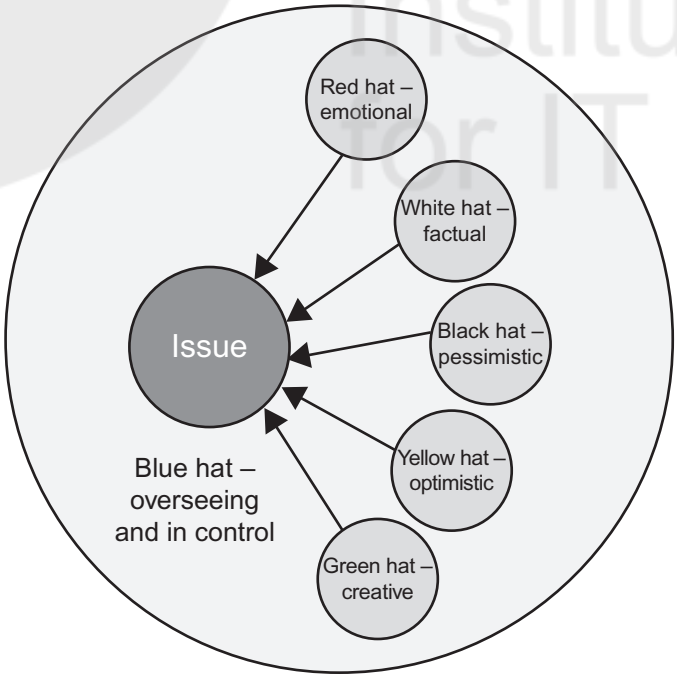
(4) The reversals are used to stimulate ideas for improving the situation. A possible suggestion for our example is to give people incentives to use the town centre at less popular times thus spreading out the demand for parking or to set up car holding areas and provide free 'park and ride' transport into the centre.

DE BONO'S SIX HATS

The 'six hats' approach to thinking was developed by a guru of lateral thinking, Edward de Bono. This creative problem-solving approach has proved very popular and is used extensively across organisations. It incorporates many of the ideas we have already discussed and can be used at various points across the creative problem-solving process.

De Bono defined six different perspectives from which to address a problem and direct the thinking process. Each perspective is associated with an appropriately coloured hat as shown in Figure 13.9.

Figure 13.9 De Bono's six thinking hats



In overview, De Bono defined the six hats as having the behavioural characteristics outlined in Table 13.1. Let's look at each hat, or thinking style, in further detail.

Table 13.1 De Bono's six hats' behavioural characteristics

Thinking mode	Thinking perspective
Blue hat	Thinking about and controlling the thinking process
Red hat	Emotions, feelings and intuitions
White hat	Pure facts, figures and information
Green hat	Creative, fertile and innovative
Black hat	Critical, cautious and evaluative
Yellow hat	Optimistic, enthusiastic, positive and constructive

Blue hat thinking

Blue is a cool (dispassionate) colour. It also represents the sky, which gives rise to phrases such as 'blue sky thinking'. The blue hat role is to control the thinking process, much as a chairperson sets the agenda (plans) and controls the meeting. The blue hat is the one that monitors the thinking process and calls upon the other hats as appropriate. It is also responsible for summaries, overviews and conclusions. When we put on our blue hat we think about the process and consider 'How is it working?' What other techniques could we use? Which hat should we wear next? De Bono (2009) talks about the blue hat choreographing 'the steps of our thinking'; an apt description.

Red hat thinking

Red (associated with anger or 'seeing red') is used to indicate emotional thinking. In red hat mode the thinker should never attempt to justify feelings or provide a logical argument for them.

Red hat thinking legitimises direct emotional responses (such as fear, suspicion or attraction) and the complex unconscious judgements associated with hunches, intuitions, taste and aesthetics. Not all our thinking is logical and rational and sometimes our feelings overwhelm us. Red hat thinking allows us to express our emotional response to situations and ideas. **It is very helpful to begin with red hat thinking where a problem is intertwined with emotion, for example if there is a lot of anger or trepidation amongst stakeholders. This will enable everyone to express their feelings and have them acknowledged at the outset; this will often defuse situations where emotions are running high.**

White hat thinking

White indicates neutrality, so white hat thinking is concerned with facts and figures. When faced with a problem, the white hat encourages us to try to establish

the facts and extricate them from feelings and beliefs. De Bono has identified two classes of facts: 'first-class facts', which may be checked and are independently provable; and 'second-class facts', which are believed to be true, but may not be fully verified (e.g. many urban myths fall into this category). Such information may be offered under the white hat, but must be appropriately labelled in such ways as 'typically', 'mostly', 'often' or 'occasionally'.

Green hat thinking

The green (growth and change) hat represents creativity. It is used to generate new ideas and perceptions. Green hat thinking enables participants to move beyond the known, accepted practices and seek more innovative alternatives. It places the focus on change and causes the group to think laterally and creatively. The creative-thinking approaches discussed earlier may be used when applying green hat thinking.

Black hat thinking

The black hat is concerned with negative assessment and critical questioning. Black hat thinking puts a deliberate focus on the identification of flaws. Sometimes, group members have a preference for negative critical thinking, which risks this approach dominating the discussion. Setting a specific time segment for doing this will help ensure that this is avoided. **Black hat thinking is essential when evaluating ideas and options because it will help to limit future risks.** It may even be used to point out flaws in the thinking process.

Yellow hat thinking

Yellow represents sunshine, brightness and optimism, so yellow hat thinking is positive and constructive. This position seeks to evaluate ideas critically, but from a positive perspective. Yellow hat thinking is used to consider all of the beneficial aspects regarding the ideas that have been generated during green hat thinking. It also looks for ways to achieve required outcomes.

Yellow hat and black hat thinking are similar in that they both require critical thinking, but they are opposite in that yellow is positive and black is negative. It is important to recognise that the yellow hat is not about feeling good and the black hat should not be used to indulge negative feelings; these are emotional responses and are catered for under the red hat perspective.

The value of 'six hat' thinking

The purpose of 'six hat' thinking is to separate the thinking positions so that we can address each perspective in a focused and formal way. De Bono raises a concern that we often wear all six hats at once, which impedes clarity of thinking and creativity. In a group discussion, the creative green hat thinking can be overwhelmed by those wearing the critical black hat, and this can seriously undermine attempts to think through a problem and generate ideas to move forward. We have all been in meetings where critical or emotional responses overwhelm the discussion and ideas are rejected as soon as they are put forward. The upshot is a fear of contribution, typically resulting in an impasse and a lack of progress. De Bono's approach avoids this by causing the group members to wear each hat in turn thus limiting them to one perspective at a time. The 'six hats' approach can also be adopted by an individual, who is thinking through a problem, although in the absence of a facilitator or chairperson, this does require self-discipline.

CONCLUSION

Creative problem solving is often confused with creative thinking. The former requires all of the elements described above, including the determination to understand the situation and frame the problem, prior to identifying solutions. Too often organisations seek to address problems that are based on assumptions and individual perceptions. This wastes time and energy that could be used productively elsewhere. Creative thinking is conducted once the problem is understood and defined. There are a range of approaches that may be used to ensure that all interested parties are able to contribute and no one should fear that they lack innate creativity. Organisations need innovative solutions to succeed in the fast-moving business world of today; creative problem solving offers a means of achieving this success.

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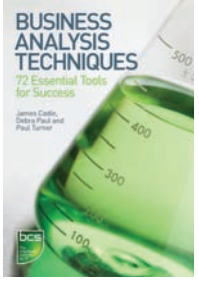

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