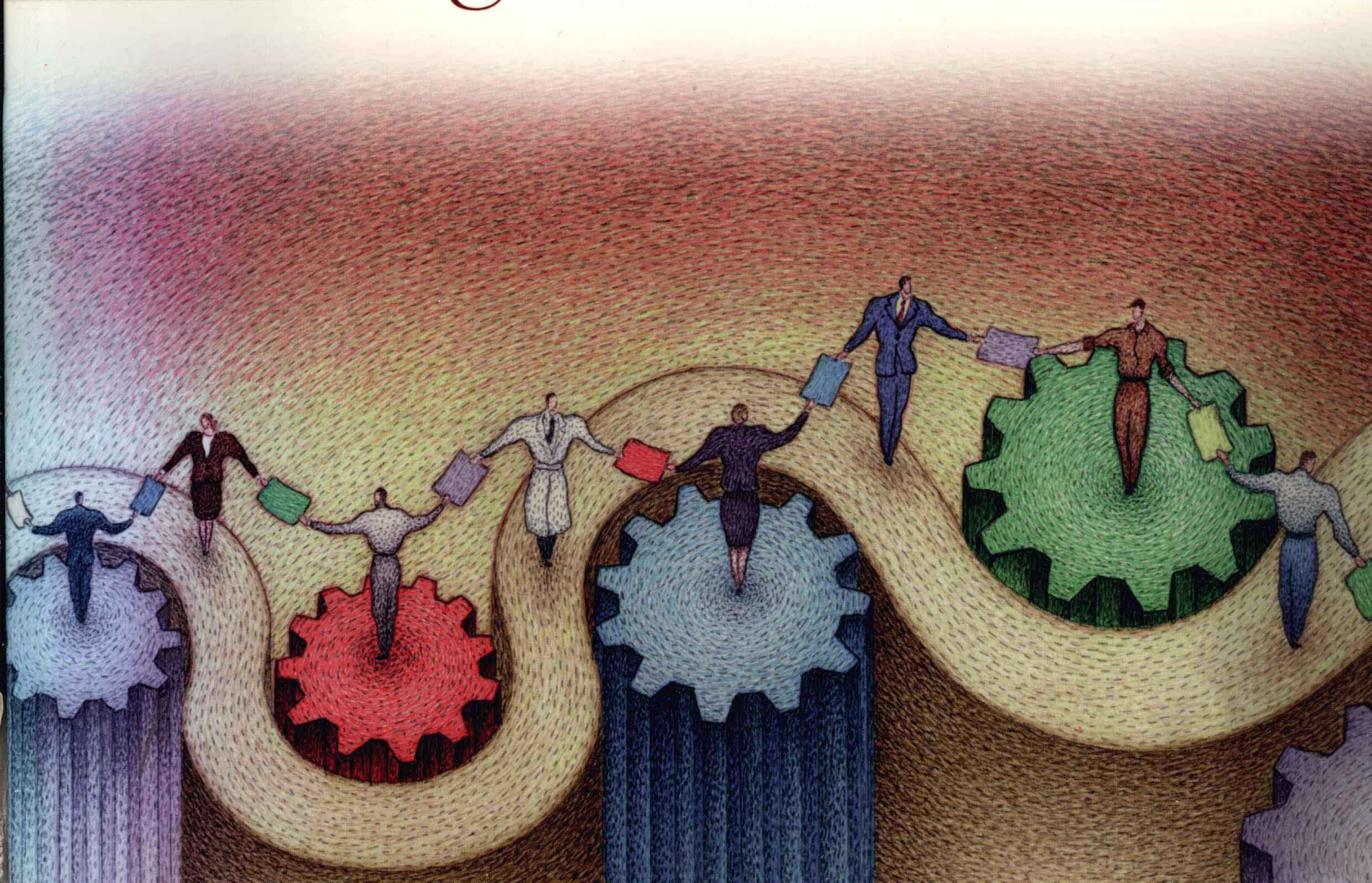Suzanne C. de Janasz • Karen O. Dowd • Beth Z. Schneider

Interpersonal Skills in
Organizations

Interpersonal Skills
in Organizations

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Preface

Birth of an Idea

Recently a group of executives who serve as the College of Business dean's board of advisors at our university identified a critical ingredient currently missing in most business school graduates. While they were technically competent—they could read a balance sheet, do a market analysis, and develop cash flow projections—many graduates lacked interpersonal skills, or the ability to work effectively with others. The executives created a wish list of "soft skills," faculty were hired, and the Interpersonal Skills course was born. Since that time, nearly 3,000 students have taken part in this required undergraduate course, and over 1,000 new students take the course each year.

In the beginning, the cadre of faculty dedicated to this course selected two books and additional readings to support the course objectives. In response to student and recruiter feedback, we have improved continuously both the content and delivery of the course. One such improvement stemmed from students' concerns that the books were inadequate for a variety of reasons. We agreed and continued to search for a book that met our needs. Frustrated with our inability to find the interpersonal skills text for our particular audience, we decided to write it.

"I Want to Buy This Book for My Boss"

As our colleagues and students have heard about this book, a common response is not simply "Where can I buy this book," but "My boss could use this—can you send him (or her) a copy?" The truth is this book is very relevant to a variety of readers. While it was written primarily with an undergraduate student audience in mind, each of the authors is experienced working with graduate students, adult learners, and working managers. In addition to our current teaching and research responsibilities, one or more of us has been a management consultant, a corporate trainer, an internal organization development consultant, a director of a career services center at a top-tier graduate business school, or a small business owner. Because of the depth of experience we offer, we are convinced that the material, with slight modification, is very appropriate for graduate students, adult learners, and managers as well as for undergraduate students. In short, this book is appropriate for anyone who wants to improve his or her ability to interact with others in the workplace.

A Unique Focus on Developing Managerial and Interpersonal Skills

In researching textbook options for our course, we found:

- Many useful resources but not any one resource that met all of our instructional needs.
- A dearth of coverage of areas we deemed important to our students, including diversity, project management, facilitation, and personal goal setting.
- A majority of books written for the graduate student or midlevel manager level rather than the primarily undergraduate audience served by our course.

Emphasis on Both Personal and Professional

Some texts focus solely on managerial skills but provide little if any assistance in helping the reader understand how understanding him or herself (intrapersonal effectiveness) relates to interpersonal and managerial effectiveness. The premise and sequencing of our book is that for students to be successful as managers in business, they must first have a solid understanding of self and how the self interacts with others to facilitate organizational success. Accordingly, we incorporate information on personal qualities needed for success in business and provide personal examples throughout the book focusing on family and other relationships alongside professional examples focusing on the workplace.

Balance between Theory and Practice

Our book offers a balance between theory and application. In our experience students and managers benefit by having some conceptual background on the topic of interpersonal skills but relate best to practical information that can be applied immediately to school, job, or team settings. Providing tips and techniques as well as conceptual grounding motivates the reader to learn a particular skill. Some popular interpersonal skills texts provide substantial theoretical and conceptual grounding of each skill area covered and are written primarily for a graduate audience rather than for undergraduates or working managers. In each chapter, we strike a balance by providing both sufficient conceptual material and applied material appropriate for use in real-life personal, academic, and professional situations, using conversational, user-friendly language.

Coverage of New Topics or More Thorough Coverage of Existing Topics

We have included a number of topics that are covered minimally if at all by other textbooks. Reviewers who have read our manuscript report that our treatment of topics such as self-disclosure and trust, stress and time management, conveying verbal messages, listening, diversity, ethical decision making, and negotiation are more thorough than what exists now. Other topics such as project management, facilitation, and problem solving are new and not addressed substantively in other books.

Focus on Experiential Learning

In addition to the latest thinking about each of the topics covered, we provide exercises at the end of each chapter that have been tested in the workplace or classroom and evaluated positively by both undergraduate and graduate students as well as working managers. A number of exercises are offered at the end of each chapter. The variety of exercises accomplishes several objectives. First, the instructor can accommodate multiple learning styles by fashioning a subset of exercises appropriate for a particular audience. "One size does not fit all." Second, the combination of experiential and reflective exercises help give students concrete experience, feedback, and an opportunity to reflect on ways to improve their current skill level. Finally, in an age where we see increasing levels of virtual and distance education delivered, the numerous observational and reflective exercises can facilitate learning even in settings that lack face-to-face interaction.

Why Focus on Interpersonal Skills?

The need to focus on improving interpersonal skills is recognized by more than business school faculty, deans, and executive advisory groups. In a recent survey by the American Society for Training and Development, more than one-third of people identified communication or interpersonal relationship skills as the most important quality in a good boss, and 42 percent said poor interpersonal skills makes bosses less effective.[1] Another recent article notes that the lack of interpersonal skills may be the major reason highly qualified professionals are not promoted.[2] The rise of teamwork in contemporary organizations has increased the need for every employee to work effectively with and through others. Individuals on work teams need to be able to communicate and collaborate effectively with others whose personalities, approaches, and work styles may differ greatly. In

addition, as power to make decisions and implement solutions is transferred down the condensed hierarchy to nonsupervisory employees, the ability to marshal needed resources in the absence of power or authority makes interpersonal and managerial skills more critical than ever. Even those in leadership positions need to be skilled on the softer side of management along with the right knowledge and experience. Recent studies report communication skills, interpersonal skills, and initiative are what corporations seek when hiring MBAs.[3]

Organizations are looking for employees with outstanding interpersonal skills to help organizations remain flexible and viable in today's competitive workforce. Organizations are profoundly affected by interpersonal interactions within and between employees, customers, suppliers, and other stakeholders. The more effective the relationships and interpersonal communications are, the more productive for the organization and the individuals.[4]

According to Harvard professor Robert Katz, there are three types of necessary managerial skills: conceptual, technical, and interpersonal. As one moves through the managerial layers, the need for technological and conceptual skills changes, whereas the need for interpersonal skills remains proportionate for all managerial levels: lower, middle, and top.[5] Improving interpersonal skills goes beyond the classroom and the boardroom; the lessons learned can have broad applications in helping individuals to better deal with problems and conflicts with family and friends.[6] Interpersonal skills help individuals initiate, build, and maintain relationships—in both personal and professional life.

"For things we have to learn before we can do them, we learn by doing them."

Aristotle

A Pedagogical Approach That Works

In today's service-oriented, knowledge- and information-focused, global marketplace, interpersonal skills are essential. However, these skills seldom occur naturally; for most of us they must and can be learned.[7] If these skills are neither learned nor practiced, the good news is that it is never too late to start. Recognizing the need for these skills and acquiring and enhancing them can help workers be continuous learners and remain marketable.[8]

We have designed the text and the supplementary materials to aid students and practicing managers in assessing their level of effectiveness and enhancing their capability in each of 20 skill areas. Each chapter begins with a set of questions that relate to the learning objectives of the chapter. Next, we include a case study that helps the reader understand how the skill (or lack thereof) applies in real world situations. Then, we lay out the background about the skill—what it is and why it's important. Then we offer strategies and techniques for learning and using the skill. The chapters are written in an easy-to-read style with numerous practical examples in both professional and personal settings. After the chapter summary and list of key terms and concepts, the reader can test his or her understanding of the written material and ability to apply the skills through the many exercises in each chapter. Some exercises are reflective while others are experiential. Some exercises are designed to be performed in a class environment while others can be performed outside the classroom. Some exercises allow for receiving feedback from others; others encourage self-feedback.

How the Book Is Organized

The book is organized in a practical, experiential learning format that facilitates learning. Each of the 20 chapters can be used as a stand-alone, modular chapter independent of the rest of the book or used in conjunction with other chapters. The chapters are grouped into four units: understanding self (intrapersonal skills), working with others (interpersonal skills), advanced interpersonal skills, and working in teams.

In the first unit, intrapersonal skills, we begin the process of looking within ourselves to analyze our strengths and weaknesses and gain a better understanding of our personal perceptions, views, beliefs and work style. Unit 1 topics include self-awareness, self-disclosure and trust, personal values and goal setting, and time and stress management. In the second unit we move to interpersonal skills, or interacting with others, through verbal communication, listening, feedback, and working with diverse others. The third unit focuses on more advanced interpersonal skills such as persuasion, politicking, negotiation, networking, coaching, mentoring, and empowerment. In the final unit, we focus on working with and leading groups of others by discussing teaming, running meetings, managing projects, making effective and ethical decisions, solving problems, and facilitating teams.

In each chapter, we discuss how a skill or concept can be incorporated into one's self-development, how a skill or concept is used in interactions with others, especially in team settings, and how the skill or concept is applied in the context of managerial roles in organizations.

Note to Instructors

Teaching interpersonal skills using an experiential, learner-centered approach differs greatly from those classes in which a more controlled, lecture-oriented approach may be appropriate. In order to help instructors transition from professor to facilitator, lecturer to experiential exercise leader, we took pains to carefully construct an Instructor's Manual and supporting materials that support this goal.

The IM contains sample syllabi and assignments, chapter-by-chapter explanatory notes, teaching plans, ideas for implementing the material in the classroom, ways to motivate the discussion on a topic, detailed instructions for using the activities and exercises, discussion questions, additional resources, and sample test questions. To enhance the overall learning experience, a companion video (with about 20 illustrative clips and suggestions for using them) and website (www.mhhe.com/iso) are available. To help instructors manage the learning process, PowerPoint slides and an electronic test bank are also available.

Endnotes

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          Working in Teams**

Journey into Self-awareness

How do I:

✓ Determine my strengths and understand how they might guide me in personal and professional choices?

✓ Figure out what motivates me in order to find personal and professional success?

✓ Assess my limitations and develop a plan for improving in these areas?

✓ Gain understanding and insight into my personality, attitudes, and behaviors?

✓ Identify the biases I have that preclude my understanding and appreciating others?

✓ Evaluate my emotional intelligence and identify areas for personal improvement?

Marjorie Morgan, age 22, was excited about her first job out of college. She had worked summer jobs and one internship, but never in an environment as professional as the bank for which she'd work upon graduation. After taking some time off in the summer, she began work in August. Eager to show she was worthy of having been hired, she worked hard the first six months on the job. She enjoyed her co-workers, got along well with her manager, and was even involved in a technology project through which she was able to meet people from other departments of the bank.

The project objective was to develop a new system through which customer complaints could be handled. The present system barely met the needs of the bank's customers and was inefficient and costly to run. Over a period of several weeks, Marjorie and her project team members worked diligently to study the problem and develop a solution.

The team consisted of Marjorie plus five co-workers: two people were about her age and the other three were considerably older. Four of the five were college educated and all but one team member had greater tenure than she had. Of the six-person team, four were Caucasian and two were African-American. The team did not have an official leader. Things ran smoothly for several weeks, until the time came for decisions to be made. As soon as a deadline was imposed on the group Marjorie became aware of some significant personality differences within the project team. Two members, who had always arrived late to meetings, were procrastinating on their assignments for the project. Two others who had attended the meetings began to spend more time socializing than working. One person who had been reluctant to state his opinion about the data that had been collected now said he thought the group needed more time before it would be ready

to make a decision. Marjorie had been very task-oriented all along and was eager to finish the project and move on to other projects within the bank. She was very frustrated with the lack of progress being made by the group and was concerned about being part of a team that wasn't going to meet its assigned deadline. Yet she was reluctant to speak up. She felt she was too young and hadn't been at the bank long enough to be credible with her teammates and take charge of the project. She didn't think she could approach her boss about the situation. She was perplexed about why the group was experiencing so many problems. Marjorie thought to herself, "Why can't they get along? Why can't everyone on the team be more like me? I work hard and have pride in how this project is going to turn out. Why don't the others?" She began to wonder if this was the right place for her.

1. Why is Marjorie upset?

2. In what ways are the work styles of Marjorie's teammates different from hers? What causes those differences?

3. Can these differences be resolved? Why or why not?

4. How would you handle the situation if you were Marjorie?

"Know thyself"

Socrates

As early as the time of Socrates, we have known about the importance of self-awareness. Understanding oneself is key not only to our ability to succeed, but also to our ability to work effectively with others. Studies show that the best managers are those who are keenly aware of their own strengths—*and* their weaknesses.[1] They are able to capitalize on their strengths and either improve their weaknesses or work with others whose qualities complement theirs. They are able to understand others—their motivation, needs, style, capabilities, and limitations—and use this information to motivate and get results from them. They also understand the importance of keeping current with self-knowledge and regularly engage in self-assessment exercises and experiences that allow them to continually learn about and improve themselves. This chapter describes self-awareness: what it is, why it's important, and how to improve your level of self-awareness. It also addresses how strong self-knowledge can enhance your ability to manage and work with others and provides a number of exercises that enable you to assess yourself and develop improvement plans.

What Is Self-awareness?

Self-awareness is knowing your motivations, preferences, and personality and understanding how these factors influence your judgment, decisions, and interactions with other people.[2] Self-awareness includes many things. Your internal feelings and thoughts, interests, strengths and limitations, values, skills, goals, abilities, leadership orientation, and preferred communication style are just a few of the elements that self-awareness comprises.

Benefits of Self-awareness

Self-awareness or self-knowledge is the starting point for effectiveness at work. As Machiavelli, the cunning author and statesman, wrote, "To lead or attempt to lead without first having a knowledge of self is foolhardy and sure to bring disaster and defeat." Self-awareness has many benefits, among them:

■ understanding yourself in relation to others.

■ developing and implementing a sound self-improvement program.

■ setting appropriate life and career goals.

- developing relationships with others.
- understanding the value of diversity.
- managing others effectively.
- increasing productivity.
- increasing your ability to contribute to organizations, your community, and family.

For example, knowing what you are good at and what you enjoy doing may help in selecting a career or job that is professionally satisfying and therefore financially and personally satisfying. Relying solely on others' thoughts or beliefs about what is best for you can lead to personal and professional unhappiness. It makes no sense to spend one-third (or more) of your precious time doing what you abhor! By knowing yourself—your strengths, weaknesses, likes, and dislikes—you'll know where you belong.[3]

> *"There are three things extremely hard: steel, a diamond, and to know one's self."*

> Benjamin Franklin

How to Gain Self-awareness

The first step to becoming aware of ourselves is to recognize our weaknesses, strengths, biases, attitudes, values, and perceptions. There are many ways to enhance our self-awareness. Some of these include analyzing our own experiences, looking at ourselves through the eyes of others, self-disclosure, acquiring diverse experiences, and increasing our emotional intelligence.

Self-analysis

One means to gain insight into ourselves is through reflecting on, examining, and analyzing our behavior, personality, attitudes, and perceptions.

Behavior

Behavior is the way in which we conduct ourselves—the way in which we act. Our behavior is influenced by our feelings, judgments, beliefs, motivations, needs, experience, and the opinions of others. Patterns of behavior develop through our reactions to events and actions over a period of time. Behavior consists of four components:[4]

Motivation—the drive to pursue one action over another. What underlying factors move you to make a particular decision or choice? For example, what drives you to do a good

**Figure 1–1
Means for Obtaining
Self-awareness**