

Understanding the Theories of Personality: A Step towards Being Effective in Communication Skills

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Globalization has kicked the urgency of understanding people around us and effectively communicating with them. Competency in technical skills has always been the requirement, but technical skills coupled with effective communication skills are regarded. In today's generation when our jobs see no national boundaries core competencies alone cannot suffice to the survival needs of the highly competitive world- it demands excellent and effective communication skills. The degree of its importance can well be understood with companies like Infosys, Wipro, IBM, Emphasis venturing into the academic institutions as an effort in enabling teachers and students improve their communication skills.

Everybody communicates everywhere, may it be interpersonal or intrapersonal, but being successful in an act that we have started performing right from our birth becomes questionable. It is only a few who transmit their thoughts and feelings successfully but most of them end up blaming their listener. Just being able to communicate is not the requirement of the day it demands the skills to communicate effectively. Therefore, it is not just important to be able to communicate or be a good communicator but to be an effective communicator, where communication is not just a process of passing on of message from the sender to the receiver or the receiver understanding the sender. In order to be effective in communication there should be clear and unambiguous transfer of message from the sender to the receiver and vice versa. "When two people have experienced the same event, their mental images that event will not be identical. Because your perceptions are unique, the ideas you want to express differ from other people (Pearson, 16). " This could be possible if people could overcome their emotional blocks likes shyness, superiority complex, disinterest, pre-conceived notions or opinions, rigid attitudes, anger, disappointment, sorrow etc. which are but the barriers that define ones personality types reflected through the language and tone of a person.

The Infosys Campus Connect Soft Skills manual has dealt with the effective methods of listening, giving and taking feedback and the art of dealing with others and ones own

feeling which involves empathizing with others while giving a feedback and while dealing with their complex feelings, which indicates the importance to understand the personality of ones own self and others where these are the tools to effective communication through listening and feedback.

Yvonne Barteau's word horse when replaced with people, "Understanding the personality of your people, coupled with knowledge of your own temperament and skill level, gives you the best chance for success in your daily rides," explains the importance of understanding the different personality traits that people carry, giving an insight into how well communication can manage our professional relationships that always end up in questioning the self with, why are some people passive and others aggressive? Why was I appreciated more than I deserve or why was I not? Why doesn't he understand what I say? Such self questionings force us to over trust some and distrust some others. Communication also stands on our level of confidence and the ability to take risks.

So, how could personality be defined- an amalgamation of the psychological systems of an individual that determines his individual adaptability with the society around him which is reflected in perception of others and the environment, use of words, body language, tone- in short though his communication. The major determiners of ones personality has been understood as is heredity, environment and situation. The ability to understand personality behind the words or gesture or the action of the people around us could make an effective communicator who could bridge many communication gaps and dissolve many resultant communication barriers thus proving to be efficient as a team player and a leader. Viewing this company's do not forget to organize personality enhancement training of their employees as they understand communication to be the root of every organizational success and company profits.

Let's analyze a few theories of personality and their effect on communication:

1. Freud's Model of Personality (Psychoanalytic Theory):

Sigmund Freud's model of personality includes the terms Id, Ego and Superego, where Id is the self that desires for pleasure, super ego stands as a moral and ethical wall that defines ones values and ego controls the conflicting Id and Superego.

The theory enables an individual to learn oneself. An awareness of this theory could make an effective communicator as in the process of encoding the sender and during feedback the receiver could mediate between immediate impulses of the Id and the pressure of the Superego. Hence, building ego motivated people, who could use their learning, memory, planning and judgement in a more moral way. Even organizations could communicate silently by giving a physically and socially relaxed atmosphere and not triggering the extremes of Id and superego. This could be adapted by individuals as well by using a more polite approach without hurting the ego of others.

2. Jung's Persona Theory:

Carl Jung viewed personality as Ego, the conscious mind. He also pointed that people mask their true self to carry a public image when dealing with people. The persona is

adopted with the thought of it being a means to be successful in the different roles adopted- student, teacher, boss, father, and colleague and also in situations when the need to hide the deeper emotions is felt. Some are apt in this masking and others purge out their emotions.

Jung developed the two major personality typology- introversion and extroversion, where he defines the introverts to be reflecting inwards or being engaged in self thoughts, feelings, fantasies, dreams and that the extroverts reflected outwards in the things and people around them. The first characterizes shyness and the second sociable which is a character highly regarded in our society as the extroverts are believed to be better communicators when compared to the introverts.

Inability to understand this personality difference could result in communication gaps. For example, an introvert and an extrovert shaking hands with each other could end up misunderstanding each other. The dead handshake of the introvert coupled with a forced smile and the introverts firm and enthusiastic one could lead the introvert to understand that the extrovert is encroaching his personal space whereas the extrovert could mistake it as the introvert's lack of interest.

Considering the different roles one takes up in their profession one could also put on the persona mask of honesty and sincerity but to impress the boss in which case Jung's Persona theory would help. It would be right to quote Bovee here, "By writing and speaking from your audience's point of view, you can help them understand and accept your message (Bovee, 19)."

3. Eysenck's PEN Theory:

Hans J Eysenck supports that personality is characterized by types and traits which is considered to be the fundamental of a personality's characteristics. His theory refers to three major factors that define human personality- Psychoticism, Extroversion and Neuroticism.

Psychoticism defines aggressive, cold and impulsive people who are usually tough-minded, imaginative, creative and having a vision of the future. Extroversion characterizes people with social interest, enthusiasm and fun. A certain degree of Neuroticism is present in everybody ranging from normal, calm and collected people to people who are highly nervous which can be measured through their blood pressure, cold hands, sweating and muscular tension in their fight in the face of danger. Emotionally stable people have a high activation threshold and are calm under pressure.

So, it is advised to convey a bad news followed by good news or after creating an environment to absorb the shock of the bad news because "people don't like to get it, and they don't like to give it."(Bovee 227)

Eysenck also observed that extroverts with high levels of neuroticism tend to ignore, avoid and forget things that challenge or frighten them. They are apt in using the defense mechanisms like denial and repression. Whereas introverts quickly learn to avoid situations that cause panic and are overcautious to take risks.

Be alert of this and instead of blaming introverts of not being able to take risks present the same thing in a manner that would show security, the barrier in communication could be dissolved.

4. The Humanist Personality Theory of Carl Rogers:

Carl Roger's theory of personality is the resultant of his years of experience in dealing with people. His entire theory is built on a single "force of life"- the actualizing tendency which states the optimal use of self or inner motivation present in every human life could be suppressed but not destroyed.

It is not only true with the plant and the animal world but also with our society and culture that is the result of self actualization. Our adapting the western culture, in its fashion and work culture certified as adaptability is but self actualization. No one can deny the changing trends in the use of chutnified English and the language of sms and chat. It is but the result of self actualization.

We develop a positive self- regard or what we name as self esteem through the positive feedback or regard that others show towards us, without which we would feel a diminishing of our stature. Hence, one ought to motivate and encourage others through positive feedback. But this could lead to uncalled for results if done every time, so Jung's came forth with Conditional positive regard where appreciation or organism valuing follows a desired output. Focusing on the feelings that other carry when a feedback is given in the Infosys Campus Connect manual version 1.0 we can find a complete chapter dedicated to the skills of handling ones own feelings and giving and accepting a feedback, which is an integral part of communication.

Rogers also defined the fully functioning person, as the one with openness of experience i.e. being able to accept reality without being defensive, with the ability to live in the present which he called as existential living, with organismic trusting which means the trust on ones own instinct, who can recognize and utilize the opportunities given by the world which he names as experiential freedom and a person who exhibits creativity not only in arts, science but also by giving their optimum in their job.

A fully functioning person can but be an effective communicator who takes care of every aspect of their and others personality.

5. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs:

Abraham Maslow's model of personality exhibits the nature of needs. Human personality is the resultant of his nature of needs, our action and behaviour depends on

our priorities. Food becomes the priority when hungry but during examination students may even forget that they had to take food.

Maslow has identified these needs in order of priority. The first one is the physiological needs which are the basic needs that are required to maintain our body. Once this is fulfilled the urge for safety and security needs creeps where there is a strife for stability and protection. In general Indians live our lives with anxiety and fear of job security, good retirement plan and get in to all available insurances. The importance of physiological and safety needs can be seen during a job negotiation where the interviewee demands for certain perks to assure all safety, security. Love and belonging needs comes next with a need for love and affection and a sense of community. A sense of loneliness and social anxiety creep if there is no one to share your feelings. Hence, the need for working in a team and sharing feelings. An effective communicator is not the one who only speaks business but the one who can give others space to share their feelings as well. Next is the esteem needs where we carry a desire for status, fame, glory, recognition, attention, reputation, appreciation- lower needs and confidence, competence, achievement, mastery, independence, freedom, self respect- higher needs. After all these are fulfilled comes the strife for self- actualization or being needs i.e. to actually achieve individual potential.

6. Theory of Multiple Intelligences:

Howard Gardner identified eight intelligences which man may have and based on this is determined his inclination towards something which others may not have. They are linguistic intelligences which exposes ones sensitivity to written and spoken words, logical or mathematical intelligences shows sensitivity to numerical patterns, an inclination towards music shows musical sensitivity, kinesthetic intelligence makes one understand and communicate other moods and temperaments, intrapersonal intelligence makes one understand and communicate ones own moods, an inclination to flora and fauna is due to natural intelligence.

Instead of coaxing people for not performing to the expectations, assign them with projects according to their intelligences or create an environment where their thirst for certain intelligence can be quenched. This is the reason why corporates communicate effectively with their employees by having gyms, dance practices, green environment and swimming pools within their company boundaries.

Company's heir trainers specialized in delivering programs on personality theory. Through the session they not only understand people around them better but also facilitate better communications skills as they are able to look into the problems that come in the way of being able to convey messages effectively. For instance, time mismanagement becomes a cause for stress and frustration, which then hampers the possibility of healthy communication at work. An effective understanding of the self could solve this problem to a large extent. Thus, the knowledge of the theories of personality could help understand the environment better thus creating an effective and healthy communication. Ability to communicate can be

effective only if we are effective in understanding the feelings of others as the kind of words chosen; with the body language used is the reflection of ones personality.

A curriculum for Engineering and Management students where they learn communication skills in their first year could include the theories of personality in a simplified way to enable students to be effective communicators, thus helping them to adapt quickly to the corporate culture.

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