

Effective Interpersonal Communications Exercise

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This case may be used by current adopters of:

S. L. McShane *Canadian Organizational Behaviour*, 5th ed. (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 2004); S. L. McShane & M. A. von Glinow, *Organizational Behavior*, 3rd ed. (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2005); S. L. McShane & T. Travaglione, *Organisational Behaviour on the Pacific Rim*, 1st ed. (Sydney: McGraw-Hill Australia, 2003)

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Purpose

This exercise is designed to help you develop more effective interpersonal communication skills, particularly in terms of helping others communicate more openly with you.

Instructions

Read the four incidents below. The first three incidents represent situations where someone is telling you about his or her work-related problem. Following each incident are five possible ways that you might reply. Rank these responses in terms of how you would reply with '1' indicating your most preferred reply and '5' indicating your least preferred reply. Identify the strengths and weaknesses with each reply. For the fourth incident, you are asked to indicate which of the two statements is more appropriate in the context described.

This exercise may be completed either individually or in small teams of 4 or 5 people. When the individuals (or teams) have completed the exercise, each of the incidents will be discussed and the results compared with others in the class.

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Incident 1

I don't understand it. The executive committee knows how hard pressed we are to get these designs out over the next year, yet our team doesn't receive any money in next year's budget for new hires to ease off the workload. Surely the company has enough money for another person in our department. Don't they think we provide a valuable service.

RANK

- _____ a. I can understand why you're upset. But I'm sure that we can find some sort of solution if you'll be patient just a while longer.
- _____ b. I'm sorry, but your budget proposal for a new hire looked pretty weak to the executive committee. You're going to have to live with this one.
- _____ c. Sure, your group is suffering. We're all suffering through this belt tightening. I can point you to other project teams who are just as mad as you are about this situation.
- _____ d. You sound really upset about this. Do you really feel that the executive committee doubts the value your group provides to the company?
- _____ e. Do you really need another person to do the work? Can't you just reschedule people or have them put in some overtime until the workload eases?

Incident 2

I'm fed up with the way my boss runs this department. She doesn't seem to have any idea of the problems we face with clients everyday or with the lack of support from the company to secure new orders. I've tried to tell her that the sales people can't do their jobs without new samples and telemarketing support, but she just seems to smile and ignore my requests.

RANK

- _____ a. I know what you mean. The boss I worked for a few years ago in an accounting department was just waiting for retirement and wouldn't do anything to help his people. I think he was afraid that demanding more resources would jeopardize his pension.
- _____ b. You're really having trouble getting your work done effectively with this supervisor, aren't you?
- _____ c. I suggest that you go directly to your boss' superior and let him know about your concerns. This isn't going to get resolved unless you take action now.
- _____ d. Gee, that must be frustrating. But, you know, it's just as likely your boss is trying but isn't getting any support from above. Have you thought of that?
- _____ e. Why don't you think your boss is doing anything to help you?

Incident 3

I worked really hard this past year and all you give me is an 'above average' performance rating. You know I've been in this job longer than anyone else and I know better than anyone else. You've got an 'excellent' rating, but I don't see you giving it to anybody. Do I have to walk on water before you give me the top merit increase?

RANK

- _____ a. You really don't know what I look at to decide merit increases, do you?
- _____ b. Don't be upset. It's true that very few people get 'excellent' ratings, but company policy dictates that only five percent of the employees receive the highest increases.
- _____ c. Tell me how you think you deserved the highest merit increase. Maybe I overlooked something, or perhaps we just need to understand the performance criteria more clearly.
- _____ d. What are you complaining about? Most people in this department would kill for an 'above average' rating and you come to me as if it's a sign of failure.
- _____ e. You seem to be saying that you deserve an 'excellent' rating with the highest merit increase rather than the 'above average' rating you actually received, right?

Incident 4

Jim Shanti is a fifty-four year old sales supervisor whose performance has recently been declining. In particular, he has acted rudely to his own staff by criticizing them in public. He has not been very helpful to sales supervisors in other regions when they call for information. A few recent incidents have been noted where Jim has received telephone messages from clients and has made no apparent attempt to return their calls. As Jim's supervisor, you hold a private meeting with him to discuss his recent performance. Which statement in each pair you would use to create a more effective dialogue?

RANK

- 4.1. a. Jim, your recent actions are quite wrong, you know.
 b. Jim, I have been quite concerned about the fact that you aren't getting back to clients who call.
- 4.2. a. I understand that you spoke harshly to Sandra the other day in front of her coworkers.
 b. You're a real goof for speaking harshly the other day to Sandra in front of her coworkers.
- 4.3. a. I don't think you're motivated enough to do this job anymore, Jim.
 b. One possible solution is to set a goal of returning all your calls within 24 hours. Does this sound reasonable to you?