



SOFT SKILLS FOR ENGINEERS

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Education



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Introduction

“Soft skills” as a term in the world of work are associated with a person’s emotional intelligence, the cluster of personality traits, social graces, communication, language proficiency, personal habits, feelings, optimism and teamwork that characterize relationships with other people. Though soft skills are hard to quantify or measure, they are needed for everyday life as well as for work.

Soft skills provide an important complement to “hard skills” which are the occupational requirements of a job and many other activities. They are easy to observe, quantify and measure. They include items such as certifications, degrees, job titles, technical know-how, and technical and administrative procedures in general.

They are the soft skills which empower higher education institutions and workforce in advancing career development and personal growth. They also create new opportunities and go beyond financial motivation.

It has been suggested that in a number of professions, soft skills may be more important over the long term than specialized occupational skills. In legal, educational or even in technical professions the ability to deal with people effectively and politely can determine the professional success of an individual which may lead to the overall success of an organization or institution. For this reason, soft skills are increasingly sought out by employers in addition to standard (technical) qualifications and may play an indispensable role in a number of professions.

In the present course, six of the main areas relevant to the soft skills field are covered in the lessons named: Interpersonal Communicative Skills; Time Management Skills; Problem Solving Skills; Managerial Skills; Report Writing Skills; Presentation Skills. The aim of the course is to help develop interpersonal communicative skills based on life skills, to design individual plans of effective time management, to prepare the course participants to effectively solve problems and perform roles of managers by using empathic components and critical thinking, and to improve their ability to create professionally written reports and oral presentations.

Besides the lectures containing basic information on the stated skills, a practical part is also included providing space for discussions and practising the acquired knowledge by completing tasks and exercises relevant to the given topics. The above mentioned contact lessons (both lectures and practical seminars) are supported by course participants’ individual work during which they will complete the tasks given by a lecturer after finishing each theme of the course.

Soft skills training forms an important part of training (future) engineers in developing their own personality to succeed in their private and professional life.



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1 INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Soft skills are primarily related to communication. Effective communication is one of the most important life skills we can learn. The term **interpersonal skills** (also called people skills or communication skills) is often used in business contexts to refer to the skills a person uses to communicate and interact with others. It means how people relate to one another.

Interpersonal communication is the process by which people exchange information, feelings, and meaning through face-to-face communication. The first step in the communication process involves **the sender** sending the message to **the receiver**. To avoid misunderstanding, the message must be clearly communicated by the sender through his/her communication skills. The second step includes the receiver both hearing and responding to **the message**. If the receiver is not a good listener, s/he will be a less effective communicator.

The communication process is made up of four key components: **encoding, medium of transmission, decoding, and feedback**. From a business perspective, effective communication is an absolute must because it commonly accounts for the difference between success and failure or profit and loss. The manner in which individuals perceive and talk to each other at work about different issues is a major determinant of the business success.

Interpersonal communication skills refer to the ability to speak competently and effectively to groups of people, e.g. in the classroom, or in public, the ability to make persuasive and convincing speeches, to communicate messages and impart information in a clear and understandable manner. This builds the **self-confidence** in people and allows them to create a **relevant impact**.

In many interpersonal encounters, **the first few minutes** are extremely important as first impressions have a significant impact on the success of further communication. Everyone has expectations and norms as to how initial meetings should proceed and people tend to behave according to these expectations. If these expectations are mismatched, communication will not be effective or run smoothly, and some form of negotiation will be needed if relations are to continue.

At a first meeting, **formalities** and **appropriate greetings** are usually expected. Such formalities could include a handshake, introducing yourself, or eye contact. Discussions around a neutral subject such as the weather or your journey may also be useful. A friendly disposition and a smiling face are much more likely to encourage communication than a blank face, inattention or disinterested reception.

The way a communication is closed will, at least in part, determine the way a conversation is remembered. A range of subtle, or sometimes not so subtle, signals are used to end an interaction. For example, some people

may avoid eye contact, stand up, turn their body away, or use behaviours such as looking at a watch or closing notepads or books. All of these non-verbal actions indicate to the other person that the initiator wishes to end the communication.

Closing an interaction too abruptly may not allow the other person to 'round off' what he or she is saying so you should ensure there is time for winding-up. The closure of an interaction is a good time to make any **future arrangements**.

Last, but not least, this time will no doubt be accompanied by a number of socially acceptable **parting gestures**.

The use of **encouraging words** alongside **non-verbal gestures** such as head nods, a warm facial expression and maintaining eye contact, are more likely to reinforce openness in others.

The use of **encouragement** and **positive reinforcement** can:

- encourage others to participate in discussion
- signify interest in what other people have to say
- pave the way for development or maintenance of a relationship
- allay fears and give reassurance
- show warmth and openness
- reduce shyness or nervousness in ourselves and others.

When you prepare for an important meeting, you have **to overcome fears and nervousness**. Otherwise it is impossible to think clearly when you experience symptoms such as: shortness of breath, accelerated heart rate, sweating palms, digestive problems, trembling, headaches, neck pain, hot or cold flashes, and others. Even if a conversation goes horribly wrong, do not panic, it will be the worst. The goal is to help the mind get used to coping with panic, which takes the fear of fear away. Whatever you fear, if you face it, it should start to fade.

Fears tend to be much worse than reality. People sometimes tell themselves they are a failure because they blush when they feel self-conscious. This then makes them more upset. But blushing in stressful situations is normal. By remembering this, the anxiety goes away. You will feel better if you physically calm down, take a 15-minute walk, make a cup of tea or have a bath.

Exercise as a tool for reducing nervousness is more than just something you do for your own physical fitness. It allows you to easily reduce your nervousness because it increases production of relaxing neurotransmitters while simultaneously burning hormones caused by stress and tiring the muscles so that anxiety symptoms are less severe. If you do nothing else for your nervousness, you still need to start exercising.

Sharing fears takes away a lot of their scariness. Talk about it to your partner, friend or a family member. You can refer people for counselling. Many people turn to alcohol or drugs to self-treat anxiety with the idea that it will make them feel better, but these only make nervousness worse. Life is full of stresses, yet many of us feel that our lives must be perfect. Bad days and setbacks will always happen, we should not expect perfection.

Your thoughts are your enemy when you are nervous often. You need to make sure that you do not let yourself get taken over by these thoughts. As soon as you are about to give the activity that makes you nervous, like a speech, get busy and stay busy. Keep your mind distracted and occupied. You will find that as long as you are engaging in healthy activities, the break you get mentally will reduce your anxiety in the future.

Concentrating on interpersonal communicative skills applied both in everyday social interaction and in professional environment, it is necessary to recognise and transform barriers to effective public speaking and to handle partners in conversation with confidence.

A successful two-way communication process depends on carefully conveying your message so that your listener understands exactly what you mean. On the contrary, poor communication may reduce quality, weaken productivity, and eventually may lead to anger and a lack of trust among individuals within the company or organization.

1.1 Voice Controlling and Careful Listening

Interpersonal communication is not just about **what** is actually said but **how** it is said.

When you speak, your **tone of voice** speaks in ways that go beyond words. It will tell people whether you feel elated or sad, excited or bored. Often, how you say things conveys more meaning than what you say. In fact, voice quality is said to convey about 38% of your meaning. Tone of voice may alter significantly the meaning of speech. For example the sentences "Are you here?" or "I am here" can have different connotations if spoken with a different tone of voice - high, low, quick, slow, rising, falling, whispering, whining, yelling, or sighing.

Some people naturally have more vocal strengths, the others need to warm up their voice every day, especially before public speaking. When your voice is affected by excitement or stress, practise your speech out loud. Learn to breathe properly and apply that technique to your public speaking. It happens that we impute strength and confidence to the person who speaks with a low-pitched, well-modulated voice. When the voice rises to a high pitch, we sense excitement, panic, and lack of control. That means that each of us should use the lower end of the voice range when we want to communicate calmness, confidence and competence.

It is a good idea to vary the **pace** – the speed at which you talk. Some simple but telling points of a message can be made effectively in a rapid-

fire sequence. Quickening up at times and then slowing down will help to maintain interest.

Pauses can be used for effect to highlight the preceding statement or to gain attention before an important message. Pauses mean silence for a few seconds. Listeners interpret meaning during pauses so have the courage to stay silent for up to five seconds – dramatic pauses like this convey authority and confidence.

Volume should always be great enough that you can be heard by everyone you are trying to reach with your voice. When you do not address people through a microphone, keep checking them for signs that they are straining to hear, or indications that their attention is straying. By developing a **strong voice**, as opposed to a loud voice, you will be seen as someone positive.

Intonation and **stress** are other important elements of paralanguage. The range between high and low intonations varies from individual to individual. The way you emphasize words can change the meaning of your sentences. As you speak, be conscious of the effects of sense stress on the meaning you are trying to convey. Use stress to show your listener which words you consider to be important.

Some people tend to speak through clenched teeth and with little movement of their lips. It is this inability to open mouths and failure to make speech sounds with precision that is the root cause of inaudibility. The sound is locked into the mouth and not let out. To have good **articulation** it is important to unclench the jaw, open the mouth and give full benefit to each sound you make, paying particular attention to the ends of words. This will also help your audience as a certain amount of lip-reading will be possible.

Before any important speaking situation, whether it is an appointment, meeting or talk, it is beneficial to have a voice warm-up.

Effective verbal or spoken communication is dependent on a number of factors and cannot be fully isolated from other important interpersonal skills such as non-verbal communication and **listening skills**.

The best thing you can do to improve your communication skills is **to learn** to really listen, i.e. to pay attention and let the other person talk without interrupting. It is hard work, but as it is said: "a good conversation is a bunch of words elegantly connected with listening".

Statistics present that we spend approximately 70% of our total waking time communicating with others. Of this communication time, we spend: 9% writing, 16% reading, 30% talking, and 45% listening. It has to be pointed out that these percentages may vary from person to person, e.g. some people may spend much more than 30% of their communications time talking and much less time listening.

Active listening is an important skill and yet, as communicators, people tend to spend far more energy considering what they are going to say

rather than listening to what the other person is trying to say. The following points are essential for effective and active listening:

- Arrange a comfortable environment conducive to the purpose of the communication (a warm light room with minimal background noise). Be prepared to listen, avoid distractions.
- Keep an open mind and concentrate on what the speaker is saying, both with his/her words as well as with voice inflections, rate of speech, body language etc.
- Try not to think about how you are going to respond to the speaker while s/he is speaking to you. Delay judgment until you have heard everything.
- Do not be trying to think of your next question while the other person is giving information.
- Interact nonverbally with small gestures or verbal affirmations, such as nodding your head or saying very brief comments, e.g. "I see" and other words that would not interrupt the speaker. This tells the speaker that you are fully engaged in listening and also keeps you involved in the communication process.
- Do not interrupt or finish the speaker's sentences. This takes your concentration completely away from what the speaker is saying and focuses your attention on your own words.

When other people talk, the mind has an opportunity to wander because it does not have to process any specific actions thus you may not listen intently when people speak to you. Try to force yourself to listen to the words you are hearing. Consider the speaker's motivation behind what he is saying. If you lack an ability to listen well and you want to change and concentrate on what people say, use a few tricks which can help you out, e.g. people who listen well communicate listening mode with body language that covers their mouth (a hand placed gently in front of it). You want to make a constant eye contact, but do not give the speaker a death stare. If you cannot make it, just look at the bridge of their nose or a little below. You can also get away with looking at their mouth because they are talking. Eyes move naturally all the time, so look at them for most of the conversation but feel free to momentarily break contact now and again.

Feedback consists of messages the listener returns, which allows the speaker to know how accurately the message has been received, as well as the listener's reaction. The listener may also respond to the unintentional message as well as the intentional message. Types of feedback range from direct verbal statements, for example "Say that again, I don't understand", to subtle facial expressions or changes in posture that might indicate to the speaker that the listener feels uncomfortable with the message. Feedback allows the speaker to regulate, adapt or repeat the message in order to improve communication.

Keep an open mind, and avoid making or expressing assumptions about your listener. You cannot know whether he will be angry, bored, or interested before he has replied. Find out how your listener thinks. The listener gives you clues with his eyes. If you notice that he often looks up, he may think in pictures. He prefers sound if he usually looks to the side and feelings if he glances down. Once you start to act like a good listener, you will come to believe you are a good listener.

You should strive to constantly become better communicators and become more aware and prepared to deal effectively with many types of communication challenges you face every day. Your communication skills play an important part in your success and even happiness in life.

1.2 Non-verbal Communication

Basic communication skills using words alone may not be enough to get your full meaning across. When communicating face-to-face with others, you receive messages on three levels: verbal, paraverbal and non-verbal.

- **Verbal messages (vocabulary)** are the words you choose and arrange in your communication. They consist of the actual words you communicate with others.
- **Paraverbal messages (voice inflections)** mean the way how you say the words. They can include tone, speed, emotions, intonation, pace, and volume of your voice.
- **Non-verbal messages** support your words through your body language, facial expressions, gestures, etc. They are the primary way that we communicate emotions.

As words have limitations, **non-verbal communication** is more effective in situations where you have to explain shapes, directions, inner feelings and personalities. Non-verbal signals serve to make the message more powerful and convincing. If a message is too emotional or too complex, a separate non-verbal communication channel is needed to transmit this message correctly. Non-verbal communication helps clarify misunderstanding and avoid possible communication barriers.

Your non-verbal behaviour may carry more meanings than your words, e.g. a handshake and a smile convey a friendly message. Frowning or using a loud voice may intimidate your listener. Lean close for an intimate conversation, but stay back in formal situations. Use eye contact and a warm approach to encourage rapport as you begin to speak.

Through verbal communication, people learn about your thoughts and ideas. Through non-verbal communication, they learn about your feelings. Much of it is unconscious, but you can bring a great deal of your wordless communication under conscious control. If you want to get your ideas across better at work, you should also watch your body language while having communication.

The most important thing in communication is hearing what is not said. It can be picked up by interpreting body language, e.g. you tell your partner you are open to discussion but your arms are crossed or you say you are listening but have not looked up from your phone yet. Do not forget that you are constantly communicating even when you are not saying a word.

Skills of non-verbal communication are rarely taught at schools, though they are very important for effective interactions with others. They are obviously (and often unconsciously) acquired in natural cultural environment by observing others and imitating them.

Body language, for example, includes **gestures** (e.g. shaking a fist, using the middle finger), **facial expressions** (smile, scowl), **body posture** (slouching, sitting upright), **eye contact** (winking, staring), **body contact** (kissing, hand shake).

To express various meanings the following non-verbal elements are used:

- **arms and hands** to say good-bye, point, count, express excitement, beckon, warn away, threaten, insult, etc.
- **head** to say yes or no, to smile, frown, etc.
- **head and shoulders** in combination mean not knowing something
- **a nod** to reinforce a positive message
- **a wink** may contradict a stated positive message
- **finger to lips** to indicate need for quiet
- **tapping fingers** or **jiggling coins** to show emotional state.

Non-verbal communication is especially significant in **intercultural** situations. Communication with people from other societies or ethnic groups is fraught with the danger of misunderstanding if their culture and non-verbal communication is unknown or ignored. What is acceptable in one country, may be criticised or rude in others, e.g. bowing, hands in pockets, sitting with legs crossed, interaction distance, or cultural use of time.

Not only in private life but also at work it is important to recognize if your partner in communication tells the truth or lies. The most common **signs of lying** are signs of nervousness, stress, anxiety, defence, or discomfort. These little things will show up in different gestures, facial expressions, actions, or mannerisms. And among these are self-touching, speech errors and hesitations, eye movements, discrepancies in the posture, and more.

People who are lying touch or rub their **nose**, scratch their forehead, play with their hair, wring or twist their fingers, cover their mouth, and the like. The need to use frequent self touching can indicate extreme nervousness and increasing tension.

If people lie, they often stumble over their speech, stutter, or even mispronounce. Voice pitch will go up and pacing will usually get a bit faster.

Eye movements of a lying person include lateral movement, squinting, frequent blinking, or looking away. A person may cover up lies through confident facial expressions and voice pitch and volume, however their body may still reveal hints of dishonesty. Fidgeting, shakiness, trembling of the hands, body stiffness, shuffling of the feet, and jitters are typical indicators of lying, but these should never be considered absolutely definitive or reliable.

Gestures showing the palm often indicate sincerity. But in lying, the palms are rarely visible, and are often hidden inside pockets. As a defensive posture and protection, people often cross their arms across their chest. People lying are also prone to sweating, increasing heart rate, breathing deeper, and being pale.

There are several more **indicators of lying**, such as forced smiles, slight tightening of the forehead between the eyebrows, lip biting, hand shrugs, flaring of nostrils, tighter lips, elbows pulled to the sides, and others.

There is an art to understanding body language. Even though they may seem sometimes unreliable, several different gestures can help clue you into how sincere and honest a person is being with you.

1.3 Tasks and Exercises

1.3.1 One of the first steps in overcoming fears and nervousness is to understand them and remove the blocks that prevent you from achieving their potential. If you start to get a faster heartbeat or sweating palms:

- ✓ Stand in an easy position with your feet one pace apart, with the knees 'unlocked' and not rigidly pushed back. Keep spine straight, head balanced and face muscles relaxed.
- ✓ Breathe in to a slow count of three, then out to a slow count of 3.
- ✓ Try not to raise your shoulders as you breathe. Breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth. Consciously think of your breath 'filling down' to the bottom of your lungs.
- ✓ Put the palm of your hand flat against your abdomen and feel the movement. Push slightly against your hand as you breathe in and out. Repeat this exercise ten times. This type of exercise helps soothe the body.

1.3.2 Brainstorming in pairs: In three minutes make a list of the most ways to communicate non-verbally. At the end of three minutes the teacher asks for one pair to share their list. If anyone has different ones to add, ask them to stand and share from their list. Talk about using body language in everyday communication.

1.3.3 Find a document to read, something about two pages in length - the first few pages of a book would work well. Read your document through silently first, then read it aloud in your normal speaking voice. Do not worry if you stumble or falter, just pick up and continue to the end. Now read it a third time, recording your voice if possible and remember:

- ✓ Slow down: It is a natural reaction to want to get it over as fast as possible and this often causes people to stumble over their words. Speeding up also occurs when you are nervous and usually makes you more difficult to understand.
- ✓ Keep your head up: Try not to tuck your chin into the book as your voice is then addressing the floor. Hold your book higher and project your voice.
- ✓ Pause occasionally: Let the end of a sentence or the end of a paragraph give you a chance of a small, two or three second rest. Pauses can be useful for emphasis.

Practise this exercise as often as you can. By building up your control of out-going breath, you will never sound 'breathy' or feel you are 'running out of breath' when you speak to a group or a meeting.

1.3.4 The teacher makes a list of gestures, body movements, facial expressions, sounds, and other nonverbal signals. You will make a column for what these signals signify – there may be to ten different meanings for each item listed, e.g. laugh may indicate humour, embarrassment, anxiety, or fear. Afterwards the students discuss how these signals make them feel.

1.3.5 The teacher says, "I am very glad I am here with you today" in a monotone, low voice, lacking any enthusiasm, with crossed arms and looking down with a disgusting look on his face. The students tell what the real message was in this communication and how it was different than the words spoken. They observe body language to see how important it is in sending and receiving messages.

1.3.6 The teacher prepares cards labelled with the words such as: Worried. Excited. Snobby. Guilty. Bored. Sad. Angry. Happy. Satisfied. Some students choose cards and demonstrate the feelings through the body language, the others identify the feelings being demonstrated.

1.3.7 The students in turns will say the word "Oh" differently, giving the following interpretation or meaning each time: Shock. Pleasure. Doubt. Questioning. Anticipation. Surprise. Displeasure. Resentment. Meaning the letter in the alphabet between n and p.

1.3.8 Students break up into pairs and take turns they will be the sender and receiver of the message. The sender (communicator) will speak for about two to three minutes about his/her job duties. The receiver (listener) will focus totally on his/her partner's words without being distracted. Afterwards s/he will paraphrase the message to the speaker in order to confirm understanding. By putting the message in his/her own words, the receiver concentrates more on what was said, making him/her listen better.

1.3.9 Check the listening bad habits from the list below that you are sometimes guilty of committing when communicating with others. Be honest with yourself!

- ✓ I interrupt often or try to finish the other person 's sentences.
- ✓ I often answer with some advice, even when not requested.
- ✓ I seldom give a response afterward, even if I say I will.
- ✓ I usually change the subject to something that relates to my own experience.
- ✓ I lose my temper when hearing things I do not agree with.

1.3.10 Students choose those areas from the DISCO (European Dictionary of Skills and Competences) which are relevant to their specialization and discuss them with their teacher and peers.

2 TIME MANAGEMENT SKILLS

Time management skills are the abilities to recognize and solve personal time management problems. Time is the most democratic commodity that there is, everybody has exactly the same amount of it: 24 hours a day, 60 minutes in an hour and 60 seconds in a minute. If you never seem to have enough, the skill to manage your time effectively will become an asset rather than an obstacle for you.

Time management skills will remove barriers to being organised and in control. Regardless of the type of your profession, your work is usually composed of **thoughts**, **conversations** and **actions**. It depends on you how much time you will spend on these three items that will lead you to success.

When you are sure that you understand your own role and responsibilities and those of your colleagues in the workplace, then you know what expertise are expected of you. However, do not overwhelm yourself with a too long to-do list but **do the important** and **urgent first**. Allocate an estimated time to complete each task, otherwise the list of to-do things will become a source of stress at the end of the day. It is wrong to assume that the more you complete at work, the better it is for you. This is not necessarily so. Too long a to-do list may cause you to procrastinate on starting the work.

Do not waste your working **time** by taking long coffee breaks, long smoking breaks, chatting on the phone, or surfing on the Internet. Try to avoid these time robbers in your workplace.

Whatever you do, get it right the first time. Have a high personal standard that says nothing leaves your hand unless you know you have done your best. Do not rush through your work assuming that speed is a surrogate measurement of efficiency. Not so, quality of work is important too.

With good time management skills you are in control of your time and your life, of your stress and energy levels. You make progress at work. You are able to make balance between your work, personal and family lives.

All time management skills are learnable. The ability to beat procrastination and laziness belongs to the most important management skills to be learnt. You should identify your **causes of procrastination** and start fighting it now. Though time management is not the only issue of what causes procrastination but you cannot underestimate the importance of time management in your pursuit for career success.

Time management is aided by a range of skills, tools, and techniques used to manage time when accomplishing specific tasks, projects and goals.

This set encompasses a wide scope of activities which include planning, allocating, setting goals, delegation, analysis of spent time, monitoring, organizing, scheduling, and prioritizing.

Initially, time management referred to just business or work activities, but eventually the term has broadened and includes personal activities as well. A time management system is a designed combination of processes, tools, techniques, and methods. It is a necessity in any project development as it determines the project completion time and scope.

One quick and simple way of time management in the workplace is to do a task immediately. Do not over rationalize and craft a perfect plan. A good plan executed today is better than an excellent plan not executed at all.

A couple of techniques below may help you improve your personal time management and overcome psychological obstacles hidden behind your personality. You should be conscious of them if you want to increase efficiency in your workplace.

2.1 The Basic Techniques to Master Your Own Time

The instructions on basic techniques to master your own time are defined as follows:

Create your own personal system for managing time. Carry a schedule and record all your thoughts, conversations and activities for a week. This helps you understand how much time is actually spent on producing results and how much time is wasted on unproductive thoughts, talks and actions.

Prioritise high value-adding tasks. Learn to set priorities wisely, and you will achieve more and will have more of personal or family time. Any activity or conversation that is important to your success should have a time assigned to it. Schedule, when it will begin and end and have the discipline to keep these appointments.

Cope with interruptions and change. Plan time to be pulled away from what you are doing. Use breaks effectively to recharge. Plan with flexibility.

Efficient planning as an important time management technique optimizes your efforts of achieving goals. Take the first 30 minutes of every day to plan your day efficiently. The most important time of your day is the time you schedule to schedule time.

Good decision making is the foundation for life and time management skills. Take five minutes before every call and task to decide what result you want to attain. Take five minutes after each call and activity to determine whether your desired result was achieved. If not, what was missing? Put it in your next call or activity.

Practise not answering the phone just because it's ringing **and e-mails** just because they show up. Disconnect instant messaging. Instead, schedule a time to answer email and return phone calls.

Seek support and **learn to delegate** assertively. Delegation skill is important for personal time management. That is why you should learn how to choose delegate and how to delegate.

Well-developed coping skills help you maintain control and do the best that could be done when faced with outstanding challenges. Build coping skills to withstanding challenges of life.

Time log is a very effective time management learning tool with which you can analyze and improve personal time management skills. Your minimal effort and a few tips and techniques can eliminate much of wasted time and help you reach balance.

A personal digital assistant outperforms other time management tools. When you use this portable hand held personal digital assistant, you will experience its advantages compared to paper notes or other personal time management tools.

Recognize the risks and causes of **burnout syndrome**. You are much better of preventing burnout now than putting your life back together later.

Self-motivate and **reward**. Remember however that it is impossible to get everything done. Odds are good that 20 percent of your thoughts, conversations and activities produce 80 percent of your results.

We all have time to either spend or waste and it is our decision what to do with it. But once passed, it is gone forever (*B. Lee*). To realize the **value of the time**:

- **One year**, ask a student who failed a grade.
- **One month**, ask a mother who gave birth to a premature baby.
- **One week**, ask the editor of a weekly newspaper.
- **One day**, ask the lovers who are waiting to meet.
- **One minute**, ask a person who missed the train.
- **One second**, ask a person who just avoided an accident.
- **One millisecond**, ask the person who won a silver medal in the Olympics.

Time management is the act or process of exercising conscious control over the amount of time spent on specific activities, especially to increase efficiency or productivity. Delivering tasks on time is one of the biggest challenges of a company or an organization because schedule problems often cause more conflict than other issues. That is why the main monitoring and controlling task performed as part of time management is schedule control.

2.2 Time Management Strategies as Study Habits

The following time management strategies having been proven as effective study habits can be accompanied by the relevant questions:

How long is your best time block you can study? What makes for a good break for you? Can you control the activity and return to your studies? A recommended strategy: Developing and planning **blocks of study time and breaks** in a typical week. Place blocks of time when you are most productive, e.g. early in the morning. Blocks are around 50 minutes but you can shorten them when difficult material requires more frequent breaks. During breaks you may have a snack, relax or otherwise refresh yourself.

What is the best study space you can think of? What is another one? A recommended strategy: **Dedicated study spaces**. You should determine a place where you can maximize your concentration and be free of the distractions that friends or hobbies can bring. You should also have a back-up space that you can escape to, like the library, study centre, or any place where you can be anonymous.

What subject has always caused you problems? A recommended strategy: **Prioritise your assignments**. During your study time, begin with the most difficult subject or task as you are fresh and have more energy to take them on.

How would you review lecture notes? Is there free time you can use? A recommended strategy: **Review the lecture material immediately after class**. The first 24 hours are critical. Forgetting is greatest within 24 hours without review.

What is one example of applying free time to your studies? A recommended strategy: **Use your free time wisely**. Think of times when you can study bits as when walking, riding the bus, waiting in a line, etc.

What is one distraction that causes you stop studying? A recommended strategy: **Postpone unnecessary activities until the work is done**. Meeting unexpected opportunities looks appealing but then results in poor study performance. Distracting activities will be more enjoyable later without the study pressure hanging over your head.

What is the best time in a week you can review? A recommended strategy: **Weekly reviews and updates**. Each week, like a Sunday evening, review your assignments, notes, and your calendar. Be mindful that as deadlines and exams approach, your weekly routine must adapt to them.

The fact that all of us have certain habits is a great obstacle to improving our time management. The problem seems to be getting out of our routines and changing them for better ones. In this respect it is important to change our behaviour in order to improve time management. **You do not really manage time, you manage behaviour.**

2.3 Tasks and Exercises

2.3.1 This kind of exercise works as a good opener for practising time management skills: Students stand up and close their eyes. The teacher asks them to open their eyes and sit down when they think one minute has elapsed after the teacher's command: Start. Of course, the students will sit down at different times. Afterwards, the teacher talks and discusses the understanding of time. Even though everyone has an equal (24 hours a day, or one minute for exercise), we experience the time and use it in different way – someone as a shorter period, the other as a longer one.

Other variations of this exercise can be practised by changing the time, for example to 30 seconds, or 2 minutes.

2.3.2 Write a simple "to do" list. Identify items and the reasons for doing them. Do not forget to set a timeline for getting them done. Discuss your list with others in your group.

2.3.3 Carry a schedule and record all your thoughts, conversations and activities for a week. This will help you understand how much you can get done during the course of a day and where your precious moments are going.

2.3.4 Prepare a long term planner. Write down a monthly chart with all the appointments, classes and meetings chronologically. It will also serve as a reminder to constructively plan time for yourself.

2.3.5 Design a plan of your own time management. Discuss it in your group.

2.3.6 Write down 10 things you did at work yesterday. Next, on a separate sheet of paper write down the five topics that you expect to discuss at your next performance review. Then look at the two lists together and mark in some way on the first list all the things which have a direct link to the second list. The outcome of the activity is the recognition that we spend time on things which have little or no consequence to our performance.

2.3.7 The teacher gives each group of students a puzzle with the same or similar level of difficulty. He does not provide them the whole picture of what it will look like when completed. The students are asked to complete the puzzle as quickly as possible. After about three minutes, the teacher provides the whole picture if students ask for it. In such a case, they will complete the puzzle much faster.

Afterwards, the teacher explains that having the perspective and clarity (as for example of the whole picture) helps to plan weekly and daily activities much more effectively. If no "whole picture" is available, then time is spent on urgencies, likes and what others want one to do.

2.3.8 The teacher divides the students into groups and gives them each a large glass container and various material, such as rocks, pebbles, gravel, sand, or anything else. The task is to fill the containers with as much material as the students can.

The purpose of this activity is to point at the order of filling the jar with the given material. If the students start with the sand first, they will not be able to add larger rocks to fit into the container. The teacher explains that the sand represents small, unimportant tasks which are usually enjoyable and easy to complete. But the most important items (represented by rocks in this case) are left largely untouched. That is why the students should start by filling the biggest rocks first, i.e. to complete their important tasks first, and then add the sand sliding easily between rocks and pebbles. The students are to explain what the material represents to them, e.g. home activities, projects, extra work, etc. and which assignments they prioritise.

2.3.9 The teacher blindfolds each of (approx.) 10 students in each group. He places a length of rope in the centre of the circle. The students' task is to form the rope into a shape of a square (or a pentagon, or "Z"). Every student must be in contact with the rope at all times and they must use the entire rope. No tangles or knots are allowed. When the group feels they have made whatever shape the teacher specified, they can set it on the ground and take their blindfolds off.

The purpose of this activity is to see all sorts of personality styles, leadership styles, communication styles and a definite pecking order. Regarding time management, the group's process is often very hectic. The teacher discusses team management time and asks the students what the most efficient way it is to accomplish a task. They will find that when they are deprived of sight, their normal ways of accomplishing the task were thrown into confusion. The group can also talk about what process they would use if they were to do the activity again.

2.3.10 Have three pages with 24 squares - representing 24 hours of a day. Fill the squares on the 1st page (based on the time you spend) and label them with routine activities of your regular day, like sleeping (6 hours - 6 squares), bathing, eating, travel, watching TV etc. After a discussion on time wasters with your teacher, on the 2nd page: fill the squares based on the time you spend on non-reproductive time at your workplace, such as coffee breaks, personal telephone calls and emails, etc. Later on, collate the data from the 1st page and 2nd page on the 3rd page. The empty squares represent your productive time. Using the 3rd page identify activities from which you can mine time to increase your productive time.

3 PROBLEM SOLVING SKILLS

A problem is generally defined as **an obstacle** which makes impossible to achieve a goal or an objective. Usually, the nature of a problem is such that an answer or solution is needed. The problem could also be defined as a deflection of the present state from optimum. The problem solving is a cognitive process directed at finding solutions to well-defined problems.

Being a confident problem solver is important to manager's success. Much of that confidence comes from having a good process to use when approaching a problem. When your problem is simple, the solution is usually obvious. In case the problem is complex and difficult to understand, then numerous tools and techniques may help you create a clear visual representation of the situation, so that you can better understand what is going on, e.g. you can use the **affinity diagrams**, the **cause-and-effect diagram**, create a **flow chart**, or a **systems diagram**. For a more comprehensive process, you can use systems providing detailed steps that you can use to solve a problem effectively, e.g. simplex, appreciative inquiry, or soft systems methodology.

Difficult decisions typically involve issues like: uncertainty (many facts may not be known), complexity (necessity to consider many interrelated factors), high-risk consequences (the impact of the decision may be significant), alternatives (each has its own set of uncertainties and consequences), interpersonal issues (it can be difficult to predict how other people will react). With these difficulties in mind, the best way to make a complex decision is to use an **effective process** leading to consistent, high-quality results.

Without a well-defined process, you risk making decisions that are based on insufficient information and analysis. Many variables affect the final impact of your decision. However, if you establish strong foundations for decision making, generate good alternatives, evaluate these alternatives rigorously, then check your decision-making process, you will improve the quality of your decision.

Involving the right people is important in making an effective decision. Allow opinions to be heard and encourage participants to contribute to the discussions and debates. The basis of creativity is thinking from a different perspective. Do this when you first set out the problem, and then continue it while generating alternatives.

Using established tools and techniques will help you improve your approach to solving the problems that your team and your organization face. You will be more successful at solving problems and more successful at what you do. What is more, you will begin to build a reputation as someone who can handle tough situations in a wise and positive way.

Communication has a big role to play in problem and conflict management. It has been observed that poor communication results in misunderstanding and eventually conflicts. Conflict is a form of relating or interacting where you find yourself under some sort of threat to your personal or company goals. The following Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument may help you to identify which **style of dealing with conflict** you prefer when it comes to conflict resolution:

Compromising style means negotiations, looking for deals and trade-offs, and finding (at least partially) satisfactory or acceptable solutions for everybody. It is useful when opponents with equal power under time pressure are committed to mutually exclusive goals to achieve temporary settlements.

Competitive style creates win-lose situations from a position of power. It is used by people who take a firm stand and know what they want. This style is used when emergency occurs and a decision needs to be made fast, against people who take advantage of non competitive behaviour, or when defending against someone who is trying to selfishly exploit the situation.

Accommodating style indicates a willingness to meet the needs of others at the expense of the person's own needs. The accommodator is not assertive but highly cooperative, and tries to build social credits for later on (though people may not return favours). This style is appropriate when the issues matter more to the other party and harmony and stability are important.

Collaborative style shares ideas and information to meet the needs of all people involved. Problems and conflicts are seen as challenges. People involved cooperate effectively and acknowledge that everyone is important. This style is used when there were previous conflicts in the group or when the situation is too important for a simple trade-off.

It has been proven that **emotional awareness** (consciousness of your moment-to-moment emotional experience) and the ability to manage all of your feelings appropriately is the basis of a communication process that can resolve conflict. It is the key to understanding yourself and others. If you do not know how you feel or why you feel that way, you will not be able to communicate effectively or smooth over disagreements. If you are afraid of strong emotions or if you insist on finding solutions that are strictly rational, your ability to face and resolve differences may be impaired. In this respect emotional awareness is one of the conflict resolution skills.

How effectively you listen is at least as important as how effectively you express yourself. If you are to come to a resolution, it is vital to understand the other person's perspectives, rather than just your own. Unfortunately, **active listening** is a skill that not everybody knows, and it is common for people to be so defensive and entrenched in their own perspective that they literally cannot hear the other person's point of view. However, helping the other person feel heard and understood can lead toward the resolution of a conflict.

3.1 The Main Steps in Solving a Problem

Presenting the following steps may help you ask the right questions, and work through the layers of a problem to uncover what is really going on.

Identifying a problem. At this stage, goals are set and obstacles are recognized. It is also important to ensure that you look at the issue from a variety of perspectives, at many elements that may contribute to the problem, and to expand your thinking around it. There are asked questions like: What is the problem? When and where does the problem occur? Whose is the problem? The definitions have to be precise enough, otherwise the solution will hardly be found.

Generating alternatives. This strategy consists of an analysis and synthesis, the convergent and divergent kinds of thinking. No universal “ready made” strategy exists which could be used for all kinds of difficulties. When you generate alternatives, you look at the problem from different angles, and you are more likely to make the best decision possible. The most popular method of generating ideas is **brainstorming**.

Evaluating and selecting alternatives. The purpose is not to get new information but to sort it and create a helpful tool. When you are satisfied that you have a good selection of realistic alternatives, then you will need to evaluate the feasibility, risks, threats, and implications (considering the potential consequences) of each choice by applying the most popular and effective analytical tools. Make it clear what kind and what amount of resources as time, equipment, money, space, etc. is available. **Global** and **partial planning** comes in the progress at this stage.

Implementing solutions. Once you have made your decision, it is important to explain it to those affected by it, and involved in implementing it. Talk about why you chose the alternative you did. The more information you provide about risks and projected benefits, the more likely people are to support the decision.

A lot of techniques can be considered useful in resolving a problem, e.g. **divide and conquer** (breaking down complex problems into smaller, solvable ones), **trial and error**, **hypothesis testing** (assuming a possible explanation of the problem and trying to prove the assumption), **means-ends analysis**, **cause analysis**, **lateral thinking**, **attempts of solution analysis** (suggested as the main way to solve communication problems).

However, as a well-known statement says: The significant problems we face cannot be solved at the same level of thinking we were at when we created them.”

3.2 Critical Thinking

Any techniques used, critical and creative thinking is mainly involved in all your problem solving. In **creative thinking**, you reject standardized formats for solving a problem, you have an interest in a wide range of fields, take multiple perspectives of the problems, and have self-confidence and trust in your own judgement. The **critical thinking** involves judging ideas, scrutinizing arguments, judging the rationality of a solution, selecting solutions and activities that seem the most satisfactory and congruent, providing positive and negative appraisal.

In general, critical thinking is the study of clear and unclear thinking. It is the process of active and skill-full conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and evaluating information to reach an answer or conclusion.

The list of **core critical thinking skills** includes observation, interpretation, analysis, inference, evaluation, explanation, and meta-cognition.

An individual or a group engaged in a strong way of critical thinking gives due consideration to establish for instance:

- Evidence through reality.
- Context skills to isolate the problem from context.
- Relevant criteria for making the judgment well.
- Applicable methods or techniques for forming the judgment.
- Applicable theoretical constructs for understanding the problem and the question at hand.

In addition to possessing strong critical-thinking skills, you must be disposed to engage problems and decisions using those skills.

Critical thinking employs not only **logic** but broad intellectual features, such as **clarity, credibility, accuracy, precision, relevance, depth, breadth, significance, and fairness**.

Critical thinking includes a complex combination of skills, such as:

- **Rationality**: relying on reason rather than on emotion, requiring evidence.
- **Self-awareness**: recognizing our own assumptions, prejudices and biases.
- **Honesty**: recognizing emotional impulses and selfish motives.
- **Open-mindedness**: evaluating all reasonable inferences, considering a variety of possible viewpoints or perspectives, remaining open to alternative interpretations, and accepting a new explanation, model, or paradigm.

- **Discipline:** being precise, meticulous, comprehensive, and exhaustive, resisting manipulation and irrational appeals, avoiding snap judgments.
- **Judgment:** recognizing the relevance and merit of alternative assumptions and perspectives, recognizing the extent and weight of evidence.

Critical thinking calls for the ability to recognize problems, to find workable means for meeting those problems, to understand the importance of prioritization and order of precedence in problem solving, to gather and marshal relevant information, to recognize unstated assumptions and values, to comprehend and use language with accuracy, clarity, and discernment, to interpret data, to appraise evidence and evaluate arguments, to recognize the (non)existence of logical relationships between propositions, to draw warranted conclusions and generalizations.

Critical thinking enables you **to recognize** a wide range of subjective analyses of otherwise objective data, and **to evaluate** how well each analysis might meet your needs.

3.3 Tasks and Exercises

3.3.1 Explain your problem in up to 40 words. Then cut it down to 20 words, then to 10, and finally to only 5 words. These five words are the root of your problem, and likely the root of your solution as well.

3.3.2 Explain your problem as if you were talking to a 5-year old child. Use basic language and simple metaphors. It may help you see your problem from aside, without any exaggeration.

3.3.3 When you cannot get agreement on which solution to choose, the teacher forms a group of proponents of each idea represented in "court". Go through opening arguments, call witnesses and allow closing statements. Selected members of a "board" choose the winner.

3.3.4 Think of a claim or choose it from a newspaper or journal. Use critical thinking as a way to decide whether the claim is true, partially true, or false. Thus you can come about reasoned conclusions based on a reasoned process.

3.3.5 Generate a list of ten ideas for solving a problem. Pick one of those ideas and generate ten variations of that idea. Pick one idea from the new list and generate ten more variations.

3.3.6 Reflect critically on your learning experience and processes.

3.3.7 Develop your critical thinking by recognizing facts from opinions. From the following statements, determine which one is a fact and which one is an opinion:

- a) My telephone number is difficult to remember.
- b) My mom is the best mom in the world.
- c) The deepest part of the ocean is 35,813 ft deep.
- d) Dogs make better pets than turtles.
- e) Smoking is bad for your health.
- f) One out of ten American citizens is colour blind.

Create your own statements and discuss them with your peers.

3.3.8 Problems listed below are more conceptual than mathematical ones. To give the correct answers, use logical reasoning, estimate solutions and analyze problems by thinking abstractly about numbers.

- ✓ Each month has different amount of days. How many months have 28 days?
- ✓ At a meeting, 14 members shook hands with each other before and after the meeting. How many total number of hand shakes occurred?
- ✓ Put a mathematical symbol between 6 and 9 to get a number which is greater than 6 but lesser than 9.
- ✓ Which one of the five choices makes the best comparison? ANIMAL is to LAMINA as 46251 is to: 25641 – 26451 – 12654 – 51462 – 15264

3.3.9 Using logical reasoning and abstract thinking analyze the problems below and give the correct answers:

- ✓ The day after the day after tomorrow is four days before Tuesday. What day is it today? Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday.
- ✓ Alan is taller than James and Andy. James is taller than Miranda. James and Miranda are taller than Emma. Miranda is shorter than Andy. Who is the shortest?
- ✓ Which of the letters does not belong in the sequence? A, E, I, F, U.
- ✓ If the word REASON can be coded as TGCUQP, then how can you code the word IMPACT? QVVSON, TCAPMI, TCGPQU, KORCEV, EIPACT.
- ✓ Which one out of the five animals is most unlike the others? Tiger. Dog. Snake. Fox. Bear.

3.3.10 Choose a topic for a problem simulation and discuss it with your peers in the group.

4 MANAGERIAL SKILLS

Strategic management aims at leading, driving and helping people, to focus on the organisation's identity and image, to question its worth in a new environment, to fix its longer term growth, while using its present capacity and fostering its potential for development. In this respect making the move into a management job can be demanding. It needs build and develop new skills and have the confidence to put them into practice and begin the process of effective, professional managerial control, of the organisation's most important resource – its people.

Managerial skills mean the ability to make business decisions and lead subordinate within a company. Not everyone can be a manager. Certain skills to translate knowledge into actions that results in desired performance are required to help other employees become more productive. The three most common skills include:

Human skills: the ability to interact and motivate. A manager with good human skills has a high degree of self-awareness and a capacity to understand or empathize with the feelings of others, to cooperate well with others.

Technical skills: the knowledge and proficiency in the trade. These skills require the ability to use a special expertise to perform particular tasks. Managers acquire technical skills initially through formal education and then further develop them through training and job experience.

Conceptual skills: the ability to understand concepts, develop ideas, implement strategies, and think analytically. Analytical skills enable managers to break down problems into smaller parts, to see the relations among the parts, to recognize implications of any problem for others.

Although all three above mentioned categories contain **skills essential for managers**, their relative importance tends to vary by level of managerial responsibility - from a lower level of management to the higher one.

The management and leadership of a workforce with the goal of encouraging productive and mutually beneficial interactions among the employees of an organization. **Managing diversity** aims at providing employees with backgrounds, needs, and skill sets that may vary widely with the opportunity to engage with the company and their co-workers in a manner that produces an optimal work environment and the best possible business results for the company.

It is recommended to organize (business) meetings during which managers can communicate the intention to take an action or the results of the action, and administer a plan of the action, or decide among alternative actions. Like any other business activity, advanced preparation is required. The better prepared you are, the more effective the meeting will be.

A clear agenda announcing all the relevant data, such as date, place, and time is obviously circulated beforehand. It should also contain the proposed topics of the meeting what enables participants to prepare in advance and will not veer off a meeting in a different direction. Scheduled meetings that are conducted according to the stated time frame and are task oriented generally receive significantly more active participation.

Managers should provide complete and accurate information to ensure effective communication during a meeting. It may, however, happen that views of some employees will not match, but it is crucial that at the end of the meeting all participants agree on a common decision. As there may still be some space for improvement, managers should request feedback from the participants.

A couple of **additional commandments** are recommended to be applied during a business meeting:

- Praise in public, criticize in private.
- Keep the personal and the business distinct.
- Do not use meetings to destroy others' career.
- The best model for meetings is democracy, not monarchy.
- Organize meetings of normal business hours, do not schedule them for evenings and weekends.
- Terminate regularly scheduled meetings if they lost their reason and purpose for taking place.

A commandment: "Do not use group pressure to logroll conclusions" means that it is wrong to use meetings to pressure employees into agreeing to immoral or illegal actions in order to promote the business of the company. If a code of ethics and the rule of law are to be broken, try to change the values or find somewhere else to work.

Supposedly, you have already experienced both good and bad business meetings. When meetings have no focus and participants are not prepared, then most meeting time is wasted. When they are well run, meeting time is not wasted. In that case meetings are empowering and a great way to communicate and to develop work skills thus being beneficial for employees in several ways.

It is also recommended to include team building games and activities in serious business project meetings, workshops, and training, as they help participants to see things differently and use different thinking styles. Games and activities also help stimulate the brain, improve retention of ideas, and increase enjoyment. Employee motivation commonly benefits from suitable and well run team building games, exercises, and activities, which are effective for serious learning as well as for personal development. (some of the games and activities see in the section 4.3).

4.1 Functions and Roles of a Manager

Successful managers value differences. They understand that in order to achieve significant accomplishments, a variety of skills, viewpoints, personality styles and motivations can come into play. If you can lead only those who are like you (who view situations the way you do or with similar motivations), then you are significantly limited in what you can accomplish.

Good managers are able to master the following **five basic functions**:

- **Planning** involves mapping out exactly how to achieve a particular goal.
- **Organizing**, including assigning work and granting authority, means to organize the team and materials according to the stated plan.
- After discerning the company needs, a manager may start **staffing** by recruiting, selecting, training, and developing employees. Besides it, a manager must lead.
- **Leading** involves motivating, communicating, guiding, encouraging. It requires a manager to coach, assist, and problem solve with employees.
- **Controlling** is one of the basic functions of a manager, as he needs to continuously check results against goals and take any corrective actions.

Planning as one of the functions of management involves setting objectives and determining (alternative) courses of actions for achieving them. Planning requires the managers to make decisions based on what the company or organization wants to happen in the future. Managers as good decision makers must formulate necessary steps and ensure effective implementation of plans. They must constantly evaluate the success of their plans and take corrective actions when necessary. Planning is the initiation function in management that embodies the other four functions.

Strategic planning is often based on the company's mission which is its fundamental reason for existence. It generally includes the entire company or organization and contains formulation of objectives for a long term, obviously for three or more years. All communication requires strategic planning: what to communicate, to whom, when and how.

A useful type of planning includes a **SWOT analysis** – to analyze competitive opportunities and threats as well as the strengths and weaknesses of the company or organization. Afterwards, it determines how to position the company or organization to compete effectively in their environment.

To improve the flow of information in the workplace alongside planning (market research, target audience, content) it is necessary to explain the value of information and knowledge, to define outcomes (results) that

appeal to both employer and employees needs and purpose, to determine simple directions of what to do or where to start, and find sources for the identification and capture of relevant management information (books, research reports, best practices, seminars, etc).

The roles that a manager has to fill may fall into **three categories**. These roles help managers carry out the five functions mentioned above.

- **Interpersonal role** involves human interaction. The activities include e.g. performing ceremonial and symbolic duties (greeting visitors, signing legal documents), directing and motivating subordinates, counselling and communication with subordinates, maintaining information links both inside and outside organization via mail, e-mail, phone calls, and meetings.
- **Informational role** involves sharing and analyzing information. Activities include, e.g. seeking and receiving information, scanning periodicals and reports, maintaining personal contact with stakeholders, forwarding information to organization members via memos, reports, and phone calls, transmitting information to outsiders through reports, and speeches.
- **Decisional role** involves decision making. Activities include, e.g. initiating improvement projects, identifying new ideas and delegating responsibility to others, taking corrective action during disputes or crises, resolving conflicts among subordinates, adapting to environments, preparing budgets, setting schedules and determining priorities, representing department during negotiations of contracts, sales, purchases, and budgets.

There are defined some other skills and personal characteristics that may contribute to high managerial performance, such as:

- **leadership** (ability to influence others to perform tasks);
- **self-objectivity** (ability to evaluate yourself realistically);
- **behavioural flexibility** (ability to modify personal behaviour to react objectively rather than subjectively);
- **oral and written communication** (ability to express ideas clearly in words and in writing);
- **personal impact** (ability to create good impression and still confidence).

Responsibility, self-esteem, sociability, self-management, integrity and honesty being classified as **personal qualities** may successfully determine people's own career and their employment enhancement.

4.2 Using Empathy in Managing Different People

Empathy encompasses a broad range of emotional states, including caring for other people and having a desire to help them; experiencing emotions matching another person's emotions; discerning what another person thinks or feels; making less distinct the differences between the self and the other.

An empathic interaction involves a person communicating an accurate recognition of the significance of another person's ongoing intentional actions, associated emotional states or personal characteristics in a manner that the recognized person can tolerate. Accurate and tolerable recognitions are central features of empathy. Positive emotions (empathy or gratitude) are linked to a more positive continual state and these people are far more likely to help others than those not experiencing a positive emotional state. Here are the basic hints for using empathy in managing people:

- **Make sure you agree to clear, common goals.** This is the starting point for success. A lack of shared vision and direction makes all other effort fruitless.
- **Understand, accept and rely on the fact that each team member is unique.** If you try to treat everyone the same way and expect each person to think and be motivated in the same ways you are, then you will struggle to work together well, to achieve the potential you have as a team.
- **Get to know the people you work with.** Understand how they think and approach problems, what motivates them and how they feel supported and encouraged. Getting to know your colleagues takes time and effort. But the results are well worth the investment. Spend time interacting with them, listening to them and explore the wealth of tools available to become acquainted at a deeper level.

When managing teams of diverse individuals you need to know your individual team members and their unique characteristics, e.g. not everyone is motivated in the same way. Some people are inspired by potential financial gain, others value recognition and praise. Some members do not want public attention but appreciate a personal note or comment.

Unfortunately, a number of managers fall into the trap of thinking everyone likes X because they do. This approach can lead to annoyance when team members do not seem appreciate what these leaders have done. And it leads to frustration among colleagues when supervisors keep doing things that do not hit the mark for them and they continue to feel unvalued. While a power-play approach (threatening consequences) can work to get one's way in the short term, this style of leadership has significant negative repercussions for long-term working relationships, including resentment and revenge. It does not go well, when managers resort to heavy-handed tactics as a consequence that they are unsuccessful or frustrated about not being able to manage their team successfully.

4.3 Tasks and Exercises

4.3.1 In your real working place practise not answering the phone just because it is ringing and emails just because they show up. Disconnect instant messaging. Do not instantly give people your attention unless it is absolutely crucial in your business to offer an immediate human response. Instead, schedule a time to answer email and return phone calls.

4.3.2 Study the factors of emotional literacy including empathic components in a workplace. Select the ones which you think are not (but should be) applied in your workplace. Discuss them with your peers.

4.3.3 The teacher forms teams based on managerial skills of their members (human, technical, and conceptual skills). The students play their roles involving the features characteristic for each skill.

4.3.4 To create your plane, start with the end in mind and work backwards. Establish key milestones and dates in reverse order, starting with the end-of-project celebration and ending with today.

4.3.5 Students think about their own personal strengths, hobbies, dreams, ambitions, and how these relate to their effectiveness, happiness, maturity, tolerance, creativity, resilience, and adaptability as people at work. They discuss the issue with their peers in the group.

Afterwards, they think about their own personal strengths, hobbies, dreams, ambitions, and how these relate to their effectiveness, happiness, maturity, tolerance, creativity, resilience, and adaptability, and as people at work. They discuss this issue with their peers in the team.

Finally, the students think about how the organisation can be improved – from personal development relating to job skills and whole-person development, to management, communication, ethics and corporate social responsibility. Teams appoint their spoke-person to give the answers for their own team in turn.

All the answers are reviewed, and then voted on to identify which answers are considered best by all teams, or ranking the three best liked answers. Here are some example of possible questions asked by the teacher:

- ✓ What does each team consider to be its three greatest personal passions, outside work? How might each of these passions, if developed further, benefit the person at work and the organisation?
- ✓ Consider and suggest three ways that the organisation can improve its communications and cooperation between departments.
- ✓ What's wrong with this organisation that even a ten-year-old child could see in a day of being here?
- ✓ How can the organisation provide more personal meaning and relevance to you in your work?

4.3.6 The teacher asks each member of the team to draw or paint a tree on their sheet of paper. The tree must include root system, trunk, branches, leaves, buds, fruit, flowers and thorns. After (or before, it is the teacher's choice) the trees are drawn, the teacher uses this 'key' to ask the students to think about their trees in terms of their:

- ✓ roots = their life influences and beliefs
- ✓ trunk = life structure and particularly aspects that are quite firm and fixed
- ✓ branches = relationships and connections, directions, interests, how they spend time
- ✓ leaves = information and knowledge - and sources thereof
- ✓ buds = their ideas and hopes for the future, and their potential
- ✓ fruit = their achievements
- ✓ flowers = what makes them special, their strengths
- ✓ thorns = challenges, threats and difficulties.

The teacher asks students to share and discuss their trees and their interpretations with each other in their teams. The usefulness of empathic listening and non-judgemental feedback is emphasized. The purpose of the activity is to develop personal self-awareness as well as mutual awareness among the teams' members, to stimulate feedback from other team members, and generally to assist team-building and bonding through getting to know each other better.

4.3.7 To encourage self-analysis and goal setting, the teacher asks the students to think about one, two or three aspects of their own personal character that they would like to develop, change, or improve, e.g. to develop greater confidence; to manage their time better; to deal with stress better; to be more creative; to be more accurate; to finish tasks on time; to take more exercise; to spend more time with their children; to achieve a qualification, or anything else.

The students can think of one aspect for work and one for home; or one for now, one for the next month and one for the next three months. They can work in pairs to give and receive feedback as to the changes and positive statements which represent the changes desired. The sharing of ideas among team members also helps to open aspects of mutual awareness which is good for team building and effectiveness.

4.3.8 The teacher organises the students into a circle and asks them to stand up. He throws a ball to one of the students, and explains that the ball should be thrown to another student - in no particular order - upon which the receiving person must call out his/her idea or suggestion, according to the theme nominated by the teacher at the start of the exercise. Possible exercise themes and categories for ideas, examples, suggestions:

- ✓ causes of stress at work
- ✓ things that motivate us/me/staff

- ✓ ideas for a publicity photo-opportunity
- ✓ management challenges that we face (for managers)
- ✓ ways to ask someone to do something for you
- ✓ positive inspirational words we can use to help others
- ✓ time management tips and ideas

examples of using positive words rather than the negative (for example, opportunity versus problem)

The activity is useful where students need encouraging to suggest examples brainstorm ideas, or think of words, methods, experiences, etc. As the exercise is physical as well as mental it is also a great warm-up, and a method of enabling people to work together and cooperate very quickly in an enjoyable way.

4.3.9 This SWOT analysis exercise is aimed at team building, decision-making, change-management, strategy development, direction and motivation. The teacher can use the following areas within which the students can identify the SWOT subjects:

- ✓ organizational or departmental change options
- ✓ team re-structuring
- ✓ problem-solving options
- ✓ technical support efficiencies and improvements ideas.

The students in their teams write down strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats related to the given area. After completing the task, the spokes-person of each team presents them for the other teams. At the end, all teams try to come a common conclusion.

4.3.10 Memory exercises are useful for team building, questioning and information gathering. The teacher shows a coloured picture for a minute with lots going on in it, and then asks different questions about what was in the picture, e.g. about a position of the asked person in the picture, about the colour of some object, etc. Teams get points for correct answers and for other teams failing to answer.

Another variation can be done with long numbers, or with drawn geometric shapes.

5 REPORT WRITING SKILLS

A report is written for a clear purpose and to a particular audience. Specific information and evidence are presented, analysed and applied to a particular problem or issue. The information is presented in a **clearly structured format** making use of **sections** and **headings** so that the information is easy to locate and follow.

The style of writing a report is usually less discursive than in an essay, with a more **direct** and **economic use of language**. The key to writing an effective report is to allocate time for careful **planning** and **preparation**. It is also necessary to leave enough time for **final reading** and **checking**. Within proof-reading you may use spell and grammar checkers, however, make sure that the changes will not affect what you wanted to say.

Many report types are classified as technical reports. You should always determine what information you need to convey and who your audience is before you start writing.

Technical reports present facts and conclusions about your designs and other projects. Typically, a technical report includes **research** about technical concepts as well as **graphical depictions** of designs and data. When you write a report, use **paragraphs** which have one main point that you introduce, expand on, and summarize. Using **shorter sentences** avoids over-complexity. Use appropriate **technical terms**, and avoid using colloquialisms and informality in academic writing.

Writing academically means writing in such a way that your information sounds credible and authoritative. Be **objective**, do not present personal or unsupported opinions. Give clear **non-subjective** descriptions and **definite figures** such as: 80% of the participants, and avoid vague terms (most of the participants). Be **direct**, put the emphasis on a strong verb which can help readers to see the important points. Be **critical**, evaluate your own work as well as that of others. Be **appropriate**, identify the purpose of your report, give readers the information they need to understand your work.

In your report explain the **purpose of the research** and ask **questions** that help you see how to **interpret and analyse your findings**, e.g. what questions you are seeking to answer, how they arose, why they are worth investigating, and others. In the final sections, that follow the discussion section, state your **conclusions** and **recommendations** clearly and simply.

Reports are written to describe work completed, so write in the **past tense**. You may use different styles of writing in separate sections. It depends on the purpose of the section, e.g. introduction of the report will be **explanatory**, sections like methods and results will be **descriptive**, literature review and discussion sections will be **analytical**.

A good piece of advice when writing a professional report is: **to write to express, not to impress.**

5.1 The Essential Stages of Report Writing

Gathering, selecting and evaluating relevant information. You can use a variety of sources, but how much information you need depends on how much detail is required in the report. You need to assess the relevance of information to your report and select accordingly.

Structuring material in a logical and coherent order. To decide what will be included and in what sequence, you may start by grouping together points that are related and may form sections or chapters.

Present your report in a consistent manner according to the instructions of the report brief which provides you with instructions and guidelines. **The report brief** may outline the purpose, audience and problem or issue that your report must address, together with any specific requirements for format or structure.

Make appropriate conclusions that are supported by the evidence and analysis of the report. Before writing your first draft, take notes on the points you will make using the facts and evidence you have gathered. Check if there are not any limitations or flaws in the evidence, if certain conclusions can be drawn from the material, etc. Finally, check if the wording of each chapter is clear and accurate. Proof read your report for errors of spelling and grammar.

Make thoughtful and practical recommendations where required.

In writing **the first draft** of your report, the structure below can be applied to chapters, sections and even paragraphs:

- Introduce the main idea of the chapter, section or paragraph.
- Explain and expand the idea, defining any key terms.
- Present relevant evidence to support your points.
- Comment on each piece of evidence showing how it relates to the points.
- Conclude the chapter, section, or paragraph by either showing its significance to the report as whole or making a link to the next chapter, section, or paragraph.

Before you review your first draft, you should leave time to take a break, then read it from the perspective of a reader. Once you are satisfied with the content and structure of your redrafted report, you can concentrate on its presentation.

5.2 Structuring a Report

Instructions or guidelines for writing a report may differ to a certain measure but in general the main features of a report can be described as follows:

Title page gives the title of the work, the author's name and the date. It may briefly explain the purpose of the report and for whom it is written.

Abstract briefly - about half a page in length - presents the content of the report, the aims of the report and what was found. It is outlined in the main points avoiding detail or discussion.

In **Acknowledgements** you may wish to acknowledge the assistance of particular organisations or individuals who provided information or advice.

It is useful to provide a **glossary of technical terms** with a brief description of each term, as well as explanations of used abbreviations and acronyms.

Table of contents lists the different chapters and headings/subheadings together with the page numbers.

Introduction sets the scene for the main body of the report. The aims and objectives of the report are explained in detail. Any problems or limitations in the scope of the report are identified, and a thesis statement, a description of research methods, the parameters of the research and any necessary background history are included.

In the body of a report, strong supporting arguments, accurate and up-to-date information are presented.

In the heading **Methods** you explain preparation and procedures applied, list the equipment used, give relevant information on materials used.

The section **Results** includes a summary of the results of the investigation together with any necessary diagrams, graphs or tables of gathered data that support the results. They are presented in a logical order without comment.

Discussion is the main body of the report where you discuss and comment your material. The facts and evidence you have gathered are analysed and discussed with specific reference to the problem or issue.

In the **conclusion** you show the overall significance of what has been covered, you re-state the thesis and give a summary, including a logical conclusion. You may highlight what you consider to be the most central issues or findings. However, no new material is introduced in the conclusion.

Appendices include all the supporting information you have used, such as tables, graphs, questionnaires, surveys or transcripts.

Bibliography lists - in alphabetical order by author, all sources referred to in your report.

Remember: all sources used in the report have to be acknowledged and referenced throughout in order to avoid plagiarism.

Plagiarism is the wrongly appropriation and stealing and publication of another author's language, thoughts, ideas, or expressions and the representation of them as one's own original work. The idea remains problematic with unclear definitions and unclear rules. The modern concept of plagiarism as immoral and originality as an ideal emerged in Europe only in the 18th century, particularly with the Romantic movement.

Plagiarism is considered academic dishonesty and or academic fraud. It is subject to sanctions like penalties, suspension, and even expulsion. Plagiarism is not a crime *per se* but in academia and industry, it is a serious ethical offense, and cases of plagiarism can constitute copyright infringement. Many institutions use plagiarism detection software to uncover potential plagiarism and to deter students from plagiarism.

5.3 Tasks and Exercises

5.3.1 Choose a scientific article from a technical journal. Divide it into sections following the structure: Introduction; Methods used; Results presented; Discussion; Conclusion. Were all the mentioned sections applied in the article? If not, give your opinion on their necessity.

5.3.2 Read a scientific article. Formulate its main idea and determine the key words (up to ten).

5.3.3 Choose a scientific article related to your specialization. Read it and select technical terms. Create - in an alphabetical order - a glossary of them. You may use it for your (future) scientific work.

5.3.4 The teacher asks students to suggest a new law, with reasons for it. They can start with the introductory words, such as: There ought to be a law... Each student writes the new law in clear terms, explains it absolutely clearly with minimum of misunderstanding or misinterpretation. The clarity of the writing will be tested by team questions and review. During this exercise, creative thinking is expected to be used and followed by ethics and morality discussions.

5.3.5 Within a team, plan a group report and discuss its overall structure. Agree on what sections it should have and what function of each section is. Create an outline of the report that consists of contents and a paragraph what each section will be about. Clarify how each section relates to all the others, and decide roughly how long (how many words or pages) each section should be. The completed outline of the report is presented in turn, and each team provides feedback on it - commentaries, questions, or suggestions for the improvement.

5.3.6 The teacher supports students in writing a group report by providing guidelines for structuring the report and dividing the workload, i.e. who will write what sections and take responsibility for piecing the sections together as well as for proofreading (a proof-reader reads the report carefully and corrects spelling errors, references etc.). Everyone in the group should write and review at least one section. The final version of the report is read aloud and evaluated according to both its content and consistent style.

5.3.7 After listening the presentations of the group reports (written within the task 5.3.6), each team in turn makes comments, gives the report a mark for separate sections and overall, and checks it against the following marking criteria:

- ✓ Is the purpose of the report clear?
- ✓ Do all the sections fit together well?
- ✓ Are the required components covered adequately?
- ✓ Are the conclusions clear?
- ✓ Is there anything what could have been done better?

When students review the group work, they reflect on their own experience as a group and understand better what makes a group work well together.

5.3.8 The teacher asks the students to reflect on their own individual role within the group work: what their contribution was, what role(s) they played, how well they fulfilled their responsibilities and how they could work more effectively in groups in the future. Some of the following questions can be used to provide a framework for students to report on the processes of group work.

- ✓ How did you get to know each other as a group and establish ways of working together?
- ✓ What roles did you adopt within your group?
- ✓ How did you allocate tasks?
- ✓ What other strategies did you use for dividing up the workload (e.g. working in pairs)?
- ✓ How did you improve the effectiveness of your group?
- ✓ What challenges and issues did you experience as a group?
- ✓ What process did you use to write your group report and/or develop your presentation?
- ✓ What were your personal strengths and weaknesses as a member of the group?
- ✓ How would you personally do things differently if you were to work with the same group?
- ✓ How has this experience helped you to understand the role of groups in the workplace?
- ✓ What else have you learnt about working in groups?

5.3.9 Explain the problem of plagiarism in the form of a written report. Emphasize the importance of avoiding plagiarism and provide a couple of

concrete examples in which authors of reports, papers or other forms of publications did not follow the rule of copyright.

5.3.10 Choose a topic related to your own (technical) field of interest. Write a draft of the structure of your future report using the sections recommended in the course lecture.

6 PRESENTATION SKILLS

A presentation is a means of communication which can be adapted to various speaking situations, such as talking to a group, addressing a meeting or briefing a team. To be **effective**, step-by-step preparation and the method and means of presenting the information should be carefully considered. Many people feel terrified when asked to make their first public talk, but these initial fears can be reduced by good preparation which will also lay the groundwork for making an effective presentation.

Preparation is the most important part of making a successful presentation. This is the crucial foundation and there should be no short-cuts. Irrespective of whether the occasion is formal or informal, always aim to give a **clear, well-structured delivery**. You should know exactly what you want to say and the order in which you want to say it. **Clarity of ideas** and **good organisation** should result in a lively, logical and compelling message.

For a good oral presentation, the **quality of text** being prepared and the **way it is presented** are equally important. Your audience should not feel that the presentation is just an activity of reading out the textual information being prepared.

Before you write your presentation, you should already have started to prepare by **developing your ideas** and **selecting the main points** to include. It is recommended to make an **emotional connection** with your audience at the opening of your presentation, e.g. to say a story or ask a question.

The material you present orally should have a similar structure as that which is required for a written research paper. A presentation has four parts: **introduction, body, conclusion** and **questions and answers**.

The opening of a presentation is very important, as in the first few minutes you may gain or lose the audience. That is why relate your purpose with the audience interest, and build the focus for the content's structure.

In **the body** of your presentation, try to stick to your **three – four** most important **points** you want to make. Emphasize the transition from one idea to the next one. Provide strong supporting arguments and accurate and up-to-date information. It is important to engage your audience than to tell them everything you know. You will need to leave some information out, but it is likely that what you do not cover in the presentation will come up when you take questions. During your presentation, however, you may pause for questions and comments as it shifts the audience from listening to participating.

You **do not have to write out** your presentation **word for word**, or even **memorize** it, just remember to keep going back to your **main points** and working toward your **desired outcome**.

You will appear more credible if you **acknowledge** your **competitors** or any opposing arguments. After you have explained the other side, you can spell out exactly why your company is better or your argument is stronger.

The closing of your presentation is the last opportunity you have to give your audience something that **will stick in their minds**. You can go back to your opening or end on a clever slogan or a call to action.

Answer any questions as **honestly** and **concisely** as you can. Also, keep in your mind that you do not need to answer every question. If you do not know the answer, then say so and offer to provide further information at a later date. At the start of your presentation, you should make it clear whether and when you would prefer to deal with questions. Some speakers prefer questions to be raised as they arise during the presentation whilst others prefer to deal with questions at the end. Decide in advance **how** and **when** you wish **to handle questions**.

Though it is different for everybody but communication experts recommend **practising oral presentation** about a month in advance. The more you practise, the more comfortable you will get and the less nervous you will be. Do whatever works for you, but make sure it includes practising out **loud** so that you can get a sense of timing and meet your time without going over. Moreover, after having rehearsed your presentation, you will know how to say what you are trying to say effectively. **Rehearsing**, however, does not mean memorization. Memorizing your speech makes you sound mechanical and over-rehearsed.

Try to behave as **experienced speakers**: do not start your presentation too early, take your time when going up to the podium, or establishing nonverbal contact with your audience. Make clear that it is going to be a dialogue right from the start. Do not forget to show your audience that you are interested in them. Allow yourself those small breaks within your speaking that help you plan the next steps and to be understood.

Do not hurry after your last words, or, even worse – during the last words. Enjoy the effect your conclusion makes on your audience. Enjoy their applause. Look somebody in the eyes once more. Only then take your papers and leave.

Remember that how you are being perceived by your audience is very important. Dress appropriately for this occasion, and look **pleasant, enthusiastic, confident, proud**, but not arrogant. What matters is not so much about what you say, but how you say it.

You need some time to start getting into **relaxation mode**. You cannot be in your hyper rewriting, restructuring mode right up to your presentation. Take a couple of days to relax before your speech.

6.1 Preparing a PowerPoint Presentation

PowerPoint presentations are a great way to support your speech, visualize complicated concepts or focus attention on a subject. However, badly designed slides with too much text or bad graphics can distract or even irritate the audience. To give the main differences between a good power-point presentation and a bad one, the following can be stated:

Good power-point presentation relies heavily on images; it has only one or two sentences per slide; it entertains; it enhances your presentation, but it does not summarize it.

Bad power-point presentation contains font smaller than 32pt; it has more than six lines of text per slide; it displays a logo on every slide; it is printed and distributed as a handout.

Do not over-dazzle your audience with excessive use of animation, sound clips, or gaudy colours which are inappropriate for your topic. Do not put a lengthy document in tiny print on an overhead and read it out to them.

To follow the abbreviation KISS (**Keep It Straight and Simple**), here is a short guide that may help you create presentations with a professional look and concise content:

You can download a free template or create your own, but do not copy and paste slides from different sources. Keep the **design** very basic and simple, it shall not distract. Carefully select **font size** for headers and text, consistently use the same font face and size on all slides. Leave room for **highlights**, such as images or take home messages.

Decorate scarcely but well. **Match colours**. Black text on a white background will always be the best but also the most boring choice. A poor choice of colours can shatter a presentation. If you want to play with colours, keep it easy on the eyes and always keep good contrast in mind so that the audience does not have to strain to guess what you have typed on your slide. Match colours for design and good contrast to highlight your message.

Remember that your **slides** are only there **to support**, not to replace your talk. Provide **keywords** only, not sentences, with one idea per slide. Follow the **6 x 6 rule**: use about six words per line, six lines per slide. It is recommended to insert a text slide to define technical terms what can help the audience better understand technical concepts. Check correct **spelling** and appropriate **grammar**. Have about one slide per minute, that is, a presentation lasting 15 to 20 minutes would have about twenty slides maximum.

Never read your slides, **talk freely**. Otherwise the audience will get bored and stop listening. They want to see what you are talking about, use **images** then. A good visual cue will help them understand your message much better. As images are key elements of every power-point presentation, have them more in your slides than text. Use images to

visualize and explain but do not use them to decorate. A picture can say more than a thousand words.

A good **animation** can also improve understanding. Animations are rather powerful tools to visualize and explain complicated matters. Use them to **draw attention**, to **clarify** a model or **emphasize** an effect.

Your **audience** defines the content of your presentation. That is why before compiling your slides, ask the questions, such as: What do they know? What do they expect? What will be interesting to them? What will keep them focused?

To give a good presentation, you should **know your slides inside out**, and **speak with confidence** - freely, loud, and clear. A well-prepared and enthusiastic talk will help you convince your audience and maintain their attention.

6.2 Tips for an Effective Presentation

Know the needs of your audience and match your contents to them. Know your presentation **material thoroughly**. Put what you have to say in a **logical sequence**. Ensure your speech will be **captivating** to your audience as well as worth their time and attention.

Prepare and structure your presentation carefully. Introduce the subject – tell the audience what your talk is about. Explain the points you wish to convey. End with a summary of your points.

Stay focused throughout your presentation, avoid irrelevance and unnecessary detail. Learn to channel any nervous energy, **relax** but stay alert. It is entirely natural to feel nervous before making a presentation. Fortunately, there are some tried and tested strategies and techniques to manage your nerves so that you can concentrate on delivering an effective and engaging presentation.

If you are short of time, know can be safely left out. If you have an extra time, know what could be effectively added. Be always prepared for the unexpected. He who fails to prepare, prepares to fail.

Talk naturally to your audience – although it may be appropriate to read short passages avoid reading from a script for the majority of your presentation. You will need to know your own abilities and decide how best to make the presentation. You might manage your talk by using full text, notes on cue cards, keywords on cue cards, or mind maps. In your speech you should avoid fill words such as: Umm, Uh. Remain calm. Appear relaxed, even if you feel nervous. Speak slowly and clearly, show appropriate emotions and feeling relating to your topic.

Stand, rather than sit, and move around a little – but avoid pacing backwards and forwards. Stand at a comfortable distance, some two metres of your audience. To appear confident, your shoulders are back, arms are at

your sides or held in front of your body when making gestures. Your hands are open or only slightly closed. Smile slightly or keep your face neutral.

Vary the tone, pitch and volume of your voice to add emphasis and maintain the audience's interest. Aim to speak loudly and clearly while facing your audience. Avoid talking in a monotone voice or turning your back to the audience. Speak to the person farthest away from you to ensure your voice is loud enough to project to the back of the room. Vary the tone of your voice and dramatize it when necessary. If a microphone is available, adjust and adapt your voice accordingly.

Make eye contact with your audience. Do not stare at your feet, or the podium and avoid looking directly at one person for more than a few seconds. Have direct eye contact with a number of people in the audience, and every now and then glance at the whole audience while speaking. Use your eye contact to make everyone in your audience feel involved.

Use visual aids where appropriate, graphs and charts, diagrams, pictures and video - but do not overdo it. If too much information is presented, very little will be remembered. Visual aids should help to illustrate and strengthen your points not to be a distraction from what you are saying. Most visual aids will need advance preparation and should be operated with efficiency. Use visual aids only if they are necessary to maintain interest and assist comprehension, do not use them just to demonstrate your technological prowess. If visual aids are used well, they will enhance a presentation by adding impact and strengthening audience involvement, yet if they are managed badly, they can ruin a presentation. Be sure all necessary equipment, such as seating arrangement for the audience, blackboard, whiteboard, lighting, location of project screen, sound system, is set and in good working order prior to your presentation.

Rehearse your speech at home or where you can be at ease and comfortable, in front of a mirror, your family, friends or colleagues. Use a tape-recorder and listen to yourself, or videotape your presentation and analyze it. Knowing what your strong and weak points are, emphasize the strong ones during your presentation.

Check your timings. To end your presentation, summarize the main points in the same way as you do in the conclusion of a written paper. Always aim to finish your talk in time remembering to allow time for questions if appropriate.

6.3 Tasks and Exercises

6.3.1 Choose a power-point presentation from the internet which is aimed at the technical field of your interest. Give its evaluation following the criteria presented in the course lecture.

6.3.2 Create a power-point presentation on a topic related to your own specialization by applying the requirements stated in the course lecture. Defense your presentation by answering questions asked by the audience (by your peers).

6.3.3 Listen carefully to an oral presentation given by one of your peers. Evaluate the presenter's:

Voice and articulation, e.g. fluent/choppy; loud/soft voice; rhythmic/non-rhythmic articulation.

Body language, e.g. broad/limited movements; too many/few gestures; much/limited eye contact.

6.3.4 Listen to an expert's speech performed on the internet. Analyse it according to the following presentation categories:

Language, e.g. flowery or unadorned language; highly verbal or too concise;

Content, e.g. many/few examples and stories; many/few facts; objective/subjective description of the topic; talking/not talking about self;

Visual aids, e.g. appropriate or overdone; strengthening or distracting the points of the presentation; enhancing or ruining the presentation.

6.3.5 Form small groups (between 3 and 5). Tell the rest of your group about the worst and best presentation you have experienced. Be careful to explain why it was so bad, resp. good.

6.3.6 The teacher provides students with guidelines for giving group presentations, to enhance the quality of their future professional presentations. These guidelines can be given in the form of questions on planning the group presentation, such as:

- ✓ What are you going to present?
- ✓ What will the overall structure look like?
- ✓ How are you going to divide up the presentation?
- ✓ Who is going to present what?
- ✓ What audio-visual aids or handouts will you need?
- ✓ How will you introduce the presentation, link the parts together and conclude?
- ✓ How are you going to keep the audience interested, active and involved?

The students submit the question responses, so that the teacher can provide some formative feedback before they present.

6.3.7 To plan their presentations, the teacher can provide the students with a checklist (see below) to develop thoughtful and engaging presentations.

- ✓ Find ways to keep the audience interested.
- ✓ Avoid including too much content.
- ✓ Make it clear where we you going (at the start, linking sections, etc.)
- ✓ Make sure that each presenter states how their section fits in with the rest.
- ✓ Develop clear and appropriate visuals (PowerPoint slides, diagrams etc.) and handouts.
- ✓ Work out ways to involve the audience (e.g. inviting comments, encouraging questions).
- ✓ Allow time for questions, and think through what people might ask.
- ✓ Summarise appropriately, outline key points.
- ✓ Rehearse your presentation and give each other feedback (check timing, etc.).
- ✓ Prepared index cards or skeleton notes to refer to (rather than reading notes in full).

After the presentations, feedback of the teacher as well as of other teams is based on the specified marking criteria.

6.3.8 The teacher presents a central concept or a particularly controversial quiz question from the prior assessment, and asks students to reflect on it. The activity is conducted in several phases:

- ✓ Think phase: students work independently and flesh out their thoughts and arguments and may write their thoughts down.
- ✓ Pair phase: students discuss their response with their peer
- ✓ Share phase: the teacher responses from all members of the class and begin to engage the students in a wider discussion demonstrating the many different perspectives. iClickers may be useful here.

6.3.9 After having read an article concerning a specific, real-life problem or scenario, each group reviews it as a case study. The students discuss the article in great depth, arguing its findings and their relevance or the general credibility of the article itself. Groups may be asked to produce a one-page summary at the end to be reviewed to ensure they understood the article sufficiently. Each group can then debrief with the rest of the class and present their solution. In a larger discussion they will see what approaches the groups or individual members took.

6.3.10 Students pair up (e.g. by finding someone with the same colour hair, or the same height, or the same colour eyes, anything appropriate for the team. Then each student briefly (three minutes) interviews the other student. After the pair interviewing, everyone presents the other person to the audience, again briefly, let's say a minute each. This is much more dynamic than simply asking everyone to introduce themselves.

If necessary the teacher gives students pointers as to what they should be finding out about the other person (e.g. job, home-life, likes, dislikes, etc.).

After completing the exercise, everyone will have achieved useful experiences and developed useful skills, such as questioning, listening, interpreting and speaking to the audience.

Conclusion

Being an indispensable part of life skills, soft skills play an important role in interpersonal communication, in managing people or companies, in problem solving and decision-making, as well as in effective written and verbal communication. They influence attitudes and behaviour of others, form contacts and maintain relationships. Moreover, by acquiring soft skills, people express personal needs and understand the needs of others, they give and receive emotional support. The emotional climate, clarity of speech, remaining calm and focused, being polite and following some basic rules of etiquette positively affect communication and aid the success of people's work.

This course gives an opportunity to build soft skills in the selected areas thus contributing to individual's achievements, both professional and personal. Learning outcomes of the course are set as given below.

Students will be able:

- ✓ to interact in various social situations of everyday life;
- ✓ to design their work and leisure according to the planned time management;
- ✓ to analyze problems, including personality disorder and behaviour;
- ✓ to apply their emotional literacy and personality traits that characterize relationships with other people;
- ✓ to write a structured report relevant to the topic of their future profession;
- ✓ to perform scientific presentations with professionalism and authority.

Besides the lectures and seminars, individual activities are also provided in the course module. The students can benefit from them, as they are used in advance and help students navigate a higher-risk group activity. They can be helpful for students who need more individual reflective time to learn. The individual activity can give students that additional time necessary to engage with the material and broaden their understanding. The students are provided with opportunity to engage with the material, reflect on it and synthesize or evaluate its content in a productive, rather than receptive manner.

Soft skills complement hard skills to enhance an individual's relationships, job performance and career prospects. Due to their broad application, soft skills are recommended not only for technically oriented professions but for any, where more than just technical qualifications are needed, since they will move an individual ahead in his/her career. Employment experts agree that technical skills may get a person an interview, but the soft skills will get him/her the job – and help keep it.

To make a broader image of soft skills which employers also pay attention to and assess them positively when looking for new employees, some of them are presented as follows:

- Willingness to work: to acquire knowledge of a subject or skill through education or experience
- Courtesy: the features such as: politeness, considerate behaviour, good manners
- Honesty: moral uprightness – the quality, condition or characteristics of being fair, truthful and morally upright
- Flexibility: the ability to adapt to new situations, to change or be changed according to circumstances
- Good work history: time spent at a place of employment shows loyalty or longevity to a company or organization
- Common sense: good judgement – sound practical judgement derived from “experience” rather than a study
- Good ethic: belief in moral value of work, a dedication to work
- Appropriate personal appearance: visual aspect of a person with regard to personal cleanness and neatness of clothing and style.

To conclude, people with good soft skills are able to communicate both in speaking and writing, they can identify problems and solve them logically, they are punctual and can manage their own time. They are able to ask questions and learn from mistakes. They think creatively and respect the views and contributions of others.

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