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TEACHING MATERIAL
MODULE: SOCIAL SKILLS

SoftSkills4EU:

Promote your Soft Skills with Open Badges

TEACHING MATERIAL

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KEY SYMBOLS

Symbols	Explanation
	Definition of terms
	Scenario
	Tips – Causes
	Questions
	Learners/Trainers activities
	Resources E.g. links, reports, articles

MODULE – COOPERATIVE SKILLS

MAIN OBJECTIVE OF THE MODULE

Social skills, or the ability to effectively interact with others, are becoming increasingly important for professionals as almost every job requires such skills. For example, if you work on a team, you need to be able to communicate effectively and get along with others. If you work with clients, you must listen attentively to their questions and concerns. It is therefore vital to be able to demonstrate that you possess strong social skills in your resume, cover letter and interview.

The main aim of this module is to equip participants with the right knowledge and skills, in order to enhance their social competences.

To meet this aim, the module covers the 5 following topics:

1. Conflict Management
2. Communication Skills
3. Intercultural Skills
4. Presentation Skills
5. Accountability

MODULE COOPERATIVE SKILLS SYLLABUS

Course Module	Topics	Sub-topics
Social Skills Module	1. Conflict Management	1.1. Understanding Conflict
		1.2. Identifying The Nature of Conflict
		1.3. The Five Conflict Management Styles
	2. Communication Skills	2.1. Understanding basic concepts of communication
		2.2. How to get the right message across effectively
		2.3. Are you really listening?
	3. Intercultural skills	3.1Intercultural Skills and Culture
		3.2. Cultural Self-Awareness
		3.3. The Ladder of Inference
	4. Presentation Skills	4.1. Understanding what presentation skills are
		4.2. How to effectively prepare a presentation.
		4.3. How to deliver a great presentation.
	5. Accountability	5.1. Understanding what accountability is.
		5.2. How accountable are you?
		5.3. How To Develop High Accountability

TOPIC 1 – CONFILICT MANAGEMENT OVERVIEW

Former President of USA, Ronald Reagan, once said '*Peace is not the absence of conflict; it is the ability to handle conflict by peaceful means*'. Conflict Management is one of the most essential soft skills that can be used in the workplace, but also in other parts of our life as well. It is hard for two individuals to think and perceive things in the same way, as they differ on their thought process and perceptions. As a result, disagreements among individuals might rise and lead to conflicts and fights. This topic will provide a theoretical background of what conflict is, what might cause it and how to effectively manage a conflict when arise. In addition, guidelines on how to use appropriately each style to reach the desire outcome are provided.

1.1 UNDERSTANDING CONFLICT

Definition

According to the Oxford Dictionary, conflict is defined as 'a serious incompatibility between two or more opinions, principles or interests'.

Scenario

Let us examine conflict through the following example:

Max and Simon were working in the same team. One day, they were asked to collaborate on a project assigned to them from their superior. Max likes structure in his work and he sets strict deadlines to himself to be able to perform effectively. On the other hand, Simon works in a more flexible way. When Max tried to set deadlines to Simon and execute the project in a particular way, a conflict between the two occurred.

It is clear that the dissimilarity in the thought process, nature and attitude between Max and Simon gave rise to the conflict between the two. If left underdressed, conflicts can affect employee's morale and also hinder their performance (Ayoko, Callan and Hartel, 2003; Kisamore et.al. 2010). Hence, such incidents require immediate action. In order, to start thinking how to resolve a conflict, the first logical step is to identify the causes of the conflict.

1.2 IDENTIFYING THE NATURE OF CONFLICT

There are countless of potential reasons that might result into a conflict. In the following list we will examine a few of the most common sources of conflict in the workplace as proposed by the psychologists Bell (2002) and Hart (2009) (To check the full list refer to the original source in further reading):

Cause 1: Conflicting Resources

Some resources (meeting room, office supplies, boss' time) are scarce and when more than one person or group requires access to a particular resource, conflict might occur. Imagine yourself to be unable to gain access to something you needed to work; any 'symptoms' of conflict starting to emerge yet?

Cause 2: Conflicting Styles

No two individuals can think alike. Everyone works differently according to their needs and personality, and this sometimes can cause conflicts.

Cause 3: Conflicting Perceptions

Just as two workers can differ in their style of work, similarly they can also have conflicting perceptions about things. For example, when a colleague offers you help one person might appreciate the gesture and perceive this as kindness, whereas another person might see this as an insult, a gesture that indicate that he/she is not able to do his/her job properly.

Cause 4: Different Personal Values

People differ on their personal values, especially if we take into consideration the cultural diversity in today's workplace. Hart (2009) suggest that such differences might cause segregation in the workplace, and ultimately conflict.

Cause 5: Unpredictable Policies

Policies and rules are important in order to avoid confusion and misunderstandings. The absence of clear policies and guidelines can create an environment of uncertainty and conflict (Hart, 2009).

Question

1. Do you recognise any of these causes of conflict?
2. Have you experienced any of them?

Tip

You can use these to recognise the root cause of conflict between people. In turn, this can help you to devise an effective resolution strategy. So, the next time a conflict occurs, never fight, instead take a moment and ask yourself: What might be the cause of the conflict?

1.3 THE FIVE CONFLICT MANAGEMENT STYLES

Once the cause is established, it is easier to choose the best strategy to deal with the conflict. According to the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (TKI) (2008), used by many human resource (HR) professionals around the world, there are **five major styles of conflict management** – *collaborating, competing, avoiding, accommodating and compromising* (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (TKI): The five Major Styles of Conflict Management.

According to this model, in conflict situations we can describe a person's behaviour along two basic dimensions:

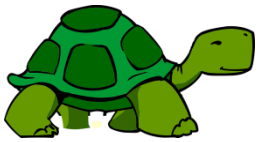
(a) *Assertiveness:* the extent to which the individual attempts to satisfy his or her own concerns.

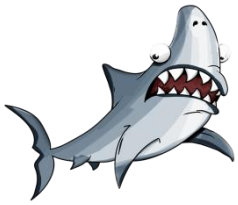
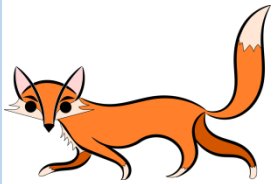
(b) *Cooperativeness:* the extent to which the individual attempts to satisfy the other person's concerns.

These two dimensions of behaviour can be used to define the five methods of dealing with a potential conflict. Your conflict style represents your inclination, or natural tendency, when faced with a situation of conflict. Knowing the five main conflict styles can help you understand the choices you have for managing a conflict. Hence, this will help you identify how you might want to approach a conflict differently, how you might better manage it, depending on the nature of your relationship with the other person.

The Table 1 below provides more detailed information regarding each conflict management style.

Table 1: Conflict Management Styles Descriptions.

Animal	Style
	Collaborating Owls highly value both their goals and their relationships. They view conflict as a problem to be solved and seek a solution that achieves both their goals and the goals of the other person. Owls see conflicts as a means of improving relationships by reducing tensions between two persons. They try to begin a discussion that identifies the conflict as a problem, and strive to resolve tensions and maintain the relationship by seeking solutions that satisfy both themselves and the other person.
	**Avoiding** Turtles tend to value avoiding confrontation more than either their goals or relationships. They often find it easier to withdraw from a conflict than to face it. This might even include completely giving up relationships or goals that are associated with the conflict.

Animal	Style
	**Competing** Sharks typically value their goals over relationships, meaning that if forced to choose, they would seek to achieve their goals even at the cost of the relationship involved. Sharks are typically more concerned with accomplishing their goals than with being liked by others. They might try to force opponents to accept their solution to the conflict by overpowering them.
	Accommodating Teddy Bears typically value relationships over their own goals; if forced to choose, Teddy Bears will often sacrifice their goals in order to maintain relationships. Teddy Bears generally want to be liked by others, and prefer to avoid conflict because they believe addressing it will damage relationships. Teddy Bears try to smooth over conflict to prevent damage to the relationship.
	**Compromising** Foxes are moderately concerned with both their goals and their relationships with others. Foxes typically seek a compromise; they give up part of their goals and persuade the other person in a conflict to give up part of their goals. They seek a conflict solution in which both sides gain something; the middle ground between two extreme positions. They are willing to sacrifice part of their goals in order to find agreement for the common good.

Adopted by: http://www.researchcollaboration.org/uploads/ConflictManagementStylesAssessment.pdf

Knowing when and how to use each style can help to control conflict and lead to an improved relationship. On the other hand, not responding appropriately to a given situation might exaggerate the problem and have the opposite outcome. Thus, it is crucial to be able to identify the appropriate means to reach the desire outcome.

Activity

1. Make a list of few occasions when you found yourself in a conflict situation with someone (friend, family member, colleague, etc.)
2. How did you react to those situations?
3. Was your reaction appropriate to the given situation in order to reach the desire outcome?

Tip

The effectiveness of a given approach depends on the requirements of the specific situation. In Table 2 below, you can find some examples of appropriate uses of each style (Nelson and Quick, 2013) so you can use this as a reference according to your desire outcome.

Approaches	Appropriate Situation
Competing	• When quick decisions are vital – emergencies. • Where unpopular actions need implementing (cost cutting, discipline). • Against people who take advantage of non-competitive behaviour.
Collaborating	• When the concerns of both parties are too important to be compromised. • When objective is to learn. • To merge insights from people with different perspectives. • When you need to work through hard feelings that interfered with a relationship.
Compromising	• To find temporary settlements of complex issues. • To arrive at expedient solutions under time pressure. • When equal power opponents are committed to mutually exclusive goals.
Avoiding	• When an issue is trivial, or more important issues are pressing. • To let people 'cool down' and regain perspective. • When others can resolve the conflict more effectively.
Accommodating	• To allow a better position to be heard and to show reasonableness. • To build social credit for later issues. • To allow subordinates to develop by learning from mistakes.

Activity

Now, let's apply what we have learned so far to our first scenario:

Max and Simon were working in the same team. One day, they were asked to collaborate on a project assigned to them from their superior. Max likes structure in his work and he sets strict deadlines to himself to be able to perform effectively. On the other hand, Simon works in a more flexible way. When Max tried to set deadlines to Simon and execute the project in a particular way, a conflict between the two occurred.

Q1: What are the steps need to be follow to resolve the conflict between Max and Simon?

Q2: What is the cause of their conflict?

Q3: Which strategy/ strategies can resolve the conflict effectively and achieve the desire outcome?

Answers:

Q1: In order to resolve the conflict between Max and Simon the following steps need to be followed:

STEP 1

- Identify the cause of the conflict – Different working styles between Max and Simon that resulted into a conflict.

STEP 2

- Choose the best strategy to deal with the conflict according to our desire outcome.

Q2: In this scenario, both parties have a common goal (to complete the project successfully), but the source of their conflict lies on the difference in their working styles.

Q3: To resolve this conflict and allow them to work together efficiently, Max and Simon can follow two approaches:

Firstly, through the collaborative approach Max and Simon can try to resolve their conflict through communication and try to find an integrative solution that will allow them to achieve their common goal and avoid any damage to their relationship too. Through this approach, the problem is most likely to be resolved and both parties will feel satisfied.

A compromise between the two might be another option, but the goal here is to find a mutually acceptable solution that partially satisfies both parties. Similarly with the collaborative approach, it addresses the issue but does not explore it in as much depth as collaborating. Hence, in this case Max and Simon will complete the project but in the end is likely that no one will be really satisfied and no improvement will be made in their future relationship.

1.4 CONCLUSION

To sum up, conflict is normal part of our life but fighting each other never lead to a conclusion. Therefore, it is incredibly important not to be afraid to deal with conflict when arises by investing on your skills and act wiser.

1.5 FURTHER READING

- An article on the long term costs of not resolving workplace conflicts: https://www.theglobeandmail.com/report-on-business/careers/leadership-lab/the-long-term-costs-of-not-resolving-workplace-conflicts/article25527147/#targetText=Unresolved%20conflict%20can%20also%20have,and%20presenteeism%2C%20and%20employees%20quitting.
- Thomas Kilman Conflict Mode Intrument – Short Clip https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PFlydyH2H8Y&t=10s
- Robin Funsten TEDx Talk – 'How Understanding Conflict Can Help Improve Our Lives' https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fdDQSHyyUic

GLOSSARY

Conflict: *a serious incompatibility between two or more opinions, principles or interests.*

Nature of Conflict: *potential reasons/causes that might result into a conflict.*

Assertiveness: *the extent to which the individual attempts to satisfy his or her own concerns.*

Cooperativeness: *the extent to which the individual attempts to satisfy the other person's concerns.*

TOPIC 2 – COMMUNICATION SKILLS OVERVIEW

Being a good communicator is crucial in any role. In today's business world which heavily relies on the exchange of information, greater emphasis has being placed by the employers on communication skills. Developing good communication skills can help you in all aspects of your life, both at a personal and a professional level. For instance, good communication skills can help you when apply for a job and to perform well at your job. At a personal level, good communication skills can improve your personal relationships by helping you to better understand others, and to be understood. Developing excellent communication skills takes some time, but here you can find a few things that you can apply immediately to help you communicate more effectively with others. This topic will provide you with the basic theoretical background regarding communication and then will go through various tips on how to get your message across effectively (verbally, non-verbally and written) and also on how to become a better listener for deeper communication.

2.1 UNDERSTANDING COMMUNICATION

Definition

Communication has been defined as the imparting or exchanging of information by speaking, writing or using some other medium…The successful conveying or sharing of ideas and feelings (Oxford English Dictionary).

Every communication requires, at least, one sender, a message and a recipient (See Figure 2). As simple as it may sounds, communication is more than simply the transmission of information, as the success of every communication can be affected by a variety of things such as our emotions, our posture or even the medium used to communicate.

Figure 2: The communication procedure

In addition, communication is a two-way process that involves both sending and receiving information. Hence, mastering communication requires a combination of skills such as being able to listen, to be able to get your message across and be able to manage non-verbal communication.

2.2 HOW TO GET THE RIGHT MESSAGE ACROSS EFFECTIVELY

There is a wide range of ways in which we communicate and in many occasions we use more than one at the same time. The different categories of communication include: verbal communication, non-verbal communication and writing communication. To be able to get your message across effectively, you need to master all those three forms.

Our verbal messaging is communicated via the words that we use. Undoubtedly, the verbal message is an important part of our communication, but the way we communicate non-verbally is equally, or sometimes more important. According to the *'7%-38%-55%'* rule, in a given social situation 7% of information received is through the words spoken, 38% is through the tone of the voice and 55% is through bodily movements (Mehrabian, 2007). Therefore, our verbal and non-verbal messages need to be consistent to avoid any misconceptions and misunderstandings.

Activity

Let's imagine that it is your first day at work and a colleague says to you: "It's great to meet you. I'm really looking forward to working together." Focusing on the words alone, most people would agree that the statement sounds relatively positive right?

Now imagine the same phrase accompanied with one of the following facial expressions:

The words did not change, but the message changed dramatically. The contradiction between verbal and nonverbal communication is evident and what initially seemed like a positive statement now probably feels sarcastic, negative and condescending.

Questions

1. Is verbal communication more important than the non-verbal communication?
2. Do you think a text message can accurately convey the intended message as in a 1v1 situation?
3. Have you experienced any misunderstandings because the message 'got lost' through the medium?

Tip

Tips to Improve Verbal Communication:

- **Phrase meaningful questions**: Close-ended questions usually elicit 'Yes' or 'No' response and do not encourage speakers to expand their thoughts. Instead, try to ask open-ended questions, as this may elicit more helpful information and also help you better understand other's perspective (Centre for Mental Health in the Workplace, n.d.)

  For example:

Closed Question		Open Question
'Did you always feel like this?'	≠	*'When did you start feeling like this?'*

- **Tailoring your Communication:** Take a moment to think about the other person and consider things like what language they use and how they would like to be addressed. Tailoring your message to your audience communicates respect as well (CRM Learning, 2016).
- **Embrace Silent:** Leaving a period of silence after speaking sometimes is the best way to make a point. This pause can allow you and the listener to clarify and reflect on what they hear from you. Additionally, by remain silent but attentive can actually encourage people to sometimes share more information with you (Smith, 2018)

Tip

Tips to Improve Non-Verbal Communication:

- **Maintain eye contact:** By maintaining eye contact shows the people you speak that you are 'present', you are feeling confident and it is building trust as well. However, moderation is crucial as an unrelenting stare (more than 5 sec) might make the situation a bit awkward (Centre for Mental Health in the Workplace, n.d.).
- **Be aware of your own tone and voice:** Tone of voice alone can convey different feelings such as anger, frustration, sarcasm, affection etc., although we do not usually notice it. Thus what matters the most is not what we say, but how we say it. (Davies, 2015)
- **Mirror expressions and postures:** Mirroring other people expressions and posture can make them feel understood and accepted. Also, it can be an important part of building rapport and finding common ground (Goman, 2019).
- **Talking with your hands:** The most charismatic speakers and influencers talk with their hands. According to a study analysing TED Talks, viral speakers used nearly as twice as more hand gestures than the least popular speakers used. Additionally, people who use hand gestures to communicate tend to be viewed as warm, agreeable and energetic. Thus, for better communication use your hands (Science of People, n.d.).

The Art of Writing

Being able to express yourself through written words is extremely important in today's workplace as most businesses rely on writing and specifically on emails to communicate. Emails now consume a significant portion of our workdays. On average, a worker read and composes at least 120 emails a day (Lynkova, 2019), hence it becomes imperative that we make the best possible use of emails to communicate effectively. Below you can find some dos and don'ts of online written communication to help you master the art of writing.

Tip

Dos and Don'ts of Online Written Communication

Do have a clear subject line.

Do use professional salutation ('Dear (insert name), 'Hello')

Do keep your message clear and brief.

Do proofread every message.

Do your best to reply to all your emails.

Don't use humor. It can cause misinterpretations.

Don't overuse exclamation marks. Should be used sparinlgy as it can appear unprofessional.

Don't overuse CAPITALS. It appears aggressive and might cause misunderstandings.

Reference: Whitmore, 2016; Smith, 2016.

Activity

Find the 10 most recent emails you sent, and ask yourself:

1. How many of the above rules do they follow?
2. What do I need to change in order to communicate more effectively through email?

2.3 ARE YOU REALLY LISTENING?

The Greek Stoic philosopher Epictetus once said, '*We have two ears and one mouth so we can listen twice as much as we speak*'. True, effective communication is almost impossible when we are not listening. And by listening, we mean really listening and not just using our ears to collect sounds (hearing). Be an active listener requires a conscious and concerted effort to fully engage with the speaker with the intention to truly understand. The art of active listening is a rare gift that requires time and effort, but luckily for you we gathered a few advises to help you develop effective listening skills.

Namig

5 Ways to Develop Effective Listening Skills

Reference: Schilling, 2012; Scuderi, n.d.

1. *Stop talking and don't interrupt* – if you are talking, you are not listening. Also, interruptions make it hard to communicate successfully.
2. *Keep an open mind* – listen without judging the other person. Listening is not the same thing with agreeing, but jumping to conclusions can compromise your ability to communicate effectively.
3. *Listen and picture what the speaker is saying* – For better comprehension and understanding allow your mind to mentally picture the information being communicated.
4. *Give indications that you are listening* – a simple nod or a well-timed 'hmmm' or 'uh huh' can do the trick.
5. *Pay attention to nonverbal cues* – as mentioned earlier words convey only a fraction of the message, thus attention needs to be given to the body language as well.

Questions

1. What is the difference between hearing and listening?
2. What are the different things we need to do when we listen in order to understand what we hear?

2.4 CONCLUSION

To sum up, communication skills are vital in every part of our life as they enable us to pass information, to understand what is being said to us and allow us to connect with other people. Developing excellent communication skills is probably best considered as a long-term project, but definitely a journey worth starting.

2.5 FURTHER READING

- Hand Gestures You Should Be Using: https://www.scienceofpeople.com/hand-gestures/
- Think Fast, Talk Smart: Communication Techniques – Talk by Matt Abrahams, Lecturer at Stanford Graduate School https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HAnw168huqA
- Cartoon Video with Strategies for Active Listening https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rzsVh8YwZEQ

GLOSSARY

Communication: *the imparting or exchanging of information by speaking, writing or using some other medium; the successful conveying or sharing of ideas and feelings.*

Sender: *the individual who initiates a message intended for the receiver.*

Receiver: *the person to whom a message is directed to.*

Message: *the information that the sender wants to relay to the receiver.*

Verbal Communication: *the use of sounds and words to express yourself.*

Non-Verbal Communication: *communication without the use of spoken language (gestures, facial expressions, etc.)*

Active Listening: *the act of fully hearing and comprehending the meaning of what someone else is saying.*

TOPIC 3 – INTERCULTURAL SKILLS OVERVIEW

Nowadays, modern societies appear more diverse than before and have been described as multicultural societies. The former president of Israel, Reuven Rivlin suggested that: 'A multicultural society does not reject the culture of the other but is prepared to listen, to see, to dialogue and, in the final analysis, to possibly accept the other's culture without compromising its own.' In order to achieve this though, people need to be better equipped with the necessary skills to allow them to thrive in an increasingly globalised and competitive workplace.

This topic aims to provide you with a better understanding of culture and why intercultural skills are important. It also aim to provide you with different ways in order to become more cultural self-aware and to equip you with the skills required to better communicate with people from diverse cultures and avoid potential misunderstandings.

3.1 INTERCULTURAL SKILLS AND CULTURE

The emergence of a globalised workplace demands the development of 'global people'. In a multicultural society, most of us require to possess some basic intercultural skills. Especially for people who work away from their native country or those who work closely with individuals from another country, such skills are absolutely vital.

The first step to start developing your intercultural skills, is to first familiarise yourself and get a better understandig of the concept of culture and how it affects our behaviour and actions. Culture is one of the most difficult terms to define due to its broad nature.

Definition

A useful definition that provides a holistic view about culture has been provided by Spencer-Oatey (2012:3):

'Culture is a fuzzy set of basic assumptions and values, orientations to life, beliefs, policies, procedures and behavioural conventions that are shared by a group of people, and that influence (but do not determine) each member's behaviour and his/her interpretations of the 'meaning' of other people's behaviour.' Now, let's imagine a giant iceberg with only its tip being visible, as the one below:

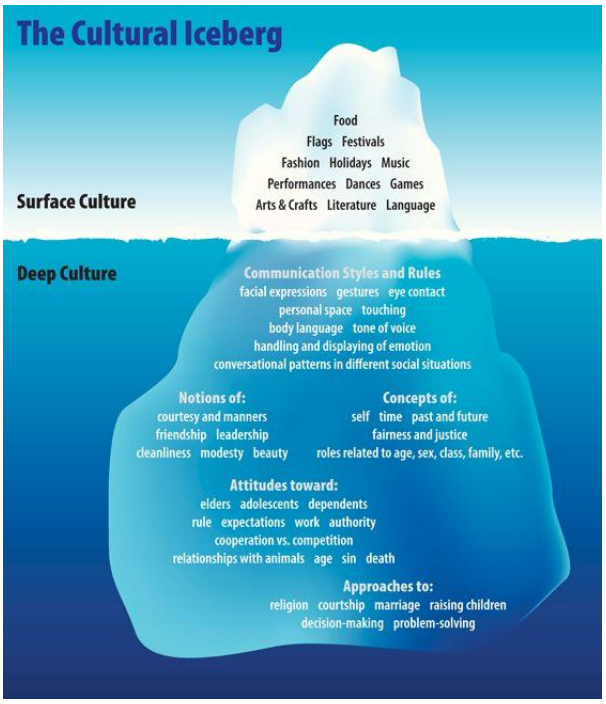


Figure 3: The Cultural Iceberg

Imagine that all those visible elements of one culture such as clothing, food, music etc are represented by the upper portion of the iceberg. However, the larger part is hidden below the surface and stands for those elements which are not as obvious such as values, beliefs and attitudes which they are also affecting the visible parts (Hall, 1989). Therefore, it is important to be aware of the impact that a culture might have on people's behavior and actions.

Scenario

Here's a case study for you to better understand the impact of culture on our behaviour:

Mr Rossi is from Italy and has been moved by his company to manage the office of their subsidiary in the Netherlands. He is horrified to find that his desk is in the middle of an open plan office seated next to some interns and junior ranked staff. In his first week he moves himself into his own separate office. Although he feels much better, the local employees are enraged with his behaviour and there is instant resistance to his presence in the office.

Any idea of what might happened here?

Well, let's take a closer look. Mr Rossi comes from a culture which respects hierarchy and status. In his culture, a boss should have their own office, otherwise they are not worthy of being the boss, right? In the Netherlands, however, they don't see hierarchy in this way – they prioritise equality and everyone being the same. When Mr Rossi moved into his own office, his action signalled to his team that he thought he was better than them and this started causing problems between them. This is also known as the 'culture shock', the experience one person may have when moves to a cultural enviroment which is different from their owns (Segal, 2019).

Hence, both parties in this scenario with a little bit of cultural awareness might have avoided those misunderstandings in the first place and in turn learn how to communicate and collaborate efficiently.

Questions

1. How would you describe culture?
2. Have you or somebody you know ever experienced a cultural shock? Describe!

3.2 CULTURAL SELF-AWARENESS

Now that we understand a bit more about how culture is defined and works, let's bring it back to you. David Livermore, a prominent thought leader on cultural intelligence, states:

"The inward, transformative journey of cultural intelligence involves a heightened understanding of our own cultural background. In what ways are we shaped by the cultures of which we're a part? How does our cultural background shape the way we think, see, and love?

Thus, the first and foremost step in your journey to develop cultural competence is to become more cultural self-aware. However, becoming aware of why you do what you do is not an easy task, as important underlying cultural aspects are unconscious to us (See Figure 3- the Cultural Iceberg).

Below you can find some useful ways to help you start your own cultural journey:

Tip

Adler and Gundersen (2008) offered two more practical ways to increase your cultural self-awareness:

1. Firstly, through gathering feedback from foreign colleagues/ friends on your behaviour to understand the way others see you might help you become more aware of your own culture.
2. Secondly, through listening to common sayings and proverbs about your culture to identify possible patterns to your own behaviour.

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Additionally, to help you uncover your own 'cultural iceberg' and explore what is covered under water, Meyer (2014) has developed an assessment tool with 25-questions to offer you the opportunity to assess your own cultural profile. Unfortunately, the questionnaire is only available in English, but if you are interested in taking the test and uncover your own cultural background you can find the link in the Extra Resources section.

Questions

Cultural Interview Questions*:

1. How do you define 'family'?
2. How do you define 'success'?
3. Do you have any eating habits/ rituals that are specific to your culture?
4. Define and describe the most important (or most celebrated) holiday of your culture.

*Individuals form different cultural backgrounds are more likely to provide different answers to those questions, thus you will be able to get a first-hand experience of the impact of culture on people.

Overall, understanding the ways in which our cultural lenses impact how we interact with the world is an important skill to develop. By being more attentive to our thoughts and judgements can help us to realise the impact that our culture has on our behaviour and also on our perceptions about other cultures as well.

3.3 THE LADDER OF INFERENCE

Understanding our own cultural background is the first step to enable us to interact with people from diverse cultural backgrounds without automatically falling back on our own cultural assumptions. To take this a step further, the ladder of inference is a fascinating tool in our toolbox that can help us to understand our thinking, so we can better interact with people and avoid jumping to conclusions. This as a result, will help us to assess intercultural situations more effectively and avoid potential misunderstandings.

Have you ever found yourself enraged by someone's comment or action, and concluded that they must be acting against you for some reason? Or perhaps you made some off-base assumptions for someone i.e. when you heard nurse and you are expecting a female?

If this sounds like you, you have been climbing the 'Ladder of Inference', a concept developed by organizational psychologist Chris Argyris and presented in Senge (1994) classic book 'The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization'.

How does this work? The entire process happens thousands of times a day inside our minds, as it is simply how our brains are wired. Nobody can see our thought process, but only our actions which are the result from it are visible to others.

Here is how the Ladder of Inference works in 7 steps:

1. I observe what is around me, pretty much as a video recorder does.
2. I select data of what is around me as our attention is limited, based on our beliefs.
3. I add meaning using my experiences, cultural background etc.
4. I make assumptions, based on the meanings I added.
5. I draw conclusions about the situation.
6. I adopt beliefs; based on my conclusions.
7. I take actions based on my beliefs.

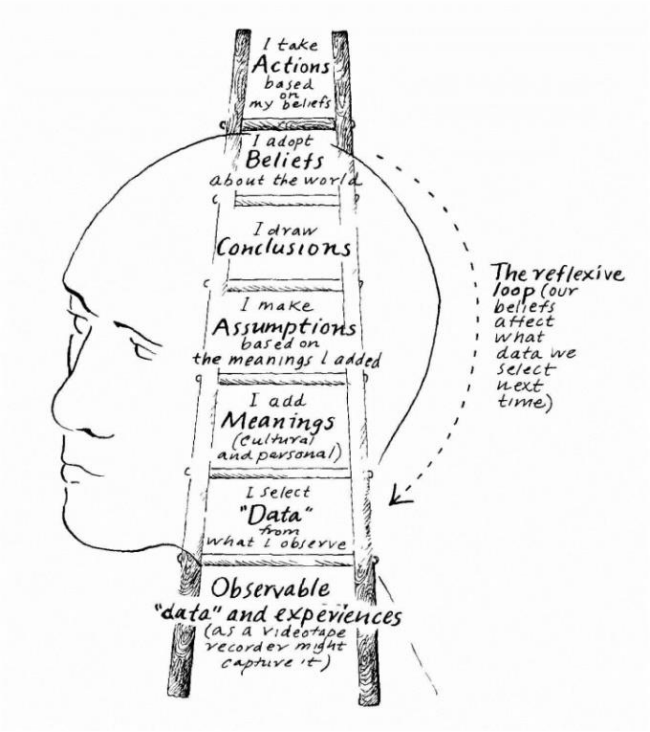


Figure 4: The Ladder Of Inference

Scenario

To illustrate this, let's take a work place scenario to better understand how we unconsciously climb the ladder of inference in a few seconds:

Imagine that you are interviewing for a junior analyst position and you are about to meet a candidate who looks great on paper. He has gone to the best schools, achieved top grades and has excellent references from his previous internships. At this point, the candidate walks in, sharply dressed and you notice that his from a certain cultural background as well. When you reach out to shake hands with the candidate, he averts his gaze and looked away. His handshake is not just weak, but mild. You might start thinking that someone who averts his gaze has something to hide or low self-esteem and you feel even more uneasy with the limp handshake. You might assume that someone with such mannerisms cannot become a hotshot analyst and/or has some hesitation about the work with your company. You might draw conclusions, perhaps that his credentials and references are somehow inflated; hence you might start feeling less enthusiastic about the interview and at the end not hiring the candidate.

In this example, the interviewer unconsciously climbed all the way up the Ladder of Inference and decided not to hire the candidate. The biggest problem with this though is that we act as if other people see the world the same as we do and we do not test or question our assumptions.

' We act as if other people see the world the same as we do and we do not test or question our assumptions'.

That is what we mean when we say someone is 'jumping to conclusions'. To return to our example, for some cultures averting the gaze and gentle handshake are signs of respect. Hence, the interviewer's assumptions and conclusions are ill-formed, because those signs were misinterpreted. If the interviewer was aware of how the ladder of inference works, he would challenge his initial assumptions and he would managed to stay low on the latter and engage in more thoughtful action.

Tip

In the workplace, the impact of false-assumptions and ill-informed conclusions can cause serious problems to communication and relationships. Be careful!

Tip

Here are few tips for you on how to keep yourself low on the Ladder of Inference (Mulder, 2018):

- Becoming more aware of your own thinking and reasoning (reflection): Understand how the ladder of inference works and be aware of your own blind-spots.
- Inquiring into others' thinking and reasoning (inquiry): Question your assumptions. Try to get into the habit of asking "Am I missing anything here?" Ask others to explain their assumptions.
- Make your thinking more visible (advocacy): Explain your thinking process and when possible ask others to do the same (e.g. So, here is my conclusion …; And that leads me to believe …;
- Am I missing anything?)

3.4 CONCLUSION

To sum up, this module aimed to provide you with the knowledge and skills on how to become more efficient in an increasingly globalised and competitive workplace and a society in general. It is important though to keep in mind that coming together is only the beginning, keeping together is a progress, working together is a success (Henry Ford).

3.5 FURTHER READING

- Meyer (2014) Tool to Identify your Cultural Profile https://hbr.org/web/assessment/2014/08/whats-your-cultural-profile
- 'How Culture Drives Behaviours' TEDx Talk by Julien Bourrelle https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l-Yy6poJ2zs
- 'Rethinking Thinking'- Trevor Maber explain in a cartoon scenario the idea of the ladder of inference https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KJLqOclPqis

GLOSSARY

Culture: *a fuzzy set of basic assumptions and values, orientations to life, beliefs, policies, procedures and behavioural conventions that are shared by a group of people, and that influence (but do not determine) each member's behaviour [...].*

Cultural Self-Awareness: understanding of our own cultural background *and how it affects our behaviour and our views.*

The Ladder of Inference: *a tool developed by* Chris Argyri, in order to better understnd how our thought process affects our actions.

TOPIC 4 – PRESENTATION SKILLS OVERVIEW

Everyone has to give presentations at some point in their lives, whether they are a student at school or university, an administrative assistant, a high-level executive or even an interviewee during the recruitment process. Presentations are a great way to get your point across and ensure your audience understands what you are trying to say.

However, many people are terrified by the idea of delivering a presentation (yes, you are not alone) and wish they could avoid it at any cause. It is important though to remember, that speaking in front of people is a skill, not an innate ability. Hence, good presentation skills can be developed and become an excellent addition into your skill set.

This topic aims to provide you with a general understanding of what presentation skills are, and then offer you various tips and strategies on how to effectively prepare and deliver an excellent presentation.

4.1 UNDERSTANDING WHAT PRESENTATION SKILLS ARE

Definition

Presentation skills refer to all the qualities you require, in order to create and deliver a clear and effective presentation (Doyle, 2019).

Any presentation is divided in two main phases: **the preparation** and **the delivery**.

Preparation involves conducting some research related to your topic, building your presentation by creating digital slides and also preparing any supporting materials for your audience. Additionally, part of the preparation might involve making sure the venue is properly set up and/or practice your presentation.

Delivery is the visible part, the one the audience sees and requires its own distinctive skill set to grab audiences' attention and deliver the right message across; such as using body language, tone of voice and eye contact effectively.

All presentation skills fit into one of those phases. Developing those transferable skills can be valuable for you, whatever your background is. Additionally, 'practice makes perfect', once you made a successful presentation, you will gain enormous confidence which means that the next time you will be less anxious and you are more likely to make an even better presentation.

Questions

1. When was the last time you have been asked to deliver a presentation? Describe how you felt before, during and after your presentation.
2. Describe a memorable presentation you've attended or watched online. What do you think made it successful? (e.g. interesting topic, visual aids, entertaining speaker)

4.2 HOW TO EFFECTIVELLY PREPARE A PRESENTATION

As mentioned earlier, the first phase of a presentation is the preparation that usually takes place 'behind the scenes'.

Below you can find a few strategies on how to effectively prepare for a great presentation (The University of Adelaide, n.d; Reynolds, 2017):

1. **Find your focus**. Read analytically and critically about the topic, then ask yourself '*What are the main points I want my audience to take away from my presentation?' - 'If the audience only remembers one thing, what should it be?'*
2. **Audience pre-assessment.** Always put the audience first. It is important to know who your audience is, what they want/ need to know and what is their background. This will help you to deliver the *'right presentation'* to the *'right audience'*.
3. **Create a solid structure.** Billy Wilder, a famous film writer once said that a *'story needs architectural structure, which is completely forgotten once you see the movie'*. Similarly, with presentations the structure will often be invisible to the audience, but it is a crucial component for a successful presentation. The structure can be very simple (introduction, argument, conclusion), but it will make all the difference.
4. **'Practice Makes Better':** Rehearse your presentation several times: both by yourself and then with a friend to receive feedback.

Tip

'The 10-20-30 Rule'

The '10-20-30 rule' has been introduced by Guy Kawasaki (2005), as a rule of thumb on how to make and structure a great presentation. Focusing on conciseness and visibility, the 10-20-30 rule can help you to significantly improve the landscape of your presentation design.

The three guidelines as proposed by Kawasaki (2005) are:

10 SLIDES: Ten is the optimal number of slides for a presentation. By having this limit, you will be managing the cognitive load for your audience without bombarding them with too much information. The challenge though here, is to be able to choose what's important and leave out what's unnecessary without affecting the message you want to put across.

20 MINUTES: It is true that audience attention spans are not necessarily great. In fact, the average attention span among people who listen to speeches is estimated to be somewhere between 5-10 minutes (Rehn, 2016). Thus, a presentation last no more than twenty minutes sounds about right to keep your audience focus.

30 PT FONT: When designing a presentation, keep in mind that anything you show must be visible to everybody. Depending on the room and screen size, a 30-size font at least will be visible to most audiences. If you are concerned about fitting more text in a slide, remember that overcrowded slides do not make a good presentation.

However, it is important to keep in mind that each situation is unique, so there is no hard-and-fast rule that applies to all. Apply those guidelines as a good rule of thumb, but in some circumstances you might require to be more flexible.

Tip

Presentation Tools for Creating Great Presentations

- **PowerPoint**: a traditional and easy tool to use to create presentations.
- **Visme:** a cloud-based presentation tool that allows you to create highly visual presentations to engage viewers and communicate your ideas.
- **Prezi:** Tired of standard slideshows? Prezi is anything but that. It can be used to create persuasive and engaging presentations with unique movement between "slides" and key points.
- **Slidebean:** If you want to skip the tedious process of formatting slides, but want to build detailed presentations that combine multiple items on each slide, Slidebean is right up your alley. All you need to do is to add all the data you need, and Slidebean will create a presentation for you, complete with formatting.

Questions

1. How do you prepare before delivering a presentation?
2. What tools to you usually use to create a presentation?

4.3 HOW TO DELIVER A GREAT PRESENTATION

Delivery is the part the audience sees, hence the one that cause anxiety and cold sweat to many people. Remember, speaking in front of people is a skill, not an innate ability.

To help you nail your next presentation delivery, we gathered a few tips and strategies for you to follow.

Tip

THE DO'S AND DON'TS OF PRESENTING (Brown, 2017)

The Do's of Presenting

✓ **INTRODUCE YOURSELF**

At the very start of the presentation, make sure you introduce yourself confidently to your audience.

✓ **'WELL BEGUN IS HALF DONE'**

Deliver an attention-grabbing opening. Do not forget to provide a summary of what will be covered in your presentation to start setting the context.

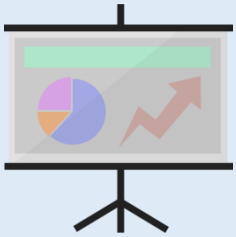
✓ **MIND YOUR NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION**

Maintain eye contact with your audience to keep their interest. Keep an open and relaxed posture and also be mindful of your own voice.

✓ **WRAP IT UP!**

Always summarise key points at the conclusion and ask if the audience has any questions at the end.

The Don'ts of Presenting



× **READ FROM YOUR SLIDES**

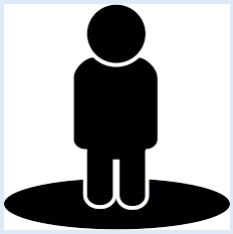
Reading from your slides makes you look unprepared and unprofessional. Instead, you can use some cue cards to refer to, but always maintain eye-contact with your audience.

× **SAY 'UM'**

Rather than saying 'um', practice pausing and thinking in your head instead.

× **TALK TOO FAST OR TOO SLOW**

Try to keep your talking at a steady speed, to ensure the audience hears and understand everything you say.



× **STAND STILL**

Move around, be a person. Don't put the audience to sleep. Have some energy and be interesting to get their attention.

Activity

Deconstruct What Great Speakers Do

The internet gives us access to countless videos of the greatest speakers of our time. Deconstruct their speech by highlighting their approach, tactics and performance. Then identify each speaking skill that was demonstrated, study it and then model it. Practice makes perfect, thus repeat this process until you master it. Steve Jobs 2007 iPhone Launch Presentation is used as an example all over the world to teach exceptional presentation skills. The link to his presentation can be found in the Further Resources section.

Steve Job's presentations were always a success because he knew exactly what audience need and he delivered it.

4.4 CONCLUSION

Presentation skills are invaluable for everyone and sometimes can make or break your career. Great presentation skills can help you get ahead in your career and might also help you to get your dream job as well. As mentioned in the beginning, speaking in front of people is a skill and not an innate ability. Hence, it is a good idea to start practicing and developing your skills now.

4.5 FURTHER READING

- Steve Jobs 2007 iPhone Launch Presentation
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x7qPAY9JqE4
- 5 Public Speaking Tips from Amy Wolff, Speech Coach
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JNOXZumCXNM
- University of Manchester – Presentation Preparation Checklist
  http://documents.manchester.ac.uk/display.aspx?DocID=10991

GLOSSARY

Presentation: *a speech or talk in which a new product, idea or piece of work is shown and explained to an audience.*

Presentation Skills: *all the qualities you require, in order to create and deliver a clear and effective presentation.*

Presenter: *the person who makes the presentation.*

Audience: *the assembled spectators or listeners at an event/ meeting.*

TOPIC 5 – ACCOUNTABILITY OVERVIEW

In the workplace (and in life generally) personal accountability is a vital skill to possess and a really important one to set you up for success. Accountability is a self-driven skill and one that you build over time, a unique skillset developed within successful professionals who choose to apply it to their job and everyday life.

Is this skillset within you too? Have you taken the time and effort to develop it?

If not, we got your back. Don't waste another minute and continue reading the rest of this section.

In this topic, you will learn about what accountability is and also it gives you the opportunity to take a step back and reflect on your own behavior. The rest of the chapter aims to provide you with different tips and strategies on how to become a more accountable person.

5.1 UNDERSTANDING WHAT ACCOUNTABILITY IS

When you are personally accountable, you take ownership of situations and see them through.

Definition

Accountability is to be able to quickly acknowledge your mistakes and failures and focus on correcting the situation (Chisienya, n.d.).

Scenarij

Let me illustrate this through the following scenario:

Maria is frustrated due to a problem occurred with an order she placed online. Maria decided to call the customer service to solve the problem, but the agent she was talking to is not helping.

'It was the dispatch team's fault. I can't do anything about that', the agent says.

Maria then asks to be put through to another agent. The second agent handles the situation very differently.

'I'm sorry to hear about this problem,' he says. 'I will find out what's happened and send the order by express delivery. It will be with you tomorrow.'

Maria felt less stressed straight away, and she was satisfied with the outcome.

Thinking about this scenario, what did the second agent do differently compare to the first one?

The first agent tried to avoid his responsibilities, whereas the second agent made himself personally accountable for fixing the problem. He took ownership of the situation, apologized, and found the best solution to the issue.

Sometimes it can be tough to take personal accountability, but you will soon discover that it can offer many advantages. For instance:

- Builds trust within the team and organizations, as people know they can depend on each other (Abughosh, 2015).
- Leaders who are accountable are more likely to be trusted and respected, as people know they will keep their word (Cornett, 2018).
- Personal accountability can save time and money (Abughosh, 2015).

- You are likely to have healthier relationships with your friends, family and colleagues (Sharpe and Daniel, 2005)
- Deliver peace of mind and a sense of control over your career and life in general (Galindo, 2013).

Questions

1. When was the last time you made a mistake?
2. Did you take responsibility for this mistake or you thought that this is someone else's fault?

5.2 HOW ACCOUNTABLE ARE YOU?

Now that we learned the basics about accountability, the first step to your accountability journey is to reflect on your behavior and acknowledge where you are standing.

Usually, the lens that we look through and how we see a situation will massively determine our reaction to it. In the Table 2 below, you can see how people with high accountability perceive and react to different situations compare to the ones with lower accountability:

Table 2: People with Low Vs High Accountability (Timms, 2018)

Low Accountability	High Accountability
× Problems are headaches	✓ Problems are learning opportunities
× Admitting weakness is career limiting	✓ We are still learning
× Who is wrong (Finger-pointing)	✓ What is wrong
× The individual	✓ The process
× People are the problem	✓ People are problem solvers

Tip

The Accountability Ladder (Blue Sky, n.d.)

The Accountability Ladder allows us to step back, evaluate and really look at the choices we make and how we handle different situations. The Ladder has eight levels; the top four rungs describe accountable behaviors (things that happen because of you), and the bottom four describe victim behaviors (things happen to you).

Below the line is where counter-productive behaviors thrive, such as blaming others, making excuses or waiting for a miracle to happen without trying to do something differently. Such behaviors can be called the Victim Behaviors, as the person tends to recognize or consider themselves as the victim.

On the other hand, as you move towards the top of the ladder the person tends to take ownership and control over a given situation, hence more opportunities can open up. Holding yourself accountable can be the foundation of a successful mindset.

Figure 5: The Accountability Ladder

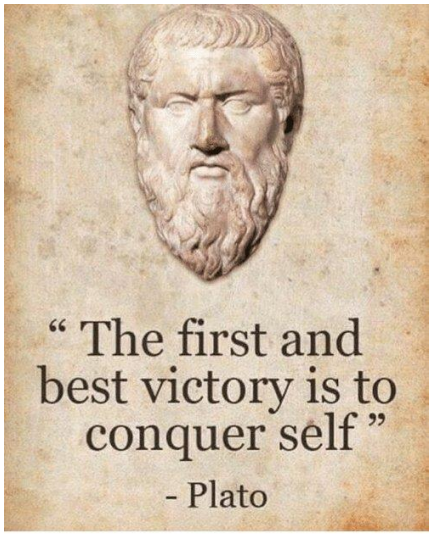
Activity

Do you recognize any of these behaviors / perceptions in you?

Think carefully about situations where you didn't take responsibility but should have. Write them down and make a short list. These mistakes and failures can be valuable teaching tools, if you have the courage to learn from them.

5.3 HOW TO DEVELOP HIGH ACCOUNTABILITY

It is important to keep in mind that accountability is not something you are born with, but something you can learn and apply it in your life, if you devote time and effort to develop it. Use the following strategies and tips to develop your accountability skillset and become a more accountable person both in your personal and your professional life.



Here are few strategies and tips for you to start developing your accountability skills today:

1. Set concrete and detailed goals:

Clear goals produce clear results. Rather than deciding to 'improve your performance at work', set the goal to 'take three professional development courses by the end of the year'. By being more specific with your goal, you will be able to be more accountable and to track your progress (Bishart, 2017).

Tip

S.M.A.R.T GOALS

SMART goal is a helpful tool to use, to assist you with your goals setting. This simplified and easy to remember concept has been used widely by leaders and managers across the globe to help them focus their efforts and increase their chances of achieving their goals (University of California, 2016).

In short goals should be:

- **S**pecific
- **M**easurable
- **A**chievable
- **R**elevant
- **T**ime-bound

2. Don't Afraid to Ask:

Ask for clarification where duties or expectations are not clear. It is almost impossible to be personally accountable for something if you are not clear what you are responsible for. Therefore, communication is the key to make sure everyone is on the same page.

Tip

Read Topic 2- Communication Skills, to find more tips and strategies that you can apply immediately in order to communicate more effectively with others.

3. Own Your Mistakes:

Mistakes are inevitable part of the journey. Sometimes you might need to set your pride aside and if something has gone wrong to have the courage to admit it and to step up to right the wrong.

Tip

How to Correct a Mistake (FJC, 2019)

- Try to focus on the end goal and how to correct the situation, rather than the problem.
- Avoid the Blame Game: Accept responsibility for what you bring to each situation. Spending time blaming others does not solve the problem, it only makes it worse.
- Treat Yourself Gently: Mistakes are part of the learning. Allow yourself to make mistakes, but make sure you took the lesson to ensure the same mistake won't happen again. Be kind to yourself.

4. The Power of 'No':

Don't always see saying 'no' or 'not now' as letting down the other person. When you take too much, something will eventually fall through the cracks. That means that you will let someone down. In other words, 'When you say 'Yes' to others, make sure you are not saying 'No' to yourself' (Paulo Coelho).

5. Accountability through Self-Reflection:

Self-reflection is a powerful accountability tool. Hosting private meetings with yourself on a regular basis can ensure that you are on the right track with your goals and also give you the chance to reflect on your everyday behaviour.

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How to start your self-reflection? (Calderon, 2017)

Step 1: Ask the right questions

Always start your questions with 'Did I do my best…?' this way you focus the effort of reflection on what you can control yourself.

Here are some examples of questions you can use:

Did I do my best to…

1. *Set clear goals today?*
2. *Make progress towards my goals today?*
3. *Find meaning today?*
4. *Be happy today?*
5. *Build positive relationships today?*
6. *Be fully engaged today?*

Step 2: Rate your efforts at the end of the day

Rate your efforts on a scale of 1-10, 1 being 'You didn't try at all' and 10 'You made every effort'.

Step 3: Reflect on Your Answers

When reflecting on your answers remember: the point of this exercise is not to judge yourself but to improve yourself and your personal accountability. This means that low scores are not failures, but indicators for improvement. Self-reflection can change your life, all it requires is a little quality time spent with yourself.

5.4 CONCLUSION

To sum up, accountability appears to be a powerful predictor of personal success and happiness as well. This one skill, or the lack of it, can determine among others, an individual's ability to work independently, to form good relationships and to follow through allocated responsibilities and other tasks. Being accountable is a craft that takes time, but definitely something that worth the effort and investment.

5.5 FURTHER READING

- 'Why are some people changing for the better, while others are changing for the worst?' Charlie Johnson shares how he discovered the power of self-accountability https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bCteZqlwf-k&t=11s
- Practice Accountability – Cartoon Scenario https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jkbBPwcu1LM
- 7 Truths About Accounability That You Need To Know https://www.inc.com/gordon-tredgold/7-truths-about-accountability-that-you-need-to-kno.html

GLOSSARY

Accountability: *to be able to quickly acknowledge your mistakes and failures and focus on correcting the situation.*

Accountability Ladder: *a tool that describes different behaviors related to accountability.*

Victim Behavior: a personality trait in which a person tends to recognize or consider themselves as a victim.

Counterproductive Behavior: *a behavior that has the opposite of the desired effect.*

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