
Interpersonal Orientation

Leadership is the process of 'taking charge' in a context that demands it. Leadership is exercised when we commit the act of having a view, stating a view and shaping a view. It is where we mobilise others' thoughts, emotions and actions.

From this perspective of leadership let us examine what it requires to move others. The leadership orientation of power helps us mobilise others, whether we use raw or natural power, socialised power or affiliative power. The challenges of exercising power in most situations are that it consumes energy, requires high maintenance, and there are contexts in which power does not provide a leverage. On the other hand, the interpersonal orientation within leadership has a wide range of application.

Interpersonal orientation distinguishes itself from power orientation in the manner it operates - through 'nudges' than 'a push' to move people's thoughts, emotions and actions to a desired state. It is when we influence others to move out of their own volition.

Leadership is a social skill. 'Interpersonal' pertains to relationship and communication between people. Interpersonal orientation is our orientation to manage the dynamics that occur between people in an interaction. So, when we are being interpersonally effective our exercise of leadership also becomes effective.

Let us uncover the elements to being effective, Interpersonally.

- 'Self' as the tool to impact an interpersonal interaction
- There are multiple dimensions to an interpersonal process namely
 - Others experience of 'me'
 - My experience of 'others'
 - Managing the engagement with others

'Self', the Tool to Impact an Interpersonal Interaction

The core to an interpersonal engagement is understanding the Self as a tool to impact it. Drawing on the work of Daniel Goleman, it requires us to - be Self-aware, exercise Self-control and be Self-managed in order to see ourselves as a tool of interpersonal effectiveness.

Self-awareness is being aware of our thoughts, emotions and actions. Self-awareness is like watching ourselves on a CCTV feed while we are going over the interactions. Self-awareness helps us reflect and learn about our thoughts, emotions, actions (behaviours). It helps us identify those that we want to control.

Exercising **Self-control** is building our skill through regular practice to "release" or "restrain" the above identified thought, emotion or action, at will. Exercising Self-control is like having the controls of our behaviour in our hands just like having the controls of our car while we drive it. By exercising Self-control over our behaviour, we gain the freedom to act out of choice and deliberation rather

than be a victim of impulse or spontaneity. When we exercise self-control in an interaction and are in control of our behaviour it helps us manage the behaviour of others through our behaviour.

With practice we can be self-aware and self-control our behaviour making us ready for self-management. **Self-management** is our ability to manage the release or restrain our behaviour in a calibrated manner to dynamically fit the context in an ongoing interaction. This is the key to being interpersonally effective as our behaviour triggers response behaviour in others. So, when we effectively self-manage, we use our behaviour to steer the desired responses in others.

Dimensions to an Interpersonal Process

Now let us focus on the dimensions to the interpersonal process. The first dimension is '**Others experience of Me**'.

Others experience is influenced by their experience of our **Stature**. The test of whether we carry stature is to ask ourselves the questions – Are my views valued by others? Do others seek me out for my views? Do they miss my absence in critical engagements? The responses to these questions will give us a reality check on the stature we carry in their eyes.

Stature has two facets to it - physical stature and mental stature.

Our physical stature gets impacted by the way we carry ourselves through our posture, voice, speed of speech, attire and overall getup, eye contact and demeanour. Our physical stature gets enhanced when we carry mental stature.

Mental stature is a state of feeling mentally equal with others in an interaction no matter what asymmetries exist between them and us. We experience mental stature when we feel self-assured, confident and comfortable in being ourselves. We build our mental stature when we value ourselves and believe we contribute value. Domain depth, preparedness relevant to the situation and offering well thought out views add to our stature.

Our stature is not static in an engagement. It keeps moving based on the way others experience us ongoingly and therefore it needs to be actively managed. We can build our stature or erode it during an interaction. We build stature when we place views that others find valuable, relevant and contextual. When our contribution is only adding to sound bites in an engagement, we erode our stature. Alternatively, when we remain silent for long periods and over multiple interactions despite having substantive views then we give ourselves limited opportunity to build our stature. This will require some of us to bring in initiative to step-in and share our views at appropriate times to build our stature. In short, we build stature when we place well thought out and measured views that create an impact on others.

The other element that impacts others' experience of us is **Articulation**. Being articulate is best described as the minimal loss between our thoughts and our expression. We are articulate when others receive our thought as we conceptualised it.

Articulation is deeply grounded in the quality of the thinking we bring in, the clarity we hold, our ability to conceptualise and concretise it. When we build imageries to that thought and fill it with the

right choice of words and express it with the appropriate level of emotions to suit people and the context, we create impact.

Articulate people build stature in the eyes of others.

The second dimension to the interpersonal process is **'My experience of others'**. Beyond focussing on others' experience of us, we shift focus to the 'others' whose behaviour we intend to move. Gaining access to what are the thoughts, emotions, motives, perspectives, beliefs of others will help us in shaping the course of engagement.

Listening is a basic yet an effective tool to gather this information. It requires us to listen without having the compulsions to respond, agree or disagree with others. Deep listening without any filters, judgments or assumptions will help us gain deeper understanding of where people are on an issue and why. Listening requires the exercise of self-control, focussed attention and mental stamina. When we listen well, we understand better and that helps us articulate our response better. When we articulate well, we earn the listening of others. Thus, listening and articulation are two sides of the same coin.

Listening when coupled with sensing helps us gain information beyond the spoken words. **Sensing** is gathering data through our other senses especially observing. It helps us pick cues beyond the said words - the unspoken thoughts, the unexpressed emotions, the thoughts behind the emotions and the emotions behind the thoughts. Sensing requires us to be silent and silence our mind so that we can direct our energy to observing and absorbing all the information from the environment and the people in it. Sensing helps us pick the power dynamics, the motives, ideologies and the needs of others. Like we said about self-awareness and self-control sensing is a skill that can be built with regular practice.

When listening and sensing is coupled with sensitivity it humanises the process. **Sensitivity** is about valuing others as a human being and being conscious of the differences that exists. We are sensitive when we are self-aware of our conduct with others. We show sensitivity when we listen to what they have to say. There may be times we may catch ourselves in moments of insensitivity, become aware of it and smoothen its impact thereafter, which in itself is an act of sensitivity. Our being self-aware and our ability to sense helps us pick up sensitivities of others and the environment.

Gathering information and shaping behaviour are the primary objectives of any interpersonal interaction. Listening, sensing and sensitivity are core to information gathering and an essential feeder to shaping others' behaviour.

The last dimension to the interpersonal process is **Managing Engagement with others**. We manage engagement by processing the information gathered. When we process the information gathered, we learn what moves whom and what will create an impact with them. It helps us know what to say, when to say, whom to say it to and how to say it, equally we understand what not to say, when not to say, whom not to say to and how not to say it.

This approach enables us to think through and shape propositions that will gain the favour and approval of others. It also helps us understand what is required to move our proposition forward. Based on this input we can self-manage our behaviour that shapes the response of others.

Our effectiveness gets enhanced when we gain clarity on what to address in a large meeting, what to bring up in a small group and what calls for a one-on-one meeting. Which conversation needs to be done in the other person's room, which is to be done in our room and which will require a neutral place. These nuances change the dynamics and have an impact on the response from the other.

We are interpersonally effective when we choose to propose rather than assert, prefer to keep the conversations open by offering alternatives, know when to pursue an issue, when to pull back and when to put it on hold in anticipation of a better timing. Our effectiveness is dependant on our ability to build reasonable propositions that has something in it for others as well. It is important for us to understand the challenge to get all that we seek in the manner we seek. Thus, we need to be clear on our core needs which we want met and know the non-core that we are willing to 'give and take' to meet our objectives.

Managing the engagement is a symphony of managing ourselves, managing others' experience of us, gathering information on them and the situation, and adapting our behaviour to elicit the response from others to meet our purpose.

Visualise this like driving a car - on one hand we control the vehicle by using its controls with skill and calibration. On the other hand, we watch the road and the other vehicles to ensure we steer through to reach our destination as intended. Through practice we can master both managing the car and navigating the surroundings. This plays out in a similar fashion for interpersonal engagements as well. With practice we can be adept at managing ourselves and actively engaging the dynamics of the people and the environment.

Interpersonally effective exercise of leadership enables us to navigate the power dynamics and political landscape of institutions to meet the objectives without having to sacrifice the core. To become interpersonally effective, we need to recognise that logic and reasoning and a good idea alone is not sufficient to win over people. Sound thinking accompanied with the plus factor of interpersonal effectiveness will enable its smooth sailing.