

Social Skills and Behaviors

Session #8 within "Self-in-Context" Unit



VETERANS



ONWARD

Training Materials:

- Whiteboard and pens or flipchart and pens.
- Paper and pen for all participants.
- Print outs or links emailed to Assessment Tool resources:
 - Toronto Empathy Questionnaire (TEQ) which can be accessed at <https://www.midss.org/content/toronto-empathy-questionnaire>
- Packet(s) of dried spaghetti and large bag(s) of marshmallows – enough for one pack each between 6 participants.
- Set of slips of paper or small cards on which you have a blue mark on each.

Learning Objectives:

1. To define soft-skills and explain the importance of soft skills in social settings, including family and workplace settings.
2. To complete a self-analysis to determine personal perception of soft skills, develop self-awareness and identify next steps in learning.
3. Use existing interpersonal “soft skills” within a group social interaction.
4. Name, describe and apply key concepts from group dynamics theory.

Training Script:

Hello everyone, how are you today? My name is _____. I am going to be your tutor today for this training module on Social Skills and Behaviours. It is the eighth session within the unit called “Self-in-Context”. This module will take between 90 and 120 minutes to complete. It follows on from the previous session on High Risk Situations.

Before we look at today’s learning objectives, I’d like to set aside some time to have a conversation about anything that came up for you from last session on. You had the opportunity to take away 3 questionnaires. Is there anything you want to ask or say as a result? There may be something else you

want to ask or discuss based on what we covered last session. We have 5 – 10 minutes now to discuss any points arising from last session.

[Allow 5 -10 minutes for this facilitated discussion as a whole group].

So, today's learning objectives. By the end of this module, my aim is that you will be able to:

1. To define soft-skills and explain the importance of soft skills in social settings, including family and workplace settings.
2. To complete a self-analysis to determine personal perception of soft skills, develop self-awareness and identify next steps in learning.
3. Use existing interpersonal "soft skills" within a group social interaction.
4. Name, describe and apply key concepts from group dynamics theory.

Let's make a start on learning objective 1:

1. **To define soft-skills and explain the importance of soft skills in social settings, including family and workplace settings.**

Soft skills can also be called "people skills" or "social skills", or even "communication skills". They are the skills, traits, attitudes, and attributes that enable people to successfully work well with others and manage social situations. Soft skills allow a person to be able to successfully employ their hard skills within a social context. Hard skills are technical or administrative skills, such as the ability to operate complex machinery, manipulate a computer document or create an end product.

Task:

Consider how assembling some Ikea flat pack furniture with a friend or partner involves both soft and hard skills.

- What are the soft skills needed in this scenario?

- What are the hard skills required?

[Allow brief time for participants to consider the question, before facilitating a 5 minutes discussion. If participants do not identify the hard / soft skills, then ensure you explain the following:

Soft skills are communication and people based: so here, soft skills would include negotiating how to begin, who will do what, compromising as needed, staying calm when you are getting irritated with your friend / partner etc.

Hard skills are technical or administrative based: so here, hard skills would include reading the instructions, operating screwdrivers and tools, correct manual handling / lifting technique with heavy furniture].

Today, we will focus much more upon soft skills. There is a good reason for that. Soft skills are now recognised as extremely important within the workplace and can be an important factor in employability. Soft skills also enhance our personal relationships. The Nobel prize James Heckman claims that:

“Soft skills predict success in life... they casually produce that success....Programs that enhance soft skills have an important place in an effective portfolio of public policies¹”

The Dictionary definition of "soft skills" also recognises how useful they can be in the workplace. Soft skill are:

Desirable qualities for certain forms of employment that do not depend on acquired knowledge: they include common sense, the ability to deal with people, and a positive flexible attitude.

It's thought the term "soft skills" was first used in 1972 within a US Army training manual. Since then, a great deal has been written and research completed into soft skills. It is now recognised² soft skills can be divided into 3 categories:

- People skills,

¹ Succi, C. & Canovi, M. (2019) Soft skills to enhance graduate employability: comparing students and employers' perceptions, *Studies in Higher Education*, **137**: 244–256.

² Marcel M. Robles, [Executive Perceptions of the Top 10 Soft Skills Needed in Today's Workplace Archived](#) 2016-08-12 at the [Wayback Machine](#), *Business Communication Quarterly*, 75(4) 453–465.

- Social skills,
- Personal career attributes.

There have been various attempts to list the different soft skills that are regarded as most important for social and professional functioning. Let's look at one of those lists, compiled by Eastern Kentucky University from executive listings.

1. **Communication** – oral speaking capability, written, presenting, listening, clear speech & writing.
2. **Courtesy** – manners, etiquette, business etiquette, gracious, says please and thank you, respectful.
3. **Flexibility** – adaptability, willing to change, lifelong learner, accepts new things, adjusts, teachable.
4. **Integrity** – honest, ethical, high morals, has personal values, does what's right.
5. **Interpersonal skills** – nice, personable, sense of humour, friendly, nurturing, empathetic, has self-control, patient, sociability, warmth, social skills.
6. **Positive attitude** – optimistic, enthusiastic, encouraging, happy, confident.
7. **Professionalism** – business-like, well-dressed, appearance, poised.
8. **Responsibility** – accountable, reliable, gets the job done, resourceful, self-disciplined, wants to do well, conscientious, common sense.
9. **Teamwork** – cooperative, gets along with others, agreeable, supportive, helpful, collaborative.
10. **Work ethic** – hard working, willing to work, loyal, initiative, self-motivated, on time, good attendance³.

Task:

From this list of 10 soft skills, identify the 3 skills you consider the most important for you to use within:

- (a). Your current role in the military.

³ Marcel M. Robles, [Executive Perceptions of the Top 10 Soft Skills Needed in Today's Workplace Archived](#) 2016-08-12 at the [Wayback Machine](#), Business Communication Quarterly, 75(4) 453–465.

(b). Your family and personal relationships.

(c). During the process of MCT.

For each of these, try to explain why you think these soft skills will be beneficial.

[Allow 5 -10 minutes for participants to complete, then lead a facilitated discussion for 5 – 10 minutes based on participants reflections].

We are now ready to move onto learning objective 2:

2. To complete a self-analysis to determine personal perception of soft skills, develop self-awareness and identify next steps in learning.

We have gained a good overview of how important soft skills are in both the workplace and within personal relationships. It is a good idea to increase our self-awareness about our strengths and areas for development with soft skills. In doing so, we are demonstrating the soft skill of flexibility and a willingness to develop and learn, as well as the soft skill of responsibility in that we are taking steps towards our own development.

If you recall in session 2 on self-awareness, there are 2 aspects to self-awareness: internal and external.

- Internal self-awareness – how well you know yourself.
- External self-awareness – how well you understand how others see you⁴.

For that reason, in this next task, you are going to answer a question I will provide for you in a moment for yourself. You will then have a chance to seek feedback from other people who know you so that you can increase your awareness of how they see you. Open, helpful, courteous and supportive communication will be really important as we give each other this feedback, which is, in itself, also us to practice other soft skills.

Task:

From the list of 10 soft skills we already looked at, I'd like you to choose:

⁴ Eurich, T. (2018). What self-awareness really is (and how to cultivate it). Harvard Business Review. Retrieved from <https://hbr.org/2018/01/what-self-awareness-really-is-and-how-to-cultivate-it>

- 2 skills that you feel you are good at and have plenty of experience in using. Highlight these on your paper.
- 1 skill that you feel is an area of development for yourself. Note this on your paper.
- Ask someone else who knows you well and who you feel is trustworthy and supportive to name the 2 skills they see as your strengths. Note this on your paper.
- Ask this same person to identify 1 area of development for yourself. Note this on your paper.
- If you have time, ask the other person to explain why they answered in the way they did.
- Finally, by yourself, make a note of anything you are surprised at as a result of this task and what you want to do as a next step in developing your soft skills.

[Participants will need sufficient time to complete this task, likely to be 10-15 minutes]

[Allow 5 -10 minutes for a facilitated discussion as a whole group following the completion of this task].

Thankyou for that. I am going to offer us one more opportunity today to increase our self-awareness of our current soft skills set. I have copies of the Toronto Empathy Questionnaire (TEQ), which is a psychological measure of how much empathy we exhibit. Empathy is an extremely important interpersonal soft skill and an important marker of having Emotional Intelligence (EI). Empathy can be defined as “the ability to understand and share the feelings of another”, or to tune into how they are feeling. This allows us to communicate our understanding and build supportive relationships and rapport, fostering good communication, trust and warmth.

So, we will have a go at identifying our current abilities in regards to empathy.

Task:

[Provide participants with copies or links to the Toronto Empathy Questionnaire (TEQ) and allow time for completion. Following this, allow 5 -10 minutes for a facilitated discussion as a whole group following the completion of this task. During this discussion, prompt participants to tell the group what they want to do next as a means to further developing empathy].

We are ready to move onto learning objective 3:

3. Use existing interpersonal “soft skills” within a group social interaction.

I think it's time we tried out some of our soft skills within a group scenario. So, I have a challenge for you! I will shortly divide you into teams. Each team has the challenge to make a structure using just dried spaghetti and marshmallows. The winning team will be the team that produces the highest free standing structure at the end of the 10 minutes I will allocate you. There is one twist, however, in each group there will be at least one saboteur. The role of the saboteur is to undermine the group's performance without being identified as a saboteur. You will discover if you are a saboteur by looking at the piece of paper I will show you. If the paper has a blue mark on it, you are a regular group member. If the paper has a red mark, you are to play the role of saboteur. It is essential you do not reveal your identity as saboteur or regular group member till the end of the task when I ask you to. Does anyone have any questions?

Task:

[Divide the participants into groups, with 5 or 6 participants in each group.

Show each participant a different card with a mark on it.

In reality, all the cards have a blue mark. There are no red marks. However, do not reveal this to the group.

Give each group a pack of spaghetti and marshmallows and set a 10-minute timer before asking the groups to start

During the task, pay close observation to what is happening in each group].

[At the end of the 10-minutes, call the groups to stop and step back from their creations.

Identify the group with the tallest creation that is free-standing. Declare them the winners.

Ask each group in turn to identify who they think the saboteur(s) were in their group.

Finally ask everyone in the room to raise their hand if they were a saboteur.

At this point, you can now reveal to the group that there were no saboteurs!

Ask participants to return to their seats]

Thank you to everyone. I hope you enjoyed that. In doing that, we had a chance to employ a whole host of soft skills. Can anyone identify any of the 10 soft skills we've looked at that you or others used in that task?

[Gather ideas from participants]

In doing that task, we were certainly working towards the learning outcome of: **Use existing interpersonal "soft skills" within a group social interaction.** However, we were also learning a great deal about group dynamics as well, and we experienced some of the processes that can take place within groups. Psychologists have studied many, many different examples of groups and there is a great deal of theory to describe some of the typical group dynamics and processes common to humans. That is what we are going to explore with our final learning objective:

4. Name, describe and apply key concepts from group dynamics theory.

As we look at a selection of psychological concepts and theories about group dynamics, I will ask us to keep on thinking about how the dynamics we are learning about were happening in the groups you were just in when you built the structures with marshmallows.

Let's begin by looking at what we mean by group dynamics. Group dynamics is a system of behaviours and psychological processes that occur within a social group or between social groups.

Key thinkers and researchers who've studied group dynamics include Kurt Lewin (1890–1947), Wilfrid Bion (1897 – 1979), Irving Janis (1918 –1990), William Schutz (1925 –2002) and Bruce Tuckman (1938 –2016). We will look at each of the main ideas on group dynamics put forward by these thinkers.

Kurt Lewin was the first to use the term group dynamics to describe the positive and negative forces within groups of people. Lewin also noted that two factors support the formation of a group:

Interdependence of Fate: Groups can be formed when people realise they are dependent on others. They didn't choose to join the group that has emerged, but realise they now depend on the fate of the group as a whole.

Interdependence of Task: Here, a group is united around a common objective. When they have a task, it encourages behaviour enabling co-operation so the goal is achieved. Members of the group are dependent on each other for achievement.

Task:

Here is a question I'd like us to discuss:

From Lewin's theory, is there anything you recognise from our marshmallow task?

[Facilitate a brief discussion. For example, prompt the participants to consider if having a goal united the group at all?]

Wilfrid Bion studied group dynamics as a result of what he observed whilst serving as a psychiatrist during World War II. He noticed that, in groups, people adopted common patterns to help them deal with the anxiety produced from being in a group. However, these patterns interfere with the group being as effective. He thought that these patterns were largely unconscious, that is, group members often didn't realise what patterns they fell into or why they did so. The three patterns identified by Bion are called "dependency," "fight-flight," and "pairing."⁵

Dependency: Here, many group members are united by feelings of helplessness, inadequacy, neediness, and fear. They search for a charismatic leader upon whom they can depend. When this occurs, group members fail to take initiative, use critical judgment, and depend on leadership too much.

⁵ Bion, W.R., *Experiences in Groups*. 1961, London: Routledge.

Fight-Flight: Here, there is a pattern of both avoidance and attack within the group. The group tends to split into camps of friends and enemies. One sub section relies on aggression, jealousy and competition. The other sub section uses avoidance, absenteeism, and giving up.

Pairing: Here, group members seek safety by forming pairs. This means splitting up the group and results in increased levels of conflict and keeps the group from progressing.

Task:

Here is a question I'd like us to discuss:

From Bion's theory, is there anything you recognise from our marshmallow task?

[Facilitate a brief discussion – in particular focus on whether a group leader emerged: were they encouraged to take up this role because of others' fear and inadequacy? Once a leader emerged, how did the group respond? Was there any split in the group between friends and enemies? Were there any pairings?]

Irving Janis is recognised for developing the theory of "groupthink". Groupthink is a psychological phenomenon that occurs within a group of people in which the desire for harmony or conformity in the group results in an irrational or dysfunctional decision-making outcome. In order to achieve cohesion, there is collusion among members to agree at all costs. This causes the group to minimize conflict and reach a consensus decision without critical evaluation.

Task:

Here is a question I'd like us to discuss:

From Janis' theory, is there anything you recognise from our marshmallow task?

[Facilitate a brief discussion – in particular, focus on whether there was any emergence of groupthink about who the saboteur(s) might be? Did anyone feel pressure to join in with groupthink?]

William Schutz identified 3 stages of group development:

Inclusion – where members are concerned with the question: “am I included?”

Control – where members are concerned with the question: “who is the top dog here?”

Affection - – where members are concerned with the question: “do I belong here?”

Task:

Here is a question I’d like us to discuss:

From Schutz’s theory, is there anything you recognise from our marshmallow task?

[Facilitate a brief discussion – in particular, focus on whether participants were concerned with any of the questions in Schutz theory?]

Bruce Tuckman proposed a four-stage model called to describe a group’s progress.

- Forming (pretending to get on or get along with others)
- Storming (letting down the politeness barrier and trying to get down to the issues even if tempers flare up)
- Norming (getting used to each other and developing trust and productivity)
- Performing (working in a group to a common goal on a highly efficient and cooperative basis)

Task:

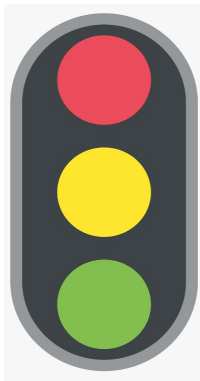
Here is a question I’d like us to discuss:

From Tuckman’s theory, is there anything you recognise from our marshmallow task?

[Facilitate a brief discussion – in particular, was there any conflict or disagreement (storming)? How did trust develop so you became productive? Did the saboteur role assist or hinder in this process?]

That marks the end of our consideration of group dynamic theory. It can be helpful to have an understanding of this theory to help us be more aware of what is happening in groups and how groups are operating. This opens up choices for us, allowing us to use our soft skills to facilitate productive relationships within groups.

So, finally, using a simple traffic light system, I'd like you to evaluate your own learning today. For each objective, you are going to decide whether you feel you are:



RED / STOP	You have made no progress in learning this and are still at a "standstill."
AMBER	You have some understanding but aren't quite ready to apply it yet.
GREEN / GO	You have a good grasp of this objective and are ready to go and apply this learning in the real world.

1. To define soft-skills and explain the importance of soft skills in social settings, including family and workplace settings.

RED AMBER GREEN

2. To complete a self-analysis to determine personal perception of soft skills, develop self-awareness and identify next steps in learning.

RED AMBER GREEN

3. Use existing interpersonal “soft skills” within a group social interaction.

RED AMBER GREEN

4. Name, describe and apply key concepts from group dynamics theory.

RED AMBER GREEN

What do you want to do as a result of your learning today?

Thank you to everyone for your engagement and participation in the session. I hope you have learnt some useful ideas that can be applied in your daily life.