



## Improving Interpersonal Relationship in Workplaces

### KEYWORDS

Interpersonal, Relationship, Dispositional Differences, Organizations, Improve

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**ABSTRACT** Positive interpersonal relationship at work foster a variety of beneficial outcomes for individual and organization hence, this paper on improving interpersonal relationship in workplace. This study is aimed at examining the need for interpersonal relationship in workplace. Three (3) research questions were raised and answered. Theoretical works were reviewed. The findings from the review were; (1) that employee's demographics and work environment can in a way affect interpersonal relationship in workplace if not properly managed. (2) That positive interpersonal relationship in workplace should be rooted in dispositional differences. (3) That the level of compatibility, communication and interaction settings between workers goes a long way in either improving or hindering interpersonal relationship in workplace. Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made; (1) Management interventions may be instrumental in promoting friendships at work, by initiating social activities both inside and outside of the workplace. (2) Individuals need to get along well with their fellow workers for a positive ambience in workplaces and also for healthy interpersonal relationship.

### Purpose of the Study:

The purpose of this paper was to provide a clearer understanding of interpersonal relationships at workplace. Specifically, the purpose of the study is:

1. To find out the need for interpersonal relationship in workplace.
2. To find out the factors affecting interpersonal relationship in workplace.
3. To find out how interpersonal relationship in workplace can be improved.

### Significance of the Study:

The study on interpersonal relationship in workplace will be beneficial to organizations, managers, and employees in a number of ways. The study will help to unveil vital information on the need and current challenges of interpersonal relationship in workplace and possible working solution for overcoming the identified problems to organizations. The study will be beneficial to managers and employees in the sense that the study will point out areas of strength and weaknesses, thereby, standing as a corrective measure. Above all, this study will help expand knowledge and serve as veritable resource tool in the future.

### Definition of terms Interpersonal Relations:

Interpersonal relationship at work constitutes the day to day interaction between co-workers, or managers and employees. These relations are a natural part of the work environment

and are usually pleasant and creative, but sometimes the source of tension and frustration. **Workplace:** A workplace is a location or building where people perform physical or mental working order to earn a living.

### Concept of Interpersonal Relationship:

Relationship is born, fed, nurtured and, it grows. It is born at the level of acquaintance relationship; it is fed at associate relationship and is nurtured at friendship. One who

must be involved in interpersonal relationship must have a goal to attain at each level in order to achieve its purpose. Relationship is the ladder to your gain or pain and therefore, it must be consciously handled. It does not come by chance, but it is a social work to be done because interpersonal relationship is the social link between two or more persons.

Maxwell (2004) observed that a thing bring two persons together to make them remain in the context of relationship. Such things may be common interest like desire, aspiration or a goal. When interpersonal relationship is born from any of these, if it is fed and nurtured, it grows but if neglected, it deteriorates and dies.

Developing interpersonal relationship is a serious business that yields dividends to those committed to it. Interpersonal relationship is the social association, connection or affiliation between two or more people.

### Theory of Interpersonal Relationship:

According to Social Exchange theory proposed by George Casper Homans in the year 1958, "give and take" forms the basis of almost all relationships though their proportions may vary as per the intensity of the relationship. In a relationship, every individual has expectations from his/her partner. A relationship without expectations is meaningless. According to Social Exchange Theory feelings and emotions ought to be reciprocated for a successful and long lasting relationship. Relationships can never be one sided. An individual invests his time and energy in relationships only when he gets something out of it. There are relationships where an individual receives less than he gives. This theory becomes necessary to organizations because it takes two or more people to form a team and a team cannot exist without "give and take" which is the core of any relationship. Therefore, this theory emphasizes the need for positive interpersonal relationship among organisation's members in other to achieve its goals.

Managing Conflict in Interpersonal Relationship at Workplace:

Conflict should be defined as open arguments between one or more persons (Appelberg, 1996). Certainly conflict can lead to or be parallel to several other interpersonal relationship problems, e.g., lack of support or bullying. When two individuals have different opinions and neither of the two is willing to compromise, conflict arises. A state of disagreement among individuals is known as conflict. Conflict arises at workplace when employees find it difficult to reach a mutually acceptable solution and fight over petty issues.

How to manage conflicts in interpersonal relationship at workplace?

Conflicts play an important role in spoiling relationship among employees at the workplace and must be controlled at the initial stages to expect the best out of individuals.

**a. For individuals, organization should always come first and all other personal interests must take a backseat:**

Fighting with fellow workers on petty issues is childish. Be professional. Do not take things to heart at the workplace as no one is working for himself or herself. You might not like someone else's style of working but remember ultimately the organization must benefit out of it.

**b. An individual ought to respect his colleagues:** Treat your fellow workers as members of your extended family. Ignoring minor issues helps in avoiding conflicts in interpersonal relationship. Try to understand your colleague's point of view as well.

**c. Avoid lobbying at the workplace:** An individual should keep his personal and professional life separate. Do not favor anyone just because you like the individual concerned or you know him personally. At work, every employee irrespective of his family background and relation with the management needs to be treated as one. Ignoring or bad mouthing someone just because you do not like him is simply not acceptable. Such things give rise to unnecessary stress and eventually employees fight and spoil relationships amongst themselves. You need people around who can give you suggestions and help you when required. You can't work alone.

**d. Remember there is a difference between being aggressive and rude:** A sense of competition is essential among employees but make sure you adopt healthy means to prove yourself. Jealousy, backbiting, criticism, leg pulling give rise to disagreements among individuals and spoil their relationships.

**e. Think before you speak. Do not hurt anyone:** There are several other ways to express your displeasure at work. Do not overreact at workplace. Stay calm and composed.

**f. Avoid being arrogant: Be polite to everyone:** Greet people and do enquire about their wellbeing. A simple smile goes a long way in managing conflicts and strengthening interpersonal relationships at workplace.

**Need for Interpersonal Relationship in Workplace:**

Organization consist of a group of people with similar aims, objectives, goals and insights who cooperatively joined hands together to achieve what individuals cannot achieve in isolation under an effective coordinating mechanism. However, in any organization that is goal

-oriented, workers cooperative efforts coupled with their level of interpersonal relationship tend to influence the entire work-group performance. The need for interpersonal relationship at workplace therefore cannot be overemphasized. Valued interpersonal relationship can influence organizational outcomes by increasing institutional participation, establish supportive and innovative climates, increasing organizational productivity and indirectly reducing the intent to turnover.

a) Individual spends around eight to nine hours in his organization and it is practically not possible for him to work all alone: Human beings are not machines who can work at a stretch. We need people to talk to and share your feelings. Imagine yourself working in an organization with no friends around. We are social animals and we need friends around. An individual working in isolation is more prone to stress and anxiety. They hardly enjoy their work and attend office just for the sake of it. Individuals working alone find their job monotonous. It is essential to have trustworthy fellow workers around with whom one can share all his secrets without the fear of them setting leaked. We must have friends at the workplace who can give us honest feedback.

b) A single brain can't take all decisions alone: We need people to discuss various issues, evaluate pros and cons and reach to solutions benefiting not only the employees but also the organization on the whole. Employees can brainstorm together and reach to better ideas and strategies. Strategies must be discussed on an open platform where every individual has the liberty to express his/her views. Employees must be called for meetings at least once in a week to promote open communication. Interaction on a regular basis is important for healthy relationship.

c) Interpersonal relationship has a direct effect on the organization culture: Misunderstandings and confusions lead to negativity at the workplace. Conflicts leads nowhere and in turn spoil the work environment.

d) We need people around who can appreciate our hard work and motivate us from time to time: It is essential to have some trustworthy co-workers at the workplace who not only appreciate us when we do some good work but also tell us our mistakes. A pat on the back goes a long way in extracting the best out of individuals. One needs to have people at the workplace who are more like mentors than mere colleagues.

e) It always pays to have individuals around who really care for us: We need colleagues to fall back on at the times of crisis. If you do not talk to anyone at the workplace, no one would come to your help when you actually need them.

f) An individual needs to get along with fellow workers to complete assignments within the stipulated time frame: An individual working all alone is overburdened and never finishes tasks within deadlines. Support of fellow workers is important. You just can't do everything on your own. Roles and responsibilities must be delegated as per specialization, educational qualification and interests of employees. An individual needs help of his fellow workers to complete assignments on time and for better results.

**Factors Affecting Interpersonal Relationship at Workplace:**

**A. Employee Demographics and the Work Environment**  
Song and Oshfski (2008) proposed that who we claim as our friends is influenced by our family ties, class, ethnic

background, race, gender, age, experience, interests, and the geography. Many theories support the proposition that demographic characteristics impact social relationships between individuals (Sacco and Schmitt, 2005). Social categorization (Tajfel, 1981; and Turner, 1987) and social identity theories (Tajfel and Turner, 1986; Turner, 1982) put forth that people categorize themselves and others into in-groups and out-groups according to salient characteristics, including race and sex. Individuals tend to minimize differences.

### B. Personality

Developing positive interpersonal relationships at work should be rooted in dispositional differences. Kalish and Robins (2006) suggest that psychological predispositions are critical factors at the most basic level of a social relationship between two individuals. The five-factor model of personality (Barrick et al., 2001; Hogan, 1991; Hough and Furnham, 2003), including openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and emotional stability, provides a meaningful theoretical framework for postulating the likelihood that certain traits lead to the development of interpersonal relationships at work. The last three traits, extraversion, agreeableness, and emotional stability, are more of interest here. These three dispositional tendencies represent core elements of interpersonal behaviour and represent interpersonal traits that have been demonstrated to be positively related to social cohesion (Barrick et al., 1998; Van Vianen and De Dreu, 2001). More specifically, each trait supports the development of social ties with others.

### C. Interaction Setting

Often, what appears to be personality changes may just be two peoples' varying responses to difference and incompatible job requirements. This frequently happens when people work in different parts of the organization, under different organizational cultures, for different bosses and in different jobs that make different demands.

### D. Job Requirement

Job requirements determine how psychologically close or distant two people need to be to perform their work. The depth of interpersonal relationships required by a job depends on how complex the task is, whether the people involved possess different kinds of expertise, the frequency of interaction in the job, and the degree of certainty with which job outcomes can be

Predicted. Work situation that are simple and familiar to both workers, don't require strong feelings, demand little interaction, and have a high certainty of outcomes call for minimum task relationships. Complex situations that require different knowledge from each person, high trust, much interaction, and have an uncertain outcome call for more intense interpersonal relationships.

### F. Organizational Culture

The organization's culture influences the general nature of employee relationships. People take cues from the culture they work in and usually respond to what they perceive as general expectations. Some cultures discourage intimacy and only allow distant, impersonal relationships. The more culture fosters competitiveness, aggressiveness, and hostility, the greater the likelihood people will be cautious and on guard with each other and other cultures encourage family-like closeness. The more sociable and personal the culture, the more people are

likely to share non-work information and feelings

Four primary factors decide the interaction pattern:

**Openness** is the degree to which participants share their thoughts and feelings with others

**Trust** is the degree that you believe someone else is honest and supportive.

**Owning** Refers to taking responsibility for a problem to which you are a contributor versus blaming someone else.

**Risk of Experiment** is the degree to which you are punished for trying something new,

especially if it fails, versus doing things in safe, approved-of ways.

**Other managerial roles in ensuring an improved interpersonal relationship at workplace are as follows:**

1) **Interact with your team members on a regular basis:** Make sure you speak to everyone, else individuals might feel ignored. Call your team for meetings at least twice in a week. Enquire about their well-being.

2) **Avoid Comparisons among your team members:** Do not shout on any of your employees in

public. Call the individual concerned to your cabin and make him realize his/her mistakes without being rude. Speak to your team members directly rather than passing on messages through someone as information might not reach in its desired form creating misunderstandings and eventually spoiling relationships.

3) **Remember a Manager's role is not just to sit in closed cabins for the whole day :** Sit with

your team members and help them plan their day. Help them in their day to day work.

4) **Managers must be accessible to their team members:** Problems start when employees find

it difficult to get in touch with their bosses. Do keep in touch with them through SMS/ES if not meet them regularly. Lend a sympathetic ear to their problems. Your team members must be able to fall back on you in times of crises.

5) **Intervene immediately in case of conflicts among your subordinates:** Your team members

might fight over petty issues but it is your responsibility to guide them and reduce the chances of a major conflict. Do not ignore even the minor issues. One problem left unattended can become a major concern later.

### Findings:

In the course of the review, some factors were said to have been affecting interpersonal relationship in workplace. These factors are:

That employee's demographics and work environment can in a way affect interpersonal relationship in workplace if not properly managed.

That positive interpersonal relationship in workplace should be rooted in dispositional differences.

That the level of compatibility, communication and interaction settings between workers goes a long way in either improving or hindering interpersonal relationship in workplace.

**Conclusion:**

Valued interpersonal relations positively impact individual attitudes, opinions and organizational outcomes (Dotan, 2009; Morrison, 2004; Maertezt, Gruffeth, Campbell and Allen 2007). This is true for both relationships between workers and relationships between supervisors and subordinates. Furthermore, communicating with others for affection or inclusion eases frustration and job-related anxiety and stress (Anderson and Martin, 1995). Therefore, the need for interpersonal relationships in workplace cannot be over emphasized because positive work relationships help reduce turnover and improve performance by providing functional; test-or career-related benefits.

**Recommendations:**

In view of the findings of this study, the following recommendations were proffered:

- That management intervention may be instrumental in promoting friendships at work, by initiating social activities both inside and outside of the workplace.
- Individual need to get along well with their fellow workers for a positive ambience in workplace and also for healthy interpersonal relationship.

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