
UNIT 4 GLOBALIZATION AND COMMUNICATION SKILLS

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4.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit we will discuss

- how important communication skills are for inter-personal relationships, and
- the use of communication skills in the changing world, especially in India, for young graduates like you.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Communication plays a key role in shaping a person's career. Dr Manmohan Singh, visiting Cambridge University as the Prime Minister of India, remarked: "Of all the legacies of the Ran, none is more important than the English language and the modern school system". This tells us how many benefits accrue to us by learning English. English provides a medium for discourse within India and across the world. With good communication skills and soft skills, one can easily obtain the benefits of globalization and get ready to be a part of emerging India. We should also become aware of the different cultures of countries and how to cope with such variations in culture.

However, there is word of caution. We should learn English, but we should also learn our own languages. Communication skills are important in any language.

4.2 THE CHANGING ECONOMY AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE YOUTH

A new India is emerging. This is an India with an ascending economic trajectory, rising foreign exchange reserves, global recognition for our technological competence, and about 20 million people of Indian origin abroad. The business process outsourcing or BPO market includes a wide range of services such as design, architecture, management, legal services, accounting and drug development.

Quietly but with breathtaking speed, India and its millions of world-class engineering, business and medical graduates are becoming enmeshed in America's New Economy in ways most of us barely imagine.

[Business Week, 8th December 2004]

India ranks high in areas such as quality of work, linguistic capabilities and work ethics. Our experience with English in education and in our own communication gives us an edge, although other countries are now bridging the gap by undertaking the teaching of English on a large scale.

Teachers of English for communication now speak of two types of working English. One is the familiar type of communication between other professionals and workers within the same line of work – for example, engineering, science and the medical profession. The new need is for a second type of working English, where the communication is with people who are not members of the trade or profession themselves.

This is a consequence of the growth of the service industries and the numbers of employees now required to project a corporate image in their dealings with the public. Many employers insist on particular ways of addressing and talking to clients and customers, since this language has become an integral part of the 'service' offered. You may be familiar already with the style of communication, in person or over the telephone, of personnel from fast food outlets, banks or financial institutions, or advertisers and sales promoters. What this means is that we need to learn a variety of language styles, to service a range of corporate roles and identities and be usable for both team work and service interactions with the public.

4.3 EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND SOFT SKILLS

Earlier, only the top officials in organizations used to communicate with their international clients. Juniors and middle level managers did not need to communicate with their international clients. Today the scene has changed. Everyone in an organization has to communicate with their clients, wherever they are. They need to understand their clients' accents and language, and make themselves understood. That is why the new concept of 'accent neutralisation' has gained prominence in the BPO industry. Business communication has now become an interdisciplinary study, synthesizing ideas from psychology, organizational behaviour, mass media, philosophy, cultural studies and interpersonal communication, and forging them with language skills, for effective communication.

More and more corporations around the world recognize that in order to gain a competitive advantage, their people need to know how to handle themselves at work and how to relate with their customers and peers. From showing empathy and

optimism, to conducting oneself with self-awareness, to knowing what's going on around one, these vital competencies are an integral part of a progressive organization. They fall under the umbrella of Emotional Intelligence (EI).

He who knows others is learned; he who knows himself is wise. [Lao-tse]
Self-knowledge is the beginning of self-improvement. [Spanish proverb]

Soft skills are the underlying principles that trademark a company for professionalism and excellent customer service. They provide differentiation between employees and play a vital role in customer loyalty. In today's working environment, where customers and employees are demanding more, minimum acceptable skills are being replaced with higher standards. And among the higher standards are what many call "soft skills".

A soft skill refers to the cluster of personality traits, social graces, felicity with language, personal habits, friendliness, and optimism that marks each of us to varying degrees. Persons who rank high in this cluster, with good soft skills, are generally the people that most employers want to hire. Soft skills complement hard skills, which are the technical requirements of a job. The ideal employee, of course, is someone strong in both job and personal skills. Many academically bright young people are vulnerable in people-management skills.

In the initial years of one's career, technical abilities are important to get good assignments. However, when it comes to growing in an organization, it is your personality that matters, more so in large organizations where several people with similar technical expertise compete for a promotion.

Indeed, it is interesting to note which candidates make the best impression on visiting recruiters. Invariably, it seems that recruiters like the outgoing, friendly, well-adjusted candidates more than those with great qualifications but less acceptable soft skills. And there is no question that personal appearance contributes significantly to a positive reaction.

Don't worry so much about the technical skills. We need you to teach them how to show up on time, how to work in teams, and how to take supervision.
[an employer to an educator]

There may be no easy way to train for soft skills. The basics stem from early childhood and the family environment. But just as you can learn a language after infancy, it is possible to acquire these skills as well, if you develop your awareness about them. We shall list below some of the often-mentioned soft skills.

√ **Check Your Progress 1**

1. Why has the new concept of 'accent neutralisation' gained prominence?

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2. Name some qualities that fall under the umbrella of *Emotional Intelligence (EI)*.

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3. Fill in the blanks:

i. In today's working environment, _____ skills are being replaced with "_____ skills".

ii. _____ Soft skills _____ hard skills.

iii. A soft skill refers to the cluster of personality _____, social _____, _____ with language, personal _____, friendliness, and optimism that marks each of us.

iv. Recruiters like the _____, _____, _____ candidates more than those with great qualifications but less acceptable soft skills. And there is no question that _____ contributes significantly to a positive reaction.

4. Name some services under Business Process Outsourcing (BPO).

4.4 SOFT SKILLS: SOME COMPONENTS

A list of some components of the cluster of soft skills appears below. To these must be added

- the ability to sense and respond to what is required in different environments
- the ability to learn by watching those around you who are the most successful
- the ability to speak, read, and write standard English *appropriately* in a business environment. One may have the "hard" skill of knowing what usage is correct and what usage is incorrect, but lack the "soft" skills of knowing when to use which standard forms, and in what tone to use them; and knowing when to go along with a different kind of usage that your business partner has, because politeness demands it.

4.4.1 A Cluster of Soft Skills

1. Behavioural traits such as attitude, motivation and time management
2. Business etiquette
3. Personal appearance and social graces
4. Team spirit
5. Negotiation skills
6. Problem Solving Ability

7. Leadership qualities
8. Cross-cultural communication
9. Report Writing ability
10. Effective listening

4.4.1.1 Behavioural Traits such as Attitude, Motivation and Time Management

These include the ability

- to arrange one's own tasks for best performance
- to learn from experience
- to ask questions and correct one's mistakes
- to absorb criticism and direction without feeling defeated, resentful, or insulted.

Om Puri, one of our finest actors, was fifteen years old and in the ninth class when he had to find his own money if he wished to continue his studies. His headmaster was sympathetic, and gave him work tutoring younger children. Puri was a bright student, but he found that to teach in a way that his students understood him, he needed to prepare better. So he would get up at 5 a.m. to prepare for his teaching – making notes, jotting down key points, devising problems. At 8 a.m., he went to the home of two of his pupils, where he received a breakfast and a small fee. He would rush to school at ten.

In the afternoon, when he had washed his clothes and utensils, cleaned his room and cooked his lunch, some more students arrived for their lessons. He also had to find time for his own studies, and he finished the day by teaching mathematics in an evening school.

It was a gruelling schedule, but in the three years that he followed it, says Om Puri, he learnt the lessons that helped him in his later life. One lesson was the importance of thorough preparation. "Today, whenever I take up a film assignment, I do a lot of homework. For instance, when I played a weaver, I lived for 15 days among the weavers of Pochampalli village, Andhra Pradesh", says Puri. Here he not only learnt to weave, he carefully studied the mannerisms and behaviour of the craftsmen. "Thanks to this, I was able to bring authenticity to my role."

He also learnt the importance of time management. He now has the reputation of a thorough professional who doesn't waste anyone's time: "I learnt early on that you can get a lot more done if you stick to a schedule."

"Attitude is the mother of luck", says a writer who has been a basketball player and coach in America. "Every life has its setbacks. Facing those setbacks is what keeps you alive.

A well-known pianist from France says: The most humble work does not have to be boring. I remember the old woman who cleaned the floor in my house. She was 80 years old. One day she knocked at my door and said, "Mademoiselle, I know you don't like to be disturbed, but the floor, come and see it; it shines!"

4.4.1.2 Business Etiquette

The habitual use of "Please", "thank you", "excuse me", and "may I help you?" in dealing with customers, supervisors, and colleagues is the minimum etiquette.

Business is built on relationships, but human interaction is fraught with communication landmines that can range from the embarrassing to the punitive.

Missteps in any situation calling for the right business etiquette can severely damage one's own reputation and effectiveness. Mistakes can even hurt the company. In contrast, knowing how to resolve a business etiquette dilemma can win important gains such as building a reputation for trustworthiness and tact. Sending a message that you respect others earns you their respect in turn. Clearly, mastering business etiquette generates valuable results for oneself and one's organization.

"Just as the golden rule of real estate is location, location, location, the golden rule of work is relationships, relationships, relationships" – a human resources consultant

4.4.1.3 Personal Appearance and Social Graces

The ability to choose one's dress, grooming, body language, tone of voice, and vocabulary according to the particular culture of the given workplace is a social grace. To begin with, students should learn to dress at least once in a while in a way that they would dress themselves if they took up a job in a corporate office. Dressing smartly reflects your respect for others and also contributes to one's dignity and self-esteem.

Heard in college: "I don't know how to write my speech-communications paper. I wish I were more intelligent. It's such a difficult topic. I don't think I can do it."
"What's the topic of your paper?"
"Self-esteem."

4.4.1.4 Team Spirit

The concept of "we" rather than "I" is more relevant in the workplace. The ability to

- share responsibilities
- confer with others
- honour commitments
- help others do their jobs, and
- seek help when needed

reflects tolerance and breadth of vision, and helps the quiet, reticent persons in the team to blossom.

"We all play on a number of teams in our lives," says one writer who has been a top basketball player and coach. "As part of a family, as a citizen, as a member of a congregation or a corporation – the rhythms of teamwork have been the rhythms of my life."

A football coach says: "There have been a lot of teams that know the basics of the game and have discipline but don't win matches. Then you come to the third ingredient. If you're going to play together as a team, you've got to care for one another." He continues: "The difference between mediocrity and greatness is the feeling these guys have for each other. Most people call it team spirit."

Although the most quotable remarks on team spirit come from sports, the gentleman speaking above was actually giving advice to the manager of a corporation: “You run a company. It’s the same thing, whether you’re running a ball club or a corporation. After all, does one man build a car all by himself?”

4.4.1.5 Negotiation Skills

The skill of negotiating is a very important skill in communication, especially in business communication. We need to negotiate with customers, suppliers, employees, and trade unions. Some of the basic negotiation skills to be acquired are:

- doing our homework, so that we are fully prepared to discuss every aspect of a task;
- being able to respond to every question and comment;
- being clear in mind about exactly what we are after;
- being persistent – not expecting to “win” the first time;
- making friends with the person with whom we are bargaining; and
- keeping our sense of humour intact!

Some experts believe that “sibling rivalry” – or competitiveness among brothers and sisters – is a good training ground for developing negotiating skills. In families, children learn to negotiate when two people want the same – or different – things. Children also learn how to live with the results of the competition: they see the unhappiness in those who lose, or their own disappointment at losing. More importantly, children come face-to-face with their differences – their strengths as well as their weaknesses. Learning to see differences in a positive light can lead to increased self-esteem and self-awareness.

4.4.1.6 Problem Solving Ability

A colleague of mine once told his son, a young man who was pointing out all the problems that would arise from a proposed move of his father’s, “Don’t create problems – solve them!” Not surprisingly, this young man was also having problems finding a job. His behaviour at home mirrored his behaviour at his workplace.

The hi-tech industry is extremely fast-paced. Employees are constantly being faced with new challenges, both technical and non-technical. Employees will need to be able to solve problems quickly and efficiently in order to keep up. Creativity and innovation are often key qualities that employers look for in potential hires.

4.4.1.7 Leadership Qualities

Not every employee is necessarily going to lead a project in the future. However, with the pace of change and staff growth as well as mobility, many companies are turning to employees for assistance in training and mentoring new team members.

4.4.1.8 Cross-cultural Communication

Communicating across cultures involves:

- understanding *their* culture from *their* perspective, while not making over-generalizations;
- understanding the differences in social values between cultures;

- In India, we traditionally do not address people older than us by their names. In our own languages, we use terms like 'bhayya' or 'didi', sometimes along with the name. When we speak English, we naturally translate these forms of address as 'uncle' or 'aunt'.
 - Outside our country, such a way of addressing a person who is not actually a relative is perceived as odd or unacceptable. In Europe, it is quite common even in primary schools, and in offices, to address teachers or bosses by name.
 - We often ask for someone's "blessings", or say that something has been achieved "with your blessings." We may consider this a form of politeness, but societies where religion and family do not play a central role in all domains of life find this strange. Similarly, the act of touching the feet of elders might be considered servility.
 - In all cultures there are many rituals surrounding food and eating. We may consider it polite, even necessary, to repeatedly offer some food to a guest. The ready acceptance of a second helping can sometimes be mistaken for gluttony in our culture. In the west, "thrusting" food on others amounts to rudeness! Another often-cited example is the middle eastern custom of belching to show appreciation for the food eaten – a sound totally unacceptable to many societies!
 - When it comes to punctuality, considered the politeness of kings, Indians are habitual transgressors. We are in the habit of being late or taking a given time as a rough approximation, notwithstanding our concern for a "good" and a "bad" time for doing something. The Germans, the British, and the Japanese respect to the minute the time printed or verbally specified and expect others to do so as well.
 - Giving or accepting praise or complimenting a colleague or friend also varies across cultures. It is quite normal in the West to compliment a lady on her looks or her dress; it is not construed as unacceptable or overly personal. Modesty and humility about one's own capability, or accepting the praise due to one, can appear hypocritical to a culture where competitiveness requires each person to assess himself or herself as objectively as possible.
- Developing the ability to understand the symbols of the other culture, and not attaching meanings derived from one's own culture:
- Colours have different symbolic values in different cultures, especially white and black. Some cultures wear light colours during the day and dark colours in the evening or night.
 - Not getting personal: asking people about their age, marital status or professional status, their salary, what they paid for a personal item of luggage or clothing, or other personal details too soon after we meet them is a common problem among our countrymen.
- Not using the right body language: for example
- In India, many of us don't nod a 'yes' the way they do in the west (by dropping the head forward towards the chin). We instead have a slower sideways shake of the head – we incline the head sideways. To say 'no,' we shake the head – sideways again, but vigorously! This is why a colleague of mine was asked by her Professor when she was studying in North America for a Ph.D., "Are you agreeing with me, or disagreeing?"

- maintaining an acceptable interpersonal space or distance between yourself and your interlocutor. We shall say more about this when we speak of body language later.
- At international conferences, participants are usually provided with individual chairs. Participants may not be used to continuous, bench-like seating arrangements where we “adjust” to accommodate an additional person. A colleague who organizes international conferences at our institution tells me how embarrassed she was when, in a conference room which had continuous seating, students and other colleagues kept walking in well after the start of a session, and visiting experts were constantly expected to “move up” to accommodate the newcomers. Two cultural rules were simultaneously transgressed: punctuality, and personal space. She now makes sure to get a room which has only individual seating!

In cars nowadays, the front seats are individual seats (called “bucket seats”). This is becoming the standard option, especially with the introduction of seat belts. But this was not the standard option in the 1950s, when the front seat was also a continuous seat, like the back seat. Indeed, a continuous front seat was (and still is) often preferred in our country, as it offers the welcome possibility of seating a third person in front!

Some negative remarks heard about young executives

“They use coloured hankies and white socks, instead of the other way round”

“They wear unpolished shoes, often without socks”

“They roll up their sleeves, wear long ties, and have oily hair”

“They use their index fingers to point, and their body language is ‘excessive’”

“They have poor table and telephone manners”

“They have poor voice control”

“They lack brevity and use superlatives”

“They frequently interrupt when someone is talking”

“They eavesdrop!”

“They do not knock on the door while entering someone’s room”

Lee Iacocca (who was president of the American car companies Ford and Chrysler) tells an amusing, if hard-to-believe, story about why the previous president of the company was fired by Henry Ford (the grandson of Henry Ford, the founder): “I wish I could say that Bunkie got fired because ... his ideas were all wrong. But the actual reason for the firing was nothing like that. Bunkie was fired because he used to walk into Henry’s office without knocking. That’s right – without knocking!”

Although this might seem like a minor wrongdoing, it suggests a level of intimacy or friendship with Ford which offends him. It also disturbs his privacy. Iacocca quotes an aide: “That drives Henry nuts! The door opens, and there’s Bunkie just standing there”.

At an elegant French restaurant, I did not want to embarrass myself by mispronouncing the item on the menu: “*Suprêmes de Volaille à la Normande*”. I pointed to it and said, “I’ll have the chicken please”.

“Sir,” the waiter said indignantly, “that is not just chicken. That is a capon breast marinated in a dry white wine and simmered in cider with sausage”.

As he proceeded haughtily to the next person, I peeked at his order pad. On it was one word: “Chicken”.

4.4.1.9 Report Writing Ability

Reports are a form of upward communication, i.e. to one's superiors. In fact government departments thrive on various kinds of reports. One should be able to present cogently and aesthetically a report on what one wants to do, or has done, by using the right words and the right visuals – such as bullets, graphs and charts – wherever necessary. This is very important because a report is read by more than one person. Reports should be accurate, sequential, coherent, logical, chronological, and above all, honest. (We shall say more about reports in the block on Writing.)

4.4.1.10 Effective Listening

Knowing how to listen effectively in a work environment is the key to understanding the tasks assigned to you. You will then be able to carry them out without supervision. Knowing how to listen is as important as being able to articulate what you want to say.

Most compliments that employees receive deal with your ability to listen more than with your actual knowledge about a particular situation. Most customers appreciate a “willingness to help” and the fact that “(s)he listened to my complaint.” These qualities are what elevate your organization above the competition.

A woman playwright, politician and diplomat was well-known for her ability to disarm those she knew disliked her, especially men who believed she was far too smart and ambitious to be any good. One man recalls an encounter with her: “You know what her secret was?” he says. “She would ask a question, and wonder of wonders, in that buzzing swarm in the middle of a party, she listened. Then she would ask another question and do the same. She gave what was most unlikely – her ear.”

✓ Check Your Progress 2

5. Do the activity suggested below. Which of the ten soft skills discussed above is it designed to develop or promote?

Find a partner. Choose a topic. Let your partner express his or her opinion on it without interruption. Now repeat what your partner has said, without expressing your own opinion. Begin like this: “If I understand you correctly, what you think/feel is that ...”

6. The chief executive office of a scarf-making company has more than 100 employees. Yet she calls every employee on his or her birthday. What soft skill does she display?

7. This chief executive officer also continued to pay a colleague his full salary for four months when he was hospitalized with cancer, and she visited him in hospital. When another employee had personal problems, she gave him the summer off. “She makes her employees feel like part of her family,” says a colleague.

When Lee Iacocca became chief executive officer of Chrysler, then a sick U.S. auto company, he had to ask employees to take a pay cut. Lee called a meeting and announced that for the next year, his salary would be one dollar.

What soft skill do these two stories illustrate?

8. A Professor goes from India to a European country as an examiner for a Ph.D. viva voce, taking with him the only warm formal jacket he has – of a light camel brown colour. At the formal dinner hosted by the University that evening, he is the only person not wearing a dark jacket!

What point in the text does this story relate to?

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9. A colleague was irritated when strangers on the bus in her husband's village would say to her, "Where are you going to?" Later she learnt that in their culture, this was a form of an impersonal greeting. The speakers didn't expect a truthful reply about her destination. Can you think of a common greeting in English that might be similarly misunderstood?

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4.5 LET US SUM UP

- A new India is emerging. India ranks high in areas such as quality of work, linguistic capabilities and work ethics.
- There are two types of working English: one is between professionals and workers within the same line of work, a second with people who are not members of the trade or profession themselves.
- We need to learn a variety of language styles for a range of corporate roles and identities. Everyone in an organization has to communicate with their clients.
- That is why the new concept of 'accent neutralisation' has gained prominence in the BPO industry.
- Business communication is an interdisciplinary study with ideas from psychology, organizational behaviour, mass media, philosophy, cultural studies and interpersonal communication. It forges them with language skills for effective communication.
- People need to know how to handle themselves at work and how to relate with their customers and peers. These vital competencies fall under the umbrella of Emotional Intelligence (EI).
- Those with good soft skills are the people that most employers want to hire. Soft skills complement hard skills, which are technical.
- There may be no easy way to train for soft skills, but it is possible to acquire these skills if you develop your awareness about them.
- Some of the often-mentioned soft skills are:
 1. Behavioural traits such as attitude, motivation and time management
 2. Business etiquette
 3. Personal appearance and social graces
 4. Team spirit
 5. Negotiation skills

6. Problem Solving Ability
7. Leadership qualities
8. Cross-cultural communication

4.6 FURTHER READING

Iacocca: An autobiography, by Lee Iacocca with William Novak, 1984. Bantam Books (Random House).

The Reader's Digest (monthly news magazine).

Columns on management and soft skills in newspapers such as The Hindu and The Times of India.

Effective Business Communication by M M Monippaly, Tata McGraw Hill, Mumbai 200.

Business Communication & Report Writing by GSRK Babu Rao, Himalaya Publishing House, 2003.

Effective Business Communication by Asha Kaul, Princeton Hall of India, 2000.

Developing Communication Skills by Krishna Mohan & Meera Banerji, Macmillan India, 1990

Improve Your Communication Skills by Allan Barker, Kogan Page, 2002

Achievement is the knowledge that you have studied and worked hard and done the best that is in you. Success is being praised by others, and that's nice too, but not as important or satisfying.

[Actress Helen Hayes]

4.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. India's workforce is now part of the new global economy. Earlier, junior people in an organization only needed to communicate with their own superiors or bosses, who in turn communicated with the world outside, including with countries other than India. Now, however, every person in an organization has to be prepared to communicate with every client in any part of the world. People have to be able to understand a variety of accents, and to make themselves understood.
2. The qualities of Emotional Intelligence are those that allow us to relate better with our customers and peers. These qualities are part of how we handle ourselves at work. They include showing empathy or being sensitive to or supportive of others' emotional needs; keeping alive a sense of optimism; to conducting oneself with self-awareness, as well as being aware of what's going on around one.
3.
 - i. minimum acceptable skills, soft
 - ii. complement
 - iii. traits, graces, felicity, habits.
 - iv. outgoing, friendly, well-adjusted; personal appearance

4. The business process outsourcing or **BPO** market includes a wide range of services such as design, architecture, management, legal services, accounting and drug development.
5. This activity promotes effective listening.
6. Business etiquette.
7. Team spirit. These leaders are both building relationships with their workers. "People accept a lot of pain when everybody is going through a bad time together," says Iacocca. By his gesture, he put the company over personal gain. Conversely, by her gesture to employees in trouble, the lady CEO put the employees above her company.
8. Cross-cultural communication, particularly the role of colour as a symbol in the dress code.
9. "How are you?" A person who greets you like this in English does not expect a report on your health!