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PhD Thesis  
Long Abstract

**Improving interpersonal communication  
skills through adaptive training - Influences  
of negotiation styles, perception of trust, and  
personality traits**

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## Abstract

Interpersonal communication skills are some of the most important aspects of everyday life, yet they are among the most difficult to define and assess. Interpersonal skills are vital to the business environment and will become even more important during the transition to the future job market. With this focus expanding and the increased value expected for Interpersonal skills (IPS), there is a strong case for learning more about these skills. Taking into account the high percentage of interpersonal communication skills as a percentage of total interpersonal skills, the current study focused on interpersonal communication skills.

Three independent variables; personality characteristics, interpersonal trust, and negotiation styles and two control variables; gender and age were examined to determine their impact on the improvement in interpersonal communication skills following a one-time training session. The training focused on the ten interpersonal competence skills (ICCS). In addition, this study explored the ability to develop an adaptive intervention plan based on a variety of variables in order to improve interpersonal communication skills within the context of the labor market. The study employed a mixed-methods approach. First, questionnaires were used to collect information from participants. A one-time 4-hour interpersonal skills training was conducted in the second phase. During professional training, participants undergo a specific program designed to enhance these skills. In the third stage, participants completed the same questionnaires again. A total of 127 participants met the conditions of the study. A focus group of 10 participants from the training program was gathered in the fourth stage. In the final phase, information from the quantitative and qualitative courses of study was triangulated.

There was a slight improvement in assertiveness in the dependent variable, interpersonal communication skills. The regression model was tested on the overall variable of interpersonal communication skills. In both the total index and some dimensions of communication skills, the percentage of explained variance ( $r^2$ ) was significantly higher after the workshop than before. A significant improvement was found in the emotional stability following the workshop. The level of competing decreased compared to the level measured before the training.

Participation in the workshop improved the level of self-disclosure among women, compared to a decrease among men. The level of immediacy, interaction management and supportiveness of women were higher than that of men conversely, men level of assertiveness is higher than women. The level of assertiveness of young people under the age of 30 was the lowest before the training, and improved most significantly after the workshop, compared to older ages. The level of interaction management of young people under the age of 30 was the lowest before the workshop, and improved most significantly after the workshop, compared to older ages. As the age increases, the level of interaction management is higher. The research indicates that the workshop had an impact on improving communication skills through a one-time intervention program. This is when its purpose was to improve interpersonal communication skills.

The qualitative research supports two components of interpersonal situations, motivation, and the effects of the situation, while further clarifying the topic of motivation by distinguishing between internal motivation, as expressed in awareness and attitude, and external motivation, as expressed in life experience. There are two types of analytical abilities involved in the interpersonal situation: the ability to analyze the situation before and during the interpersonal interaction, both from the perspective of the other party and from an external, objective viewpoint. In a one-time intervention, age was a significant determinant of improvement in interpersonal skills, which was also linked to the qualitative part of the study as well as other studies tying age to other elements of life experience as predictors.

Qualitative research consistently showed that trainees found the training effective, despite it being a one-time event. This study was conducted with minimal resources and time expenditure and proved to be effective. It is possible to raise participants' awareness of interpersonal communication principles through a one-time training program. A wide range of organizations can benefit from the workplace interventions offered by this study, including interpersonal communication skills training. In this way, the quality of relationships within an organization can be enhanced over time. Future research should be conducted to determine whether these programs should be tailored to specific industries, business sectors, and types of organizations. A continuous adaptable training program should be tested among managers in the field over time.

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# **Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION**

## **1.1 Nature of the problem**

Interpersonal communication skills are some of the most important aspects of everyday life, yet they are among the most difficult to define and assess. With this focus expanding and the increased value expected for Interpersonal skills (IPS), there is a strong case for learning more about these skills. Interpersonal skills are vital to the business environment and will become even more important during the transition to the future job market.

## **1.2 Gap of knowledge**

There is a clear need for interpersonal skills training, and more empirical studies are needed to develop an effective model. Based on studies that indicate employers view interpersonal communication skills as the predominant mode of interpersonal skills required for job performance and based on the high proportion of interpersonal communication skills as a percentage of total interpersonal skills, the current study focused on interpersonal communication skills, as interpersonal communication skills are regarded as a top concern for promoting employees to executive level positions.

## **1.3 Rationale for the research**

IPS have been found to be associated with important workplace outcomes, such as task performance, job dedication, interpersonal facilitation, and overall performance. However, the relationships observed between IPS and outcomes are generally not consistent across studies.

### **1.3.1 Are interpersonal skills trainable?**

It may be more challenging to develop interpersonal skills than to learn hard skills. Training transfer may still be facilitated by generic content in training methods. The question remains, however, whether IPS training should incorporate general principles rather than focus on specific behaviors. A few studies contend that interpersonal and supervisory skills training focuses less on teaching specific behaviors than on instilling generalizable principles.

### 1.3.2 Interpersonal skills antecedents

Several possible antecedents of IPS have been identified in the literature. Among the most researched antecedents, gender and different personality traits stand out. The impact of additional antecedents on interpersonal skills training outcomes needs to be examined. Understanding IPS antecedents will help us better understand the entire domain of interpersonal skills.

### 1.4 Researcher's personal experience

Throughout my twenty years in intelligence and special operations, I have learned, experienced, and deepened my interpersonal skills. Over the last few years, I have been lecturing and training students and executives in organizations from the private, public, and social sectors regarding interpersonal skills. This research provides me with a significant opportunity to deepen my understanding of a topic that has been a concern for me for twenty-five years and to try to develop a model to improve interpersonal skills as they relate to the labor market.

### 1.5 Research problem

It may prove challenging to identify strong or even significant predictors of IPS since these behaviors tend to be situation specific. This study examines the influence of three main antecedents: trust, negotiation style, and personality characteristics on improving interpersonal communication skills among managers from various hierarchical positions that maintain interpersonal communication by virtue of their positions. This study also explores evidence regarding potential differential effects of IPS training by demographic variables gender and age. In addition to examining the effects of training before and after the training, this study addressed the need to develop an adaptive intervention plan based on a range of variables for improving interpersonal communication skills within the business environment.

## 1.6 Research goals

This thesis consists of four main objectives derived from the problem analysis:

- To explore the impact of personality traits on improving interpersonal skills
- To explore the relationship between perception of trust and improving interpersonal skills
- To explore the relationship between negotiation approaches and improving interpersonal skills
- To develop an adaptive interpersonal skills training program based on the interconnection between several fields of knowledge

## 1.7 Research questions

The following research questions were developed to address the problem statement:

1. How do personality traits affect the ability to improve interpersonal skills?
2. How does the perception of trust affect the ability to improve interpersonal skills?
3. How does the approach to negotiation relate to the ability to develop interpersonal skills?
4. What components may be included in an interpersonal skills adaptive learning program based on a link between several knowledge worlds?

## 1.8 Research limitations

This paper presents an overview of current research within a clearly defined framework. The rationale of the research is to conduct field research within the routine of business activities in organizations, by a single researcher, within a relatively short period of time, with limited contact with participants. The field study examines the improvement in interpersonal communication skills only through ten categories among managers of different levels and different organizations through a one-time training and self-report of the research participants before and after the training, as well as a focus group selected from among the participants.

## 1.10 Contribution and significance of the research

Considering interpersonal skills are a critical component of the current and future labor market, and assuming people have different levels of interpersonal skills and different awareness of these skills, as long as the factors affecting these skills can be identified, it will be easier for organizations to recruit and train their teams.

Organizations will gain a significant learning curve by using adaptive training programs that consider the heterogeneous dynamics within a team at work.

At both a theoretical and managerial level, this research has a unique contribution to make. At the theoretical level, I have identified a few variables that can predict the improvement in interpersonal skills following training. At the managerial level, in order to improve interpersonal skills among managers in organizations, I developed a framework for one-time training. In response to the changing labor market, this research may contribute to strengthening interpersonal communication skills in the modern workplace.

## **Chapter 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

### 2.1 Preview

Three stages make up the literature review chapter. The first chapter begins with description of the key concepts, and relating them to the topic of the research. An overview of the development of interpersonal skills over time is presented in the second chapter. Next, training and assessment of interpersonal skills are examined, and the third chapter discusses how interpersonal skills relate to the workplace.

### 2.2 Literature review key concepts

According to the professional literature, the following key concepts were examined in the chapter: Interpersonal skills (IPS), Social skills, Soft skills, Soft skills vs hard skills, Communication skills.

## 2.3 The development of interpersonal skills research over the years

Throughout the years, research on interpersonal skills has been focused on a variety of topics. They are reviewed in the chapter.

## 2.4 Interpersonal skills training

Several studies on interpersonal skills training demonstrate the need for training and development of interpersonal skills, as well as the need to develop an effective model to meet that need. A person's personality cannot be changed, but interpersonal skills can be improved through training. Due to an increase in IPS expenditures, these training interventions are becoming more common. Soft skills training is increasingly being invested in by organizations. IPS training has been widely recognized for its value. There has been conflicting research on the long-term effects of train and develop programs.

### 2.4.1 Interpersonal skill training methods and principles

IPS training can be successfully conducted in a variety of ways, some of which are more effective than others. There are basically four options: (a) learning on the job, (b) cognitive educational methods, (c) group training, and (d) role playing.

Four key elements of an effective training program have been identified in the literature: Information, demonstrations, practice, and feedback (I-D-P-F). The combination of these components not only leads to greater learning, but also helps ensure that newly acquired knowledge, skills, and attitudes will be applied in the workplace.

### 2.4.3 IPS training effectiveness

Interpersonal skills training can be measured in several ways. Comparing different training programs is one direction. A second approach involves isolating variables and comparing their effects. Other studies examine different antecedents and mediators. The literature also discusses the duration of effective training. Research has shown that training affects different skills differently.

## 2.5 Interpersonal skill assessment and measurement

Literature on the subject discusses ways to assess and measure interpersonal skills. Assessing IPS competencies involves understanding the skills captured in the IPS taxonomies that may be trainable, often before and after training. Several assessment strategies stand out in business settings for assessing interpersonal skills: Questionnaires, likert-type scales, behavioral observation scales, self-ratings, peer evaluations, situation judgment tests. There are several components of the affective IPS, including self-efficacy, satisfaction, and a range of motivational characteristics including goals, desires, needs, efforts, and values.

Assessment of IPS for training support involves identifying IPS characteristics, developing training programs tailored to specific IPS characteristics, and evaluating training outcomes. IPS assessments have three purposes: Identifying candidates for IPS training, identifying the specific IPS to be trained, and identifying the acquisition of trained IPS.

A natural part of training programs is the evaluation of their effectiveness. A successful training program should produce the desired results, such as increased performance or behavior change. In general, researchers and trainers agree that evaluating soft skills training is more challenging than evaluating hard skills training.

## 2.6 Interpersonal skills and the workplace

The concept of soft skills is sometimes also referred to as employability skills. There is compelling evidence that soft skills can improve an individual's ability to perform at a job and help them advance in their careers. The literature review also found that soft skills play a significant role in labor market outcomes. The impact of interpersonal skills on a range of workplace parameters, including mobility, promotion, and salary, has been documented. Regardless of the industry, soft skills have become a crucial and increasingly sought-after quality for corporate careers. Soft skills are a new way to describe abilities that an individual brings to the workplace. As these skills have become increasingly important, significant funding is spent on IPS training programs to improve these skills. It is likely that interpersonal skills will

become more important in the future workplace, along with the growth of the global digital economy .

## 2.7 Main theories

This section presents the key theories and models used in the present study regarding interpersonal communication skills:

### 1. A conceptual model of skilled interpersonal communication

In the first theory, Hargie's (2017) model is used. Communicating effectively while engaging in appropriate social behavior is one of the elements of communication skills, according to the model. The model identifies six elements of skilled interpersonal communication: Person-situation context, goal, Mediating processes, response, feedback and perception. Three assumptions underlie the model. The first assumption- people act purposely. The second- they are sensitive to the effects of their action. The third- they take steps to modify subsequent action in the light of this information.

### 2. IPS applied training method

According to the second theory, interpersonal skills training can be effective if it adheres to the following five principles (Bailey & Butcher, 1983): Experience plays a key role, developing skills, encouraging self-reflection. sharing emotions and learning sequentially.

### 3. The behavior modeling training

The third theory is Bandura's social learning theory (1977), which emphasizes four processes which can be applied in training interpersonal skills: attentional, retentional, reproductional, and motivational processes. There are four major learning activities associated with BMT: Modeling, role play, positive reinforcement and facilitating the transfer of training to the workplace.

#### 4. Theoretical and conceptual soft skills model

Based on the research of Martin-Zapata et al., (2021), the fourth theory explains how soft skills relate to other constructs, such as skills, abilities, personality, and behavior. The model also proposes that soft skills can be divided into intra and interpersonal types.

#### 4. Interpersonal skills assessment theories

Gibb (2013) conducted a meta-analysis of three theories in the fifth theory: (a) control theory, (b) goal setting theory, and (c) attribution theory. A comprehensive assessment of interpersonal skills should include cognitive, emotional, and social factors, with an emphasis on receiving formative feedback and assessment. Control theory explains behavior by means of feedback loops. Unlike control theory, in which the self alone is dominant, and goal theory, in which the social context is dominant, attribution theory involves both the self and the social context.

#### 5. Action assembly theory (AAT)

The sixth theory was developed by Greene & Buralson (2003) and addresses the thought processes that allow us to speak and move. Essentially, the theory focuses on how we formulate and produce our verbal and nonverbal messages. Interpersonal communication is inevitably characterized by mutual influence.

#### 6. The five axioms of interpersonal communication by Palo-Alto group

The seventh and final theory is based on the work of Watzlawick and Beavin (1967). The theory is based on five axioms which recognize the complexity of interpersonal relationships. The first axiom states that it is impossible not to communicate. A second axiom is that all communications have to do with both relationships and content. The third axiom refers to communicators' tendency to punctuate their behavior. The fourth axiom is that communication involves both digital and analog codes. The fifth and final axiom states that interactions can be symmetrical or complementary. Communicators who behave in the same way are behaving symmetrically.

## 2.8 The variables

This section presents the variables selected for the study based on the literature review and research objectives:

### 2.8.1 Interpersonal Communication Competence Scale (ICCS)

Compared with previous measures, the ICCS (Rubin & martin, 1994), has greater content validity, since it taps into the multiple facets of ICC found in the literature of interpersonal relationships. Several studies have found that it is extremely useful for interpersonal communication training. The ten dimensions of competence: Self-disclosure, Empathy, Social relaxation, Assertiveness, Interaction management, Alter centrism, Expressiveness, Supportiveness, Immediacy and Environmental control.

### 2.8.2 Big-Five personality inventory

As an extremely short measure of personality traits based on the characteristics Extraversion, Agreeability, Conscientiousness, Emotional Stability, Intellect or Openness to Experience, the Big-Five Inventory (BFI) was developed in the late 1980s (John et al., 1991) and has since been validated in many studies.

### 2.8.3 Interpersonal trust

According to several studies, trust is one of the most important components of a successful, well-functioning relationship. It may even be the most important ingredient. Trust has three dimensions: an affective state, a conceptual concept, and a desired behavior (Cummings & Bromiley, 1996).

### 2.8.4 Behavioral approach to negotiation

TKI (Thomas and Kilmann Instrument) is a valid tool for assessing the characteristic approach or style to negotiation or conflict situations (Kilmann & Thomas, 1977). Based on the dual concern model, TKI can be categorized into two dimensions: (1) concern for satisfying one's own needs, which is called assertiveness, and (2) concern for satisfying the needs of others, which is called cooperativeness. According to the TKI, there are five bargaining styles: Competing, Accommodating Avoiding, Collaborating and Compromising.

As this chapter continues, the literature is reviewed for the relationship between the variables.

## 2.9 Research hypotheses

Based on the theoretical part, the following hypotheses can be formulated:

H1: Big-5 personality traits will be positively related with improvement of interpersonal communication skills

H1.a: Agreeableness will be positively related with improvement of interpersonal communication skills

H1.b: Conscientiousness will be positively related with improvement of interpersonal communication skills

H1.c: Emotional stability will be positively related with improvement of interpersonal communication skills

H1.d: Extraversion will be positively related with improvement of interpersonal communication skills

H1.e: Openness to experience will be positively related with improvement of interpersonal communication skills

Hypothesis 2: A prominent level of trust will be related with improvement of interpersonal communication skills

Hypothesis 3: A difference will be found in improvement of interpersonal communication skills between collaborative and competitive approach

Hypothesis 4: Female participants will show higher improvement in interpersonal skills after the training program than male participants

Hypothesis 5 - No correlation will be found between the participants' age and improvement in their interpersonal skills

Hypothesis 6- The participant's level of interpersonal communication skills after training will be higher than before training

## **Chapter 3: METHODS AND PROCEDURES**

### **3.1 Introduction to methodology**

An investigation of the effects of three valid variables combined with two demographic variables, which have the potential to affect interpersonal skills, was carried out using a training program.

### **3.2 Research methodology: Mixed-method design**

In order to analyze the issue of interpersonal skills improvement and its predictive factors in more detail, the study was divided into four phases. As part of the first phase, questionnaires were used to gather information from participants in the action plan. In the second phase, interpersonal skills training was conducted on a one-time basis. In the third stage, the participants of the training program completed the same questionnaires for the second time. In the fourth stage, participants from the training program were gathered as a focus group for the qualitative portion of the research.

### **3.3 Triangulation of methods**

Triangulation was used to obtain a comprehensive and balanced picture of the information gathered from the quantitative and qualitative courses of study as well as to ensure the validity and quality of this study. The results of the study can be more confidently analyzed when different methods are used.

### **3.6 Research population**

In this study, managers from diverse professional fields, managing level and experience backgrounds within business organizations at distinct size in Israel who manage interpersonal interactions, including internal and external factors, as part of their responsibilities were chosen to participate in the study. A total of 160 participants attended the training, and 10 volunteers from among the training participants who met the research profile participated in the focus group.

### 3.7 Research approach: Action research

This study used an action-oriented methodology. The training focused on Rubin and Martin's ten interpersonal competence skills. Training involved didactic teaching separated by demonstrations of specific communication skills and their consequences, discussion of difficulties in changing behavior, sharing experiences, identifying good and less effective communication skills from scenarios, and rehearsing effective communication skills in everyday scenarios. A standardized protocol was used to ensure consistency across the training groups. The participants completed a four-hour training session over a few months, with 25 trainees participating each time. Measures the data was collected through a structured self-report survey before and after the training. The methodology included a lecture, discussion, modeling several tactics for managing interpersonal communication individual and group exercises with subsequent feedback, rehearsing effective communication skills from the participants everyday scenarios. The interpersonal meeting was divided into five phases: the preparation phase, the informal phase, the dialogue phase, the summary phase, and the ending phase. The characteristics of each stage, as well as the emphases of its execution and the skills that are reflected at each stage, were described. A four-dimension preparation phase was involved in preparing for interpersonal interaction: setting goals, creating an appropriate climate, choosing the appropriate time and duration, and self-preparing a mindset of curiosity. The informal phase consisted of five elements: establishing a suitable environment, generating interest, connecting with others, setting the context, and conveying messages. Five aspects of the dialogue phase were involved: initiating the formal phase of the interaction, listening actively, the art of asking questions, self-expression and exploring needs. As part of the fourth stage, the agreements reached during the interaction were summarized. A final stage is the stage of concluding the interpersonal interaction, creating positive momentum, and emphasizing the outcomes.

### 3.8 Role of the researcher

I am involved in two different aspects of the research. In addition to my position as a PhD student, I am also an independent interpersonal skills lecturer. In the planning and execution of the study, all measures necessary to avoid a conflict of interest between these two roles were taken. The chapter also discusses procedural ethics?

## Chapter 5: FINDINGS FROM QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH

Prior to the comprehensive field study, a pilot study was conducted to validate the program, evaluate its effectiveness, and examine the data with a limited number of participants.

### 5.1 Quantitative chapter introduction

The participants voluntarily participated in a workshop held on several dates: July 2022, November 2022, December 2022, January 2023, and February 2023. Finally, only participants who filled out the research questionnaire in two periods of time, before and after the workshop, are included. The research report is based on the answers of 127 respondents who filled out the questionnaire twice: 71 women who are 55.9% of the sample, and 56 men who are 44.1% of the sample. The average age is 40.9 years (standard deviation 14.0), the age range is 21-84.

### 5.8 Findings summary

#### Interpersonal Communication Skills

- In the dependent variable - **Interpersonal communication skills**: there were no significant differences in the subjects' interpersonal communication skills following participation in the workshop, except for a slight improvement in the **Assertiveness** dimension.
- Participation in the workshop improved the level of **Self-disclosure** among women, compared to a decrease among men.
- The level of **Assertiveness** of young people under the age of 30 was the lowest before the workshop, and improved most significantly after the workshop, compared to older ages.
- The level of **Interaction management** of young people under the age of 30 was the lowest before the workshop, and improved most significantly after the workshop, compared to older ages.

### Personality trait

- A significant improvement was found in the **Emotional stability** following the workshop.

### Negotiation approach

- Following the participation in the workshop, the level of **Competing** decreased compared to the level measured before the workshop.

### Gender- related differences

#### Interpersonal communication skills

- The level of **Immediacy, Interaction management and Supportiveness** of women were higher than that of men.
- Conversely, men level of **Assertiveness** was higher than women.

### Age-related differences

- As the age increases, the level of **Interaction management** was higher.
- The higher the age, the lower the level of **Empathy**.

### Regression models

- The model was tested on an overall variable of **Interpersonal communication skills**. Following the workshop, the percentage of explained variance (r squared) was significantly higher than before, which indicated a significant increase in the percentage of communication skills explained by the model, both in the total index and in some dimensions. The research indicates that the workshop had a fundamental impact on improving communication skills through an intervention program. This is when its purpose was to improve communication skills.
- Following the workshop, an elevated level of personality traits (Extraversion, Emotional stability, Openness to Experience), trust, and a negotiation approach (accommodating), predicted an elevated level of interpersonal communication.
- Participating in the workshop changed the way people associate negotiation techniques and personality traits with **Interaction management**.

## Assessing the changes before/after the workshop, with an Intervening variable

### - Extraversion (Personality traits)

- Among people with **Low extraversion**, the level of **Self-disclosure** increased after the workshop, compared to those with high extraversion who showed the opposite trend. Before the workshop there was a significant gap between the two groups in the Self Disclosure ratings, while participation in the workshop reduced the gap to a small difference.
- Among people with **High extraversion**, the level of **Empathy** increased after the workshop, compared to those with low extraversion who showed the opposite trend. Before the workshop there was no gap between the two groups in **Empathy** ratings, while participation in the workshop increased the gap between the groups.
- Among people with **Low extraversion**, the level of **Assertiveness** increased after the workshop, compared to those with high extraversion who showed the opposite trend. Before the workshop there was a significant gap between the two groups in **Assertiveness** ratings, while participation in the workshop narrowed the gap to a small difference.
- Among people with low extraversion, the level of **Competing** did not change after the workshop, compared to those with high extraversion who showed strong decreased.
- Among people with low Extraversion the level of **Accommodating** didn't change following participation in the workshop, while among people with high Extraversion the ratings of Accommodating increased following the workshop. Before the workshop there was a gap between the two groups in Accommodating ratings, while participation in the workshop narrowed the gap to a small difference.

### Intervening variable - Conscientiousness (Personality traits)

- Among people with **low Conscientiousness** the level of **Assertiveness** increased following the workshop, while among people with high Conscientiousness the level of Assertiveness almost didn't change.
- Among people with **low Conscientiousness** the level of **Supportiveness** increased following the workshop, while among people with high

Conscientiousness the level of **Supportiveness** didn't change at all following the workshop.

Intervening variable - Openness to Experience (Personality traits)

- Among people with **low Openness to Experience** the level of **Self-disclosure** increased following the workshop, while among people with high Openness to Experience the level of Self-disclosure decreased a little following the workshop.
- Among people with **low Openness to Experience** the level of **Expressiveness** increased a little following the workshop, while among people with high Openness to Experience the level of **Expressiveness** decreased a little following the workshop. Following the workshop, the gap between the two groups narrowed.
- Among people with low Openness to Experience the level of **Immediacy** increased a little following the workshop, while among people with high Openness to Experience the level of **Immediacy** decreased a little following the workshop. Following the workshop, the gap between the two groups narrowed.

Negotiation management styles as an intervening variable

Intervening variable - Accommodating (Negotiation management styles )

- Among people with **low Accommodating**, the level of **Interpersonal communication skills** decreased following the workshop, while among people with **high Accommodating** the level of interpersonal communication skills increased following the workshop.

## **Chapter 6: Findings from qualitative research**

The qualitative part is related to the research question number 4: What components may be included in an interpersonal skills adaptive learning model based on a link between several knowledge worlds?

A small focus group had 10 participants confirm their participation, which corresponds to a response rate of 43%. There were 3 women and 7 men in the focus group, aged between 23 and 59. Volunteers were selected from the training group. It lasted sixty minutes and followed all the rules in the literature.

The focus group analysis revealed two themes. A first theme includes the experiences of trainees in training interpersonal skills, which are divided into three categories: competence improvement, responsibility, and motivation. In the second theme, there are three related categories of interpersonal skills between me and the other party, which include the situation, perspective, and trust.

## **Chapter 7: DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS**

### **7.2 Research question 1: How do personality traits affect the ability to improve interpersonal skills?**

An in-depth examination of an intervening variable found that those with more solid personality characteristics such as low extraversion and high conscientiousness made an improvement in skills that require more activity such as assertiveness, empathy, supportiveness, open to experience and self-disclosure, while those with less solid personality characteristics showed a smaller improvement or even decreased in these skills following the training. These findings confirm previous findings which revealed that extraverts, agreeable, conscientious individuals, and individuals with a high degree of self-efficacy, based on their own assessments, exhibit higher levels of self-disclosure, social relaxation, expressiveness, immediacy, and empathy. As such, this set of skills represents half of the competencies examined in the study, in addition to representing a mix of self-oriented and other-oriented skills.

Interestingly, a link emerged between those with an elevated level of extraversion and assertiveness, but a low level of agreeableness and conscientiousness (outgoing incompetence). These variables did not correlate with immediacy, supportiveness, alter centrism, or empathy, as stated by Hullman et al., (2010). In the current study, individuals with high extraversion demonstrated an increase in empathy following the workshop, as opposed to those with low extraversion, who demonstrated the opposite result. The level of assertiveness increased after the workshop among individuals with low extraversion, whereas the level of assertiveness decreased among individuals with high extraversion. However, the training narrowed the gap to a small amount.

### 7.3 Research question 2: How does the perception of trust affect the ability to improve interpersonal skills?

According to the current study, trust did not predict improvement in interpersonal skills significantly. As a result of the significantly short duration of training, a variable such as trust may not be adequately elicited. In addition, the measurement tool chosen for the trust variable may not be appropriate for assessing trust within the context of interpersonal communication skills.

### 7.4 Research question 3: How does the approach to negotiation relate to the ability to develop interpersonal skills?

Following the participation in the workshop, the level of Competing decreased compared to the level measured before the workshop. Following the workshop, the respondents rated the level of Competing as lower (3.7) compared to how they rated themselves before participating in the workshop (4.2). There was a distinct improvement in assertiveness among the ten interpersonal communication skills. The level of competitiveness of those with a competitive approach decreased following the training. According to the present study, those with a competitive style, whose assertiveness is channeled in a certain manner, direct their assertiveness more towards cooperation and less toward competition following interpersonal communication skills training. It should also be noted that the young people were also found to be less assertive before the training and more assertive after the training. This group also made an improvement in interaction management. A conclusion can be drawn from this study that interpersonal communication skills can be sharpened by training in such a way that the quality of their performance is enhanced.

### 7.5 Research question 4: What components may be included in an interpersonal skills adaptive learning program based on a link between several knowledge worlds?

#### 7.5.1 Control variable gender

In the present study, a significant difference in immediacy was obtained before the workshop: women perceived their level of immediacy (4.4) as higher compared to men (4.1). Few less significant but valuable differences were found between men and women in the interaction management and supportiveness variables: the women rating

was higher than men. On the other hand, in the assertiveness variable, men gave higher scores than women, like Klein's research findings (2009). The differences in assertiveness between men and women remained unchanged after the workshop. However, differences in alter centricism between the two groups showed a significant increase, with women scoring higher than men.

According to this study, self-disclosure was significantly influenced by gender. A significant interaction between gender and self-disclosure was observed: In the course of the workshop, self-disclosure was slightly higher among men (3.9) than among women (3.8), but after the workshop, self-disclosure was higher among women (3.9) than it was among men (3.7). Therefore, although the ratings did not change across the entire sample, there appear to be differences between men and women in response to the workshop on the self-disclosure variable.

In addition to verifying previous findings regarding gender differences in interpersonal skills, the study presents alternative methods and highlights to improve these skills between men and women. However, the differences are not substantial, and gender is not a significant factor predicting interpersonal communication skills improvement.

#### 7.5.2 Control variable age

According to the present study, as the age increases, the level of interaction management increases, and as the age increases, the level of empathy decreases. There were no differences between the age groups before and after the training.

#### 7.5.4 Discussion of the qualitative research findings

Focus group participants expressed overwhelming agreement that the training had improved their interpersonal skills. Two themes arose from the discussion group. The first theme refers to the experience of the trainee. This puzzle is divided into three subcategories. The first deals with the improvement process as experienced by the discussion participants. Consequently, practical tools for the labor market are reflected in this improvement. As a reminder, the participants of the discussion group are managers who deal with interpersonal interactions as part of their daily work. In the second part of this category, participants discussed the issue of continuous

training. The repeated words are "practical tools" and "implementation". Among the participants, as well as experiencing improvement, there was agreement that assimilation and practice of the tools was necessary in order to avoid working "on automatic" as they experienced in the first part of the training. The literature has addressed this topic extensively over the years and it is outside the scope of this study. For the next category, participants discussed responsibility or accountability as a factor that contributed to training success. Two words appeared in this category - "mutual expectations" and "responsibility perception". It is surprising that accountability has not been integrated into transfer models and measures even though several studies have shown direct and indirect implications for integrating accountability into transfer interventions. The third category in the first theme refers to motivation. Participants divided into two categories: internal motivation to improve interpersonal skills, which is reflected in how they approach training and is also related to their approach to responsibility for improving interpersonal skills and external motivations, which are determined by factors such as life experience, age, organizational or material incentives. Research has shown that motivation and enthusiasm are more important predictors of interpersonal skills training effectiveness than program length.

In the discussion group, the second theme was the interpersonal situation. This theme is divided into two categories. The first category is the perspective through which the situation is viewed. My perspective, the other perspective of the situation, and the third perspective of the situation. The second category refers to trust. Within this context, there was agreement regarding trust as a fundamental element of interpersonal relationships. As part of their improvement in training, participants noted the need to identify gaps in trust as part of their ability to place trust in the other side as well as our ability to inspire trust.

### 7.5.5 Triangulation

As part of this analysis, triangulation was used to get a complete and more balanced picture of qualitative and quantitative information. After analyzing the results of the focus group and quantitative research questionnaires, it is evident that short and focused interpersonal communication skills training has a primarily positive impact

on increasing awareness, pattern recognition, and responsibility for interpersonal communication skills components. In the interpersonal space, it enables approaches such as competitiveness, assertiveness, openness to experience and emotional stability to be more effective. Both women and men can participate in the training. Besides age, other factors related to life experience influence motivation to improve skills.

Overall, the findings from this study further support what was discovered in previous studies that interpersonal communication skills can be developed. Although not all skills are affected by training in the same way, but an improvement can be seen in a short but effective intervention. Generally, the training has modest but positive results, in that most before/after group means are positive. The findings are integrated into other studies that evaluate the value of the behavior modeling plans to improve interpersonal skills. Results of this study provide satisfactory evidence of the effectiveness of these interventions.

The qualitative research supports two components of interpersonal situations, motivation, and the effects of the situation, while further clarifying the topic of motivation by distinguishing between internal motivation, as expressed in awareness and attitude, and external motivation, as expressed in life experience. There are two types of analytical abilities involved in the interpersonal situation: the ability to analyze the situation before and during the interpersonal interaction, both from the perspective of the other party and from an external, objective viewpoint.

## **Chapter 8: CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE STUDIES**

### **8.1 Conceptual conclusions**

A total of four objectives were set forth in the research. The first objective was to explore the impact of personality traits on improving interpersonal skills. The second was to explore the relationship between perception of trust and improving interpersonal skills. The third was to explore the relationship between negotiation approaches and improving interpersonal skills. The fourth objective was to determine whether it was possible to construct a model or program that predicts interpersonal skills improvements. All the objectives were accomplished.

Following a series of studies examining different directions around the research topic, the present study attempts to take a step forward. Over the past several years, there has been a sustained focus on interpersonal skills in various aspects of life. The literature review revealed that there are still many opportunities to explore and evaluate soft skills from a wide range of perspectives. As a response to some of the challenges posed by the research literature, this study examined the path that a trainee goes through in interpersonal skills development training by examining several variables. There is some evidence that interpersonal skills training is effective. However, the quantitative findings indicate slight improvement. The qualitative research, however, consistently confirmed that the training was effective in the eyes of the trainees, even though it was a one-time event.

Among the variables selected for the study, personality characteristics continue to provide results which demonstrate the relationship between personality characteristics and interpersonal skills development. Following the workshop, participants showed an enhanced level of extroversion, emotional stability, and openness to experiences, as well as trust and an accommodating approach to negotiations. Although trust did not yield significant results in this study, future studies should consider its accuracy. However, trust emerged as a significant variable among participants in focus groups, strengthening its importance in interpersonal skills research.

Negotiation approaches have shown partial results in research. Following participation in the workshop, the level of Competing decreased relative to the level measured before the workshop. I believe that if the training had been variable continuous, it would have manifested itself in a higher degree of intensity.

In a one-time intervention, age was a significant determinant of improvement in interpersonal skills, which was also linked to the qualitative part of the study as well as other studies tying age to other elements of life experience as predictors.

Given that resources such as time and money dictate a relatively short training program, interpersonal skills development programs must consider the personal characteristics of the trainees, specifically the groups of trainees. This will increase the effectiveness of the training. Furthermore, it is important to emphasize not only the skills themselves, but also the interpersonal situations and the ability to understand

the situation from the partner's perspective as well as from a broader perspective during the situation. As a result, the relationship quality can be enhanced over time, an extremely important aspect of relations within an organization.

### 8.3 Implications

This study supports the basic idea that individuals differ in terms of their level of IPS. It is important to note, however, that some of this variation can be better understood based on gender and age. Additional variables examined in the study, personality characteristics, level of trust and approach to negotiation, provided differences regarding the ability to make an improvement in an individual's interpersonal skills regardless of the baseline level of IPS, and they should be considered as contributing factors to the effectiveness with which IPS are administered. Therefore, while an IPS can certainly be developed, it is likely that some roles or positions will be more suitable for certain individuals based on a unique combination of characteristics and other factors. Consequently, standard guidance may be developed as a resource for organizational decision makers concerned about the development of interpersonal skills within their organizations as a result of the research.

The research may give those in positions in the organization the tools to carry out recruitment, evaluation, and career development processes during the employee's tenure in the organization and serve as a solid basis for these important tasks. As a result of the study, all officials within an organization need to be trained in interpersonal communication skills, in a short and timely manner, to improve their skills at the personal level, which will manifest themselves in their level of satisfaction and advancement throughout their employment with the organization. By evaluating interpersonal skills, organizations can specify development processes, identify potential, and retain employees by using the model.

### 8.5 Limitations

In addition to the expected contributions from the research products, I would like to point out five limitations. First, the study chose a valid variable that breaks down interpersonal communication skills into ten competence skills resulting in awfully specific findings, despite there being a few ways to measure interpersonal

communication skills. It is possible that other, more general measures would have led to different results. Second, Research was conducted on managers from a variety of professional backgrounds, organizational positions, and sizes. These conditions allowed only two factors to differentiate participants: age and gender. This reduced the life experience factor in the study. Third, participants were provided with information about the study prior to participating in the training, which may have influenced their evaluation. However, several measures were taken to minimize this problem. First, anonymity provided considerable freedom. In addition, they completed the questionnaires without access to the questionnaires they completed prior to the training. In addition, the substantial number of participants and the diversity in size and nature of the companies where the training was conducted should provide an answer to this question. Fourth, because participants completed the second questionnaire immediately following the workshop, subjectivity was enhanced. It is possible to anticipate a sense of euphoria or frustration when practicing in a group setting. To examine the resolution of the change, I opted to examine variables close to the training, since the participants were in the short and intense training experience. Also, filling out the questionnaires later would have made it difficult to collect data. In addition, using other assessment tools to measure the acquisition of soft skills objectively through performance achievements is also problematic or at the very least extremely challenging. Fifth, the intervention program lasted only four hours, whereas interpersonal skills training typically lasts a full day to three days and even more. As a result of this limitation, managers were able to be reached in the field, within their organizations, and during work hours, a dimension that enhanced the authenticity of the training participants' answers and involvement in relating the tools they received in the training to interpersonal situations they encounter on a daily basis.

## 8.6 Future research

Future studies may follow the focus group only throughout their daily routine in the organization. Furthermore, three independent variables were examined for their effect on interpersonal skills. Future research can examine interpersonal skills as influencers or moderators to gain further insight. In addition, personality characteristics, trust, and negotiation approaches may differ depending on training design or instructor characteristics. Research on diverse types of training programs should be considered

in future research. A workplace intervention program was also implemented in this study, which was intended for a wide range of organizations. Such programs should be tailored to specific industries, business sectors, and organizational types.

Finally, this study evaluated how several variables affected interpersonal communication skills following a one-time organization intervention. Planned and diagnosed program participants were studied to determine the accuracy and effectiveness of the program. Research on improving interpersonal skills will be able to expand on this trend.

## 8.7 Concluding thoughts

In this thesis, I contribute on both a theoretical and managerial level. Among the main contributions I made to the field of research are:

In theoretical terms:

1. A comprehensive review of the literature concerning interpersonal communication skills and training in interpersonal skills was conducted.
2. Through one-time training, I examined and refined a model for improving interpersonal skills.
3. In terms of methodology, I used a mix of methods through an intervention plan, an approach that is less common in studies in this area.

A managerial perspective:

1. The research was conducted among managers, in cooperation with the training bodies and human resources departments in the organizations that found it essential to improve interpersonal skills among managers.
2. As a result of the research, standard guidance may be developed as a resource for organizational decision makers concerned about developing interpersonal skills in their organizations.

Despite the mentioned above limitations, this study provides a starting point for further research and provides a stimulus for training research which includes several

predictor variables for improving interpersonal skills. In research of this type, we will extend previous approaches by describing the effects of training before the training process on the outcomes of the training. Using a comprehensive model of this important organizational intervention, we will be able to refine the training later.

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