

Communication Skills Training

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Various types and forms of the Group Communication Skills Training are used all over the world for those who are trying to improve their communication (social, interpersonal, negotiating etc.) skills. Thousands of books and articles devoted to these topics are published every year. The training scheme based on the holistic Social Pedagogical Concept developed by the Prussian educational thinker Friedrich Diesterweg in the middle of the 19th century and on the Technology of Instruction Theory created by the Russian psychologist Piotr Galperin in the middle of the 20th century and developed by their followers is widely spread in Europe and used by social workers and psychologists for children and for adults to improve their communication skills. The following article describes practical implementation of this schema.

The concept of transforming personal behavior from impulsive to reflexive level forms the basis of active social psychological education. It is accomplished through objectifying and assimilating to a wider spectrum of daily life models, patterns and communication. As soon as a person realizes the inconsistencies that his everyday impulsive social behavior has brought, he or she becomes conducive to change learning new behavioral models, patterns, approaches, and ways. These models and patterns form the basis for new mental actions that ensure better communications in daily activities than previously for the student. After learning these new models and patterns of social behavior, they are gradually assimilated and adapted into a person's consciousness and transferred back to his or her unconscious impulsive level. Such transformations are accomplished under the direction and influence of the referent group and trainer.

Forms of Communication Skills Training

Among Communication Skills Training (CST) programs there are:

partner style communications programs,
conflict control programs,
conducting business discussions programs, and
public presentation programs, along with others.

Process and structure of CST

The standard sequence of Group CST consists of four phases:

Warming-up" the group to the working level and implementing group norms and standards;
Objectifying and creating conditions in which the person becomes more sensitive to the opinions and actions of referent group members who facilitate the change to new and more reflexive behaviors;
Implementing and learning new social behavioral techniques;
Participating in role-playing games, group discussions and public presentations that demonstrate and enforce the positive effects of the change and the training.

Methods, means and techniques of CST

The basic means of Group CST are conducting role-playing games, discussions and exercises in groups of two and three. Each participant makes his or her own analysis of the group member's behavior and provides feedback to the others.

Both verbal reactions and the playback of video or audio records of nonverbal reactions (e.g. motions, gestures, poses, mimics, and eye contact, voice and speech patterns) are used as the means of feedback. Such techniques are utilized for the following applications:

Establishing personal contact,
Active listening,
Reducing emotional tensions with the partner,
Defending one's opinion, position, or point of view,
Discussing organization and administration,
Public presentations.

The main methods that are used for objectification and creating positive behavioral change are:

Group analysis of the participant's behavior in the role-playing games with hidden motive and/or conflict embedded in it; analysis of discussions with distributed roles, which minimizes self interest and leads to the development of joint solutions; and analysis of public presentations.

Analysis of playbacks of recorded role-playing games, discussions, and presentations.

The Group in CST

The basic medium for the CST is a small group. For this very reason sometimes this kind of learning is named "Social Psychological Training". The best size for this group learning is 8-12 people.

The Trainer's Work - Rules and Behavior

Usually each trainer (mediator, facilitator) includes his or her own components and techniques in the educational process.

The primary goals of Group CST trainers are:

Creating the social environmental conditions that facilitate improved behavior of each group member.

Aiding in learning and mastering the new techniques and tactics of behavior.

As such, the trainer organizes group work in a way which motivates each participant to consider

and accept a wider spectrum of positive daily life models, patterns and communication. It provides an opportunity for each group member to come to his or her own conclusion on his or her past and future behavioral responses. In order to reach this state of mind in a group member's consciousness the trainer must adhere to the following principles:

Predominance of the process of learning above the results,

Organization of learning in a manner where every participant utilizes the feedback, obtained from other members and from the video/audio sources,

Step-by-step technique training during the learning (i.e. no one "jumps over" or skips a stage of the process that proceeds gradually from the simple to more complex),

Individual approach to each participant based on and solidified by the support of the group,

Mediated influence of the group members towards each other - initiated and encouraged by the facilitator unnoticeably, indirectly, but constantly and consecutively.