

SKILLING SELF TO BETTER MANAGE DIFFICULT PEOPLE

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Abstract Taylor says, 'If you have a gift for the spoken and written word, you will always put your best foot forward. Being articulate is highly prized in today's workplace, when time is at a premium and technology requires constant communication.' However, to effectively communicate one needs to develop certain skills that enable communication and ability to get along with colleagues, persuade others to listen to one's ideas and many more that are essential to manage people at work, more so the 'Difficult People'.

Technical and professional skill are crucial to professional success; but to be successful, it is imperative that one has the required soft skills too – more commonly known as 'People Skills'. There can be several instances or situations when one encounters difficult people in an organization, who come in the way of smooth operation and hinder the flow of work. Such difficult people come in different forms, but we have to cope with them. This is called 'Man Management Skills'. This article tries to identify such difficult people and their undesirable behaviour, and also attempts to suggest some of the time-tested ways recommended by experts and KPs, with which one should be aware of, conversant with and equipped to use them. An attempt is also made to identify extent and types of difficult behaviour and the possible reasons thereof through a sample survey using predesigned questionnaire of randomly selected respondents in five sample educational institutions. These have been discussed briefly. List of skills and behaviours that one needs to develop is discussed, with examples.

Keywords: People Skills, Defensive People, Bad Behaviour, Psychopath, Self-Recognition, the Blamers, Control Mechanism, Back-Up Support, Leveraging Self-Control

One may have extensive experience and highly developed technical skills. Yes, while technical and professional skills are crucial to professional success, it is imperative that one has required soft skills too – more commonly known as 'people skills,' writes Jacquelyn Smith, a Forbes Staff. People skills come down to how people interact with each other, from a verbal and/or non-verbal perspective; they are non-technical in nature.

Organizational behaviour (OB) is a subject that now is a core paper in university curriculum for technical and professional courses. The simple reason is that both hard and soft skills have become essential for career development and progression. This paper basically deals with managing 'difficult' people more effectively and efficiently in order to achieve the ultimate organizational objectives. This is what most of the accepted definitions tell us about the subject. Today, managers and professionals are expected to be adept in enabling their colleagues to meet targets – both quantitatively and qualitatively. People with high hard skills fail to be effective due their inability to manage people and maintain effective working relationship. The problem gets more complicated when people turn difficult and, at times, hostile.

This paper specifically tries to identify some of the probable reasons, where a professional's own inability to handle people tactfully could adversely affect individual, group/team, and organization's performance. A colleague can be difficult more often than one expects him/her to be. A customer can be difficult too, and people who deal with public have to be prepared and trained for any such situation. The boss can be aggressive and rigid, but one cannot end relationship and quit just because of this. Moreover, there is no guarantee that the next manager in the next organization/department will not be more aggressive. Hence, one needs to develop the skill to manage difficult situations and people, anywhere and everywhere, more so in the organizational context.

Difficult people can take many forms. Defining 'difficult' is a uniquely personal thing. What is challenging to me may be a breeze for you. David Brown describes several *types of difficult people* and how their behaviours serve to irritate others.

- Perfectionists: If we are looking for quick results, perfectionists can be a source of frustration. With good intention, they delay things beyond one can manage.
- Control Freaks: When we want to do things our way, overly controlling types can be a source of irritation.

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- Creative People: They are essential if generating ideas is the plan but can cause frustration when one just want to get to deliver a simple result on time to a client.
- Aggressive or Defensive People: Aggression can help move a group forward. Aggression or defensiveness can have the opposite effect on a Group Dynamics. In a way, they are rigid and stubborn.
- Submissive People: The lack of confidence and fear of failure that many submissive types display can be a source of frustration as well. They believe 'the boss can make no mistake' or 'play safe, do as directed'.

There is yet another way experts classify 'difficult people'.

- The Gossip types get their title from talking about other people (often, behind their backs) and spreading rumours about others (which are often untrue or exaggerated). Talking about others could be a way to deflect attention away from their own poor work performance or a way to self-amusing. Gossips may also hold the misguided belief that their gossip is a way to connect with others.
- The Blamers are another common type of difficult personalities found in many workplaces. They point finger at someone else when perhaps they were the cause of a situation or problem. Often referred to as 'guilt trippers', are those who constantly shift responsibility away from themselves and onto others whenever things go wrong. Rarely do they acknowledge or apologize for their own misgivings, mistakes, or poor performance.
- The Flyer is a person who is the highly emotional type, who is also called the 'drama queen' or 'drama king' and is emotionally very reactive (Miller, 2014). This personality type will show a 'pattern of excessive emotionality, attention-seeking, need for excitement, and use of exaggeration to maintain largely superficial relationships for the purpose of getting emotional needs met' (Miller, 2003, p. 427).
- The Control Freaks are those difficult workplace personalities who are often critical of others, who do not do things their way. Such people may have traits of obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD). They often feel the need to control the outcome of seemingly everything and everyone around them and may even step over appropriate boundaries and attempt to control situations that are not relevant to their own job duties.
- The Victim is the person who is often a constant complainer and attempts to draw people's attention to their problems or perceived problems. For example, they may complain about their work duties and try to convince everyone that they are not treated fairly and have more work than everyone around them.

- The Quiet Type is not necessarily a difficult personality but can be a confusing one. They usually prefer to remain aloof in the office, may sit at their desk a lot, instead of conversing, and may close themselves off to others by hiding behind their cubicle, keeping their office door shut, or wearing headphones in many cases.
- The Passive-Aggressive Type can make very difficult co-workers to interact with, as they may not be as easy to spot and can do real damage. They hide their real feelings by pretending everything is okay when they are actually upset – and have a tendency to appear calm, cool. However, a classic sign of this type is the fact that they may do things to sabotage the work or performance of others, or get revenge in other ways.
- The Paranoid Ones are people who are constantly suspicious of other people and their motives, distrusting other people, without any reason, and interpret the behaviours of other people in very negative ways (for example, 'She did that because she's out to get me fired!').
- The Psychopath can be a very harmful type of person, particularly in a workplace. Such people may have traits of antisocial personality disorder which is defined by 'a pattern of disregard for, and violation of the rights of others' (APA, 2013a, p.645). They have a tendency towards intentional harm to others including lots of deceit and manipulation. They may take the credit for work done by others at their company and purposefully deceive others in order to 'win' even if their actions are very damaging, unethical.
- Egomaniacs: These people resist direction. They think they always know what is best and ignore even the nicest of advices or suggestions. Not only do they think they do not need to improve, but they also think that everyone should consider themselves lucky to work with them.

WHAT TO DO?

The first thing to do is to *accept the person as he is*. He did not choose his difficult personality: who would voluntarily choose to be Paranoid or Quiet Type. Try also to *understand* the erroneous beliefs that underlie his behaviours. At the same time, learn how to *protect yourself* and set your limits as soon as possible. But if, despite everything, your professional life with this person becomes unbearable, a positive solution is to try to persuade him (gently and diplomatically) to consult a psychotherapist or a psychiatrist. In-house mentoring and counselling could also be used.

CONTROL MECHANISMS

We can only correct what we can understand or establish by facts. Once the source of the problem is revealed, we

need to evaluate the consequences and the frequency of such harmful behaviours in the workplace before deciding how to intervene. There are instances when the behaviour

is 'externally caused' and there are others when they are 'internally caused'. Both can be controlled, without trying to change the person, or his personality.

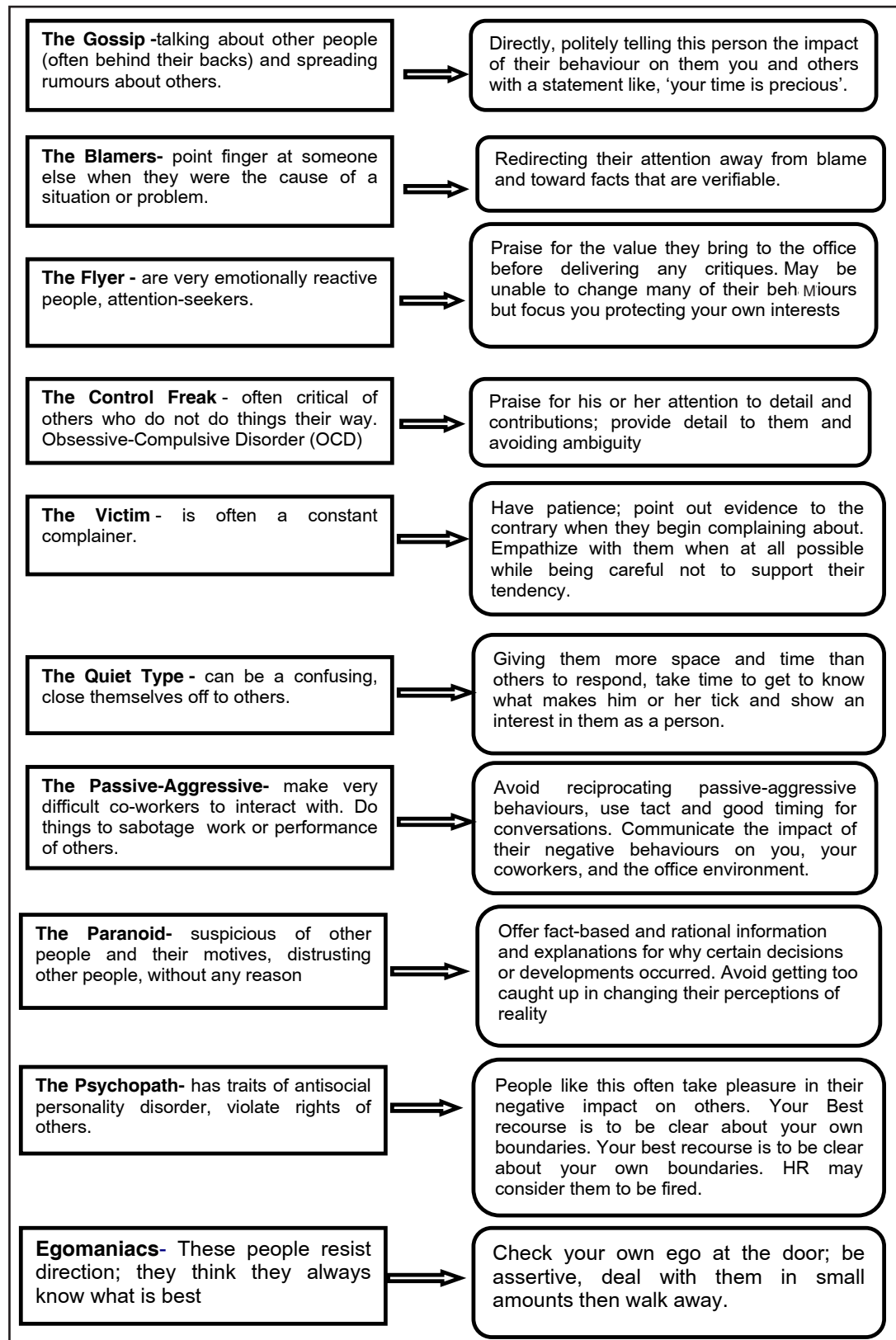


Fig. 1: List of Difficult Behaviour and Ways to Tackle/Manage

A small sample survey was conducted in five major technical and professional colleges in and around Bhubaneswar city to identify the intensity of ‘difficult people’ in terms of 10 characteristics listed above. A total of 100 teachers at different levels were personally contacted and their responses were

recorded in a specially designed questionnaire. Participatory observation of their behaviour and paralanguage was also considered in classifying the sample respondents. The result of this sample survey is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Type of Difficult People in Selected Educational Institution

Type & Nature of difficult persons.	No of Persons Reported/Identified Difficult in the Selected Five Major Technical & Professional Edu. Institution (N=100)					
	Inst. I	Inst. II	Inst. III	Inst. IV	Inst. V	Total
Gossipers- Talking negatives behind other’s back.	16	10	15	12	10	63
Blamers- Pointing fingers at others for their own failures.	14	10	16	12	08	62
Play Victim- Constant complainers for everything- men, materials and environment.	18	14	13	10	06	55
Control Freaks- Trying to do things their ways.	05	08	06	08	04	51
Egomaniacs- They think they know the best, closed to others.	11	12	08	07	04	42
Flyers- Constant attention seekers.	05	10	10	12	04	41
Paranoids- Suspicious of other’s action and looks.	10	12	06	06	05	34
Quiet Type- Prefer & remains aloof, confusing to coworkers.	11	10	02	04	06	33
Passive Aggressive & Stubborn- Hide their feelings, but show them in action, resulting in damage to others.	06	04	03	09	08	30
Psychopaths- Intentionally harm others & enjoy sadistic pleasure.	02	04	05	02	00	13

Data relate to survey period between 10th March and 20th March 2018

A total of 100 sample respondents, 20 from each institution, were randomly selected for the survey. As seen from Table 1, ‘Gossiping’ is found to be the most difficult behaviour in the sample educational institution among the faculties. Out of 100 sample respondents, 63% were found to be indulging in gossips. Next in the intensity of difficult behaviour is reported to be ‘Blamer’ (62%), followed by ‘Play Victim’ (55%), Control Freaks (51%), Egomaniacs (42%), and others. Comparatively, only 13% reported to be Psychopaths; in fact, one institution reported ‘nil’.

To get an idea as to why the teachers were found to be indulging in identified difficult behaviour, a random sample of 170 respondents was selected, the breakup of which is – Institution management member (40), Principal/Dean (10), General public (50), Teachers (40), and Parents (30). The result of the survey regarding the possible reasons for the difficult behaviour (irrespective of type) is presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Probable Reasons for the Difficult Behaviour

Sample Respondents	Reasons for the Difficult Behaviour Reported by Sample Respondents (N= 170)						
	Idle Time	Personality Disorder	Job Dissatisfaction	Salary Inadequacy	Dissatisfied with Boss.	Inf. Complex	Oth.
Inst. Management Members (N=40)	04	19	08	10	10	28	38
Principal/Dean (N= 10)	02	08	03	06	01	08	06
General Public/ KP (N= 50)	30	18	30	28	NR	NR	41
Teachers (N= 40)	02	05	32	38	30	12	12
Parents (N= 30)	22	25	NR	28	NR	NR	28

Data relate to survey period between 10th March and 20th March 2018

N.R Refers to ‘No Response’. Some responded assigned more than one factor.

Multiple reasons were cited by each category of respondents as to the probable reasons of the difficult behaviour. The category of response, ‘Others’ includes the quality of work life (QWL), Politics, Health issues, and Family disturbances.

Institute management, though considered ‘Inferiority Complex’ (28), as a possible reason but felt ‘Other Factors’ (38) to be dominant cause. The principals of educational institutions (other than the institution surveyed) ‘Personality

Disorder' and 'Inferiority Complex' to be major reason. Majority of the Public/Knowledgeable Persons felt that the 'Difficult Behaviour' of the faculties is mainly due to 'Idle Time', 'Salary Inadequacy', and 'Other Reasons'. Above

listed difficult behaviour is typical to specific profession, and any generalization may not be appropriate. However, some general common features may be found cutting across jobs and trade.

Table 3: Opinion Regarding Control Mechanism

Source	Suggested Control Mechanism				
	Counselling Cum Grievance Hearing	Oral Warning	Written Warning	Fines & Penalties	Suspension & Dismissal
Member Governing Body (N=40)	15	28	19	20	16
Dean/Principal (N= 10)	08	10	10	06	03
General Public/ KPs (N= 50)	45	40	35	18	05
Teachers (N= 40)	38	32	32	05	05
Parents (N= 30)	30	20	20	22	24

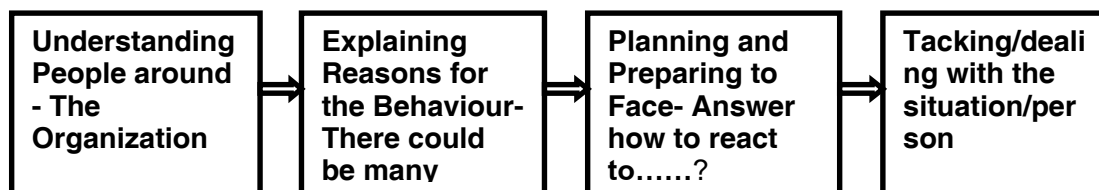
Data relate to survey period between 10th March and 20th March 2018

Most of the respondents gave multiple suggestions.

When asked regarding control mechanism which the respondents feel should taken to manage difficult people in organization, the responses widely varied from counselling-cum-grievance hearing to extreme step of dismissal. Majority of teachers (40), general public (38), and parents (30) felt that the organization should try to know the reasons behind the difficult behaviour by a system of grievance handling/hearing. The members governing body (28 + 19) and deans/principals (10+10), however, were more in favour of warning, both oral and written.

The subject of OB also basically aims to understand, explain, predict, and control people's behaviour in an organization. The sequence that one may follow to learn the skill of managing difficult people and situation, which one is likely to encounter, is to follow these steps:

- Understanding people around
- Explaining reasons for the behaviour
- Planning and preparing to face the behaviour
- Tacking/dealing with the situation/person



UNDERSTANDING PEOPLE AROUND

In an organizational context, there could be difficult situations and diversities caused by cultural differences among the employees, which in turn could be due to geographical differences. There could be personality differences, which may or may not be linked to one's culture and place of origin. But more often, one may have to study and analyze the situation in which parties find themselves.

We often meet difficulty in a culturally sensitive environment; for instance, in India, women colleagues prefer to remain aloof, not too freely interacting and expressive with their male colleagues. They may be reluctant to join a social chat or share a joke. Such behaviour may pose to be difficult to others but in their eyes, they may feel to be behaving normally.

One has to recognize geographical differences also. People may express differently or use unfamiliar language to

communicate, even the accent could different, but one has to accept the differences and adopt a 'Melting-pot Approach' to build relationships.

When people with personality differences come together in organizations, there could be conflicts that may lead to dysfunctional outcome to the team and organization ultimately. People with different personalities working in a group/team may prefer to adopt different approaches to issues. Instead of treating each member to be 'difficult' to deal with, such differences should be welcomed as a source of knowledge that can add richness to a team, which otherwise becomes a team of clones.

Many times, people may appear difficult to deal with due to situational factors. A place of work or a team could be incompatible for people to be part of. The behavioural outcome of people placed in such situations should never be taken on their face value. 'Digging below the surface' and trying to understand the genuine grievances against such situations are the right strategies to follow on.

People going through 'stress' often behave differently from what is normally expected from them. Two people often react differently to a crisis due to their ability to manage and cope with stress. One person may exhibit emotion by openly crying at his/her desk but another may take to alcohol and still another may suffer internally adding to his/her own health problems like sleeplessness and irritable bowel syndrome. The situation demands that instead of branding the person 'difficult' and running away from him/her, better empathize and try to address them with patience, later on.

EXPLAINING & APPRECIATING REASONS FOR THE BEHAVIOUR

It is essential to understand as to why people behave in an undesirable way in a certain context and situation. There could be many reasons for this. People might be carrying a feeling that such behaviour is an acceptable way to exhibit since no one has opposed or challenged them yet. Also, some carry the notion that such deviant behaviours make them powerful superior and using them they can shout others down. It could also be the fact that such behaviours have delivered results/been effective, they wanted in the past. There are enough disciples of Machiavelli, who believe, 'if it works use it' and 'end justify means'.

The actual trial of a 'bad behaviour' starts early in the childhood. This is the stage where we often test the workability of these behaviours. Resultant reactions to such behaviours help to reinforce them which then become a 'pattern' or 'habit'. This is what the theory of Classical Conditioning also says. Psychologists suggest that our position in the family also has a bearing on our behaviour later on in life. Actually, if we go on complying with bad behaviour of our colleagues, we are reinforcing their belief that they are acceptable and no reason to mend/change.

PLANNING AND PREPARING TO FACE THE BEHAVIOUR

Often, other's bad behaviour feeds off from our unguarded reaction. Hence, we all, particularly professionals dealing with people and part of a team, should plan and prepare to know how to react, to enable us to control the situation or at least to deflate the situation preventing it to get out of control.

The most important part of the investment to plan, prepare is to allocate time – time to think, analyze, and put in Plan of Action. Some strategic qualities and tactics that help include – building self-confidence, skill of listening (not hearing), hearing through body language, and practicing the skills.

We can never be sure when and where a difficult colleague poses a situation not to our likes, but cannot be ignored

either. Hence, prior preparation for such situations will give one a range of coping skills, which may not all work in all situations, but in some and with some people at least. This way, one can also minimize the chances that we have to ignore and walk away telling self, 'I should have done this or said this to his allegation/charges'. At least, preparation will give an edge when we meet similar situation or similar people's behaviour. One of the most important skills/lessons to pickup is to build self-confidence to tackle such situation/people. One has to speak assertively (not aggressively), looking straight (nor necessarily staring) and communicate. This skill requires practicing before a mirror on some imaginary role play situation.

Another important skill that should be mastered by a professional through training and practice is the skill of listening (more than hearing). A difficult person could be trying to convey some message, which he/she considers to be genuine. For instance, a customer with some complaints would be happy if he is listened to uninterruptedly, before being responded to. The 'Courtesy of being heard' is a strategy that works wonders for people who deal with people.

A professional's body language, while dealing with difficult people, also matters a great deal. We also hear, rather listen, through our body language and visual cues that we send sub-consciously, while dealing with people. One has to be careful to integrate body language with oral message so that both are not incongruent, which gives a wrong and confusing message. For example, inability to maintain eye contact may send a message that what is said is not true.

The environment we chose to deal with a person and situation is also critical, in the sense that some environment may inflate the situation. A room with calming colour scheme, place ensuring 'privacy', sufficient and comfortable seating arrangement, and free from distractions can all help to deal with difficult people at work.

'Practice what you prepare', say experts on conflict management. This way, things get reflected in 'action' much easily and naturally. When we practice, more likely our colleagues will follow us. A smiling boss is more likely to be reciprocated with than otherwise.

DEALING WITH DIFFICULT PEOPLE

It is better to do some research on the 'system that is in place' in the organization, the rules and procedure already in place to initiate any disciplinary action and also past practices. Next is to think how these rules and procedures can be of help or hinder your contemplated action. One should know the ground rules and then act within the boundaries. For instance, as a HR manager one has to stick to the rules of considering for promotion to only those who fulfil minimum length of service as per the existing rules, no matter how

hard a person claims to be efficient and potential. This way, one can work faster in making fair and rational decisions without having to reverse them due to litigation.

One often faces 'difficult group(s)' that lack cohesiveness and source of conflict. People as individual are more easily managed than when they are in group(s). Also, some groups are more difficult to manage. Groups come to the leader with problems and grievances and they often feel they have been unfairly treated. It is always better to acknowledge the difficulties at the outset, rather than denying they are there. Pinpoint the cause in first person plural. Say per instance, 'it appears we have a problem', rather than 'you have got a problem here...'. Seek solution from the group members before suggesting one. Involve an expert and external adviser with credibility, in case required. All can get into a brainstorming session to suggest solutions.

In an organizational context, back-up support could be necessary to deal with difficult staff. Support could be in different form and levels. Experts on 'people skills' suggest – practical support, which could be in the form of required information, could be from a different department from one's own or even a senior manager or the HRIS from HR department. Legal support in the shape of legal advice from the internal legal cell of the organization. Alternatively, professional bodies or institutions could be tapped. A different input at times makes a great difference to manage difficult people, is what is named, emotional support. Here, a colleague, who can give impartial advice or a mentor, could be of help.

SELF-RECOGNITION IS IMPORATNT

Difficult people and difficult situations do not necessarily come from others; we may be part of the cause. It is not always very clear as to who is/are the difficult people and who are not. Hence, it is better to introspect and illuminate on our own behaviour. This way, we may ultimately reach a situation where we need to empathize with people who initially we felt are guilty. It also helps to recognize some of the possible causes and results in viewing the situation/issue more objectively. For instance, a fresh recruit on the very first day in the organization finds a senior colleague ignoring his 'good morning' wish and then finds his reporting boss calling him to his cabin and instructing him to attend to job, without explaining how, where and with whom to work with. This creates a bad taste for the new employee, who develops apathy and callous attitude towards the boss and organization. If we are the person, can we expect from the new recruit any organizational citizenship behaviour?

Developing the critical, constructive, and creative thinking that is necessary for reflective practice is essential for a professional, be they be employed outside or self-employed.

Reflective practice that Neil Thompson, in his book *People Skills*, suggests is to follow the following six steps:

- **Read** - around the topics you are learning about or want to learn about.
- **Ask** - others about the way they do things and why.
- **Watch** - what is going on around you and others also.
- **Feel** - pay attention to self-emotions, what prompts them, and how I deal with particularly the negative ones.
- **Talk** - share your views and experiences with others in your organization. This opens the door for constructive feedbacks.
- **Think** - learn to value time spent thinking about your work.

ENABLING FACTORS TO COPE WITH DIFFICULT PEOPLE

Accept Difficult People – One has to learn the skill of dealing with and living with difficult people and not run away from them. Next is to have a firm strategy to deal with them.

Learn to Cope with Difficult People – It is neither possible to change the personality of difficult people, nor essential. Better to focus on an effective working relationship that gets the task done. There can be 'short-term agreement' with difficult people working out a win-win negotiation, at times.

Reflect on Own Behaviour – As suggested by Johari Window, aspect that we do not know about ourselves, but others within the group have become aware of, is in our blind area. With the help of feedback from others, we can become aware of some of the positive and negative traits as perceived by others and overcome some of the personal issues that may be inhibiting our personal or group dynamics within the team. Also by asking self, 'Did I incite the negative behaviour of the other?', one have a clear perception of situation going wrong. A few questions about self that one needs to find answer include:

- Am I meeting the expectations I set for others around me?
- Am I being a person others can respect?
- Am I living up to my core values and personal mission?
- Am I performing at my peak capacity?

The Ability to Relate to Others – It could mean to simply willing to agree to disagree with mutual respect; letting them know that you understand their position.

The Ability to Keep an Open Mind - To create trust and respect in others, people need to know that their point of view and feedback will be considered and used. Being known as someone who keeps an open mind also makes you more approachable and easier to work with.

Awareness of Body Language - The importance of body language cannot be emphasized enough, since it makes up the majority of how we communicate with others. We communicate with people all the time, even when we are not speaking. Being mindful of what our gestures, expressions, voice, and appearance are communicating, can greatly help or harm our people skills.

Active Listening Skills - Hearing someone and actively listening to them are two different things. Most people hear someone speak and start to form a response in their mind before the person finishes what they are saying. The key is to actively listen, which takes more time but produces better results. It means you listen without interruption and then take the time to think and form a response before replying. It takes practice, but it pays off.

Leveraging Some Self-control - Know yourself. Having a clear sense of self, what causes our tension and where our limits are, can serve us well when interacting with people that we find to be difficult. Staying calm and developing inner awareness and emotional intelligence skills can help to manage our reactions to frustrating situations.

Separate the Person from the Issue - In every communication situation, there are two elements present: the relationship you have with the person, and the issue you are discussing. An effective communicator knows how to separate the person from the issue, and be soft on the person and firm on the issue. For example: one can say,

- *'I want to talk about what's on your mind, but I can't do it when you're so emotional. Let's either sit down and talk more quietly, or take a time out and come back this afternoon.'*
- *'I appreciate you putting a lot of time into this project. At the same time, I see that three of the ten requirements are still incomplete. Let's talk about how to finish the job on schedule.'*
- *'I really want you to come with us. Unfortunately, if you're going to be late like the last few times, we'll have to leave without you.'*

When we are soft on the person, people are more open to what we have to say. Also, the sentences start with a positive note, which creates a feeling of being cared and respected on the part of the receiver.

Use Appropriate Humour - Humour is a powerful communication tool. When appropriately used, humour can shine light and disarm difficult behaviour. For instance, when the egotistical co-worker ignores your greeting do not feel offended. Instead, smile and quip, 'You remind me the movie.....' This most likely shall break the ice and you can start a friendly conversation, then on.

Shift from Being Reactive to Proactive - When we feel offended by someone's remarks or deeds, better come

up with multiple ways of viewing the situation before reacting. For example, one may think that my co-worker is ignoring my messages, or can consider the possibility that she's been very busy. When we avoid personalizing other people's behaviours, we can perceive their expressions more objectively. People do what they do because of themselves, more than because of us. Widening our perspective on the situation can reduce the possibility of misunderstanding and helps to concentrate energy on problem-solving.

Keep Cool - Experts suggest when we feel angry or upset with someone, before saying something, take a deep breath and count slowly to ten. This helps to maintain self-control and avoids the escalation of problem. It also allows to figure out a better way of communicating the issue/to the person, so that we can reduce, instead of escalating, the problem. One can also use the method to take a time out, and revisit the issue after things get calm down.

General Tips for Effective Communication with Difficult Workplace Personalities

- Effective communication skills with difficult personalities should be used to make interactions go more smoothly rather than trying to change a co-worker's personality, as it will be wasted energy.
- Try being flexible with your style of communication depending on the personalities that you deal with in your office (Hautala, 2006). Some adjustment on your part is a factor you can control and may help you connect better with a co-worker who has a different personality and communication style than your own.
- Consider the positive aspects of your co-worker's personality and point these out during conversations in order to help communicate more effectively with them, especially when delivering negative feedback/criticisms.
- Use direct yet tactful communication to help confront problems. Experts say even the most difficult of personalities can surprise you if you give them the chance to understand how their behaviour impacts you and other co-workers.
- Never assume anything or jump to conclusions about a situation until you have had a chance to communicate directly with a difficult personality. Just because a person is difficult to deal with, it does not mean that our assumptions are a particular situation are 100% accurate every time.

MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

Very few people in organizations have ideal co-workers. Our workplace and social interactions are full of difficult people who can make life miserable. Difficult people come in all

shapes, sizes, and personalities. They are demanding, often defensive, problematic, and can drain all of our energy. Often, these difficult co-workers cause stress and lower the work morale also. It might be a co-worker who is argumentative with a big ego and thinks he is always right. The boss who we experience could be arrogant, condescending, and disrespectful or maybe even a bully.

Such difficult people around us cannot and should not be ignored and it is not possible to show them the door every time. Hence, how we handle these interactions will depend on a number of factors, including how often we encounter difficult people, how closely we have to work with them, the types of behaviour they present, our flexibility and sense of humour, and the mobility and options we believe we have within the system and organization's policy.

Control mechanisms also depend on type of difficult person we encounter. As discussed earlier, there are numerous classifications of 'Difficult People' in organizations. Each has to be dealt with differently. The Gossiper needs to be politely told the impact of their behaviour on them, you, and others. Minimize the interaction, if it is a co-worker who you do not need to work with day-to-day; just avoid them. Intensity of 'difficult people' also differs and that the coping mechanism.

Understanding people around is the first essential step in managing them. Next is to understand and explaining reasons for the behaviour, which we consider difficult. Prior planning and preparing to face such behaviour can do a world of difference. This is what is 'Skilling' self to manage people around us in organization. Knowledge of difficult persons and personality can help. Coach cannot play, so the ability to tackling/dealing with the situation/person is core of Human Resources Management.

Difficult situations do not necessarily come from others; we may be part of the cause. It is not always very clear as to who is/are the difficult people and who is/are not. Hence, it is better to introspect and illuminate on our own behaviour. Reflect on own behaviour before trying to assess and point fingers at others. Learn to Cope with Difficult People, as it is not always possible and sensible to throw them out.

Letting the person know that you understand their position creates an ambiance in which people become much more gentle and well-behaved. This is what the ability to relate to others is. We are communicating with people all the time even when we are not speaking. Being mindful of what our gestures, expressions, voice, and appearance (body language) are while communicating can greatly help or harm our skills of managing difficult people and situation. Situations, which we are not very comfortable with, require an open mind, so that one accepts things as they unfold. Supreme communicators have a keen ability to shift gears when the context calls for it. This is what we ask to 'making self accessible' to colleagues.

Effective man management skill requires to remain assertive but recognizing the rights of others to have different positions, values, and priorities. When we personalize disagreements and attack back, it often leads to escalation. Hence, better to keep the focus on mutual problem solving not name-calling.

Last but not the least, old saying goes, 'prevention is better than cure'. Hence, experts in human resources management suggest let us do what we can, to avoid bringing difficult people onto the organizational bus in the first place. Thereby, the question of how to deal with difficult people becomes less important. Pay close attention to attributes, not just skills. Restaurateur, Danny Meyer, advises organizations and recruiters recruiting those whose skills are 49% technical and 51% emotional. His emotional list of skill includes optimistic warmth, curious intelligence, caring empathy, strong work ethic, self-awareness, and integrity. By focusing on these, we will have fewer difficult people in our orbit.

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